

## LESSON OUTLINE/GOSPEL OF JOHN

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### I. Lesson 1/The Greatest Story Ever Told/Introduction

- A. John is different from the other three gospels. They are referred to as the synoptic gospels. All three of the synoptic gospels cite many of the same events. John's gospel sometimes refers to events that no other gospel addresses, such as Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus, and the woman at the well.
- B. John's gospel was the last to be written. Most—perhaps all—of the other Apostles were dead by the time he wrote it, sometime between AD 85 and AD 100. And John was familiar with the other gospels; the Apostles were a small group, and the letters and gospels were widely circulated.
- C. His purpose in writing is clear: John 20: 30-31; 21: 24-25. Whereas the other gospel writers set out to provide an “orderly account” (Luke 1:1), John is highly selective in what he wrote to achieve his purpose as stated in his gospel.
- D. For example, John does not include any of the parables of Jesus. Neither does he include the Sermon on the Mount—the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching on Christian living. It is not that those are unimportant to John, but again he was being selective to achieve his goal of presenting Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, through whom we have life. He probably also felt that the parables and the core of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount had already been covered well in the other gospels. He is writing as an eyewitness of the events he describes and explains. (See John 21:24) We will see that time and again in his gospel by the little details he includes of what is happening that only an eyewitness would know.
- E. CONTEXT: To understand any author's intent, we must know something about the context into which the book is written. John was writing at a time in which the growth of the church was mainly among the Gentiles. Indeed, he was writing from Ephesus where he had been the pastor and bishop of Asia Minor for many years. He wanted to tell the gospel story in a manner that would be easier for a Gentile—raised in Greek culture—to understand. Therefore, he begins not with a genealogy of Jesus but with associating him with the Word—the Logos—of God. To us, words are symbols by which we convey our thoughts and feelings. Their power is not in the words themselves but rather in the ideas and feelings they convey. To the Greek world, words themselves had power. They could understand God speaking the world into existence as the book of Genesis relates. Thus, John intentionally begins with Jesus being the Word of God through whom the world was created.
- F. Another aspect of the context into which John wrote is the fact that certain heresies had arisen in the church over time. One of the most prevalent of the heresies was “gnosticism.” Basically, this heresy asserted that the only thing that mattered was the spirit. Flesh was corrupt and not of God, so one could do whatever one wanted in the flesh—it was of no importance. Furthermore, they claimed, Jesus only seemed to be in the flesh, and while he was dying on the cross, his spirit had already left him. It is

difficult for us to understand this type of thinking, but it was prevalent within all of the Gentile churches and John sought to put a dagger in its teaching in his gospel. That is why in the first few verses of the book we read in John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” Additionally, John’s gospel, perhaps more than the others, tells us of Jesus being tired, angry, hungry and alone—all very human traits. He also tells us in John 19:30 that Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit,” refuting the lie that Jesus had already given up his spirit before going to the cross.

- G. Other facts to keep in mind: John is an old man by the time he wrote his gospel (and older still when he wrote Revelation). His brother James was martyred about 40-45 years previously. John cared for Mary, the mother of Jesus (as Jesus instructed from the cross, John 19:26-27) until she died—probably in Ephesus where John pastored for many years. Scholars believe that Salome, John’s mother and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were sisters. That would have made John a first cousin of Jesus.
- H. John changed over the years. Because of his hot temper and zeal for the Lord, Jesus dubbed John and his brother James, “Sons of Thunder” because they were ready to call down fire from heaven to punish any city that did not receive Jesus (Mark 3:17). Yet when we read the three letters that John wrote late in life, they are all about love. He refers to those to whom he wrote as “dear children” and “dear friends.” He has developed a pastor’s heart, a tender heart, and we see that in what he wrote.
- I. There are themes in this gospel that we will see repeated time and again. One such theme is that Jesus was misunderstood by those whom he taught and by the religious hierarchy of the Jews. They were grounded in the law and the prophets—or at least in their interpretations of the law and the prophets—but they misunderstood God’s overriding requirement for mercy, justice and faith.
- J. Another theme we will see in John’s gospel is Jesus’ reliance upon the Wisdom books in his confrontations with the Pharisees and Sadducee’s. What is striking about this is that the Wisdom books in the Old Testament present the wisdom of God, yet declare that wisdom alone is inadequate (i.e., in Ecclesiastes Solomon repeatedly offers wisdom but then says, “all is vanity.”). John presents Jesus as the Wisdom of God personified, but more. He is the ultimate answer to every question for all time. Yet he is repeatedly misunderstood by the Jewish leaders, by the people and, at times, even by his own disciples. Not until after his resurrection do even his own disciples begin to fully understand Jesus and the purpose of his incarnation.
- K. Another theme is light and darkness. (John 1: 4-5) This theme is repeated throughout this gospel. Jesus is the light of the world, and the light has overcome the darkness.
- L. Perhaps because of his long tenure as a pastor to Gentiles, John includes a number of parenthetical statements to provide background information or to inform his readers what a Hebrew word means. He does this more than any other gospel writer. He is somewhat like the stage manager in the play “Our Town,” whispering as an aside to the reader about what is going on. We will see this happen repeatedly in John’s gospel; he wants the reader to see clearly who Jesus is and what is really happening in the story he is telling.

- M. One of the things I hope you will do as we go through our study is use your imagination to understand what is going on. But it should be an informed imagination. Try to picture what is going on in the stories being told. Hopefully, some of you have seen the video series “The Chosen.” If not, I strongly encourage you to watch it. The Chosen will help put in context the stories from the gospels for you. For example, the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus in the third chapter of John will come to life after you see that episode. When you have questions about a particular festival or holiday mentioned in the gospel, look it up (Google works pretty well for such questions). Try to understand the circumstances and how the participants would be affected by what is going on. Try to place yourself in the stories.
- N. If you do this, our study will be exciting. We are studying the greatest story ever told about the greatest life ever lived. And that’s exciting! Bring your questions and your observations to the class so we can learn from each other.

## II. Lesson II/Chapter I/In the Beginning.

- A. Remember John’s purpose in writing his gospel: to convince the reader that Jesus was the Son of God—the Messiah—and that through faith in him we can have life. Certain heresies had grown up in the church that would distract the new Christians about who Jesus really was, and John sets out immediately to refute those heresies. There is far more to these verses than refuting heresies, but John both refutes heresies and describes the glory of the nature and ministry of Jesus in words that are simply unsurpassed in all of literature.
- B. Read **John 1:1-5**. One heresy, which is with us to this day, was that Jesus, although a great teacher and a worker of miracles, was not divine but only a man—like Moses. After all, Moses was called the Law Giver, the person through whom God gave the law to Israel. John immediately declares the idea that Jesus was *only* a man to be false. He begins “In the beginning,” the same way Genesis begins, and he declares that the Word—the Logos of God—was already there in the beginning (referring to the beginning of our universe). Not only was the Word there, everything that came into being did so through him. And what came into being through him was not just the created things we see, but life itself. And the life of Jesus was the light of all mankind. In other words, what God intended through creation can only be understood through the life of Jesus. Without him, there is only darkness, but the life of Jesus has overcome the darkness. So, in a few sentences John has struck a dagger in the notion that Jesus was only a man—perhaps a great man, but nothing more. John says the Word was not only “with God,” he “was God,” what we now refer to as the second person of the Trinity.
- C. **Read John 1:6-13**. In these verses John turns immediately to a second heresy—namely that John the Baptist was the messiah for whom Israel had been waiting. We get a hint of this in Acts 19:1-7 where Paul is in Ephesus and encounters some disciples who had never heard of the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized into the baptism of John the Baptist for repentance. There is to this day a small sect that worships John the Baptist

as the Messiah—the Mandaeans. John quickly torpedoed the idea of the Baptist being the Messiah. He identifies the Baptist as being a witness to who Jesus was, and a few verses further along he has John directly deny that he is the Messiah. Jesus is the true light, and the Baptist is a chosen witness to that light. In verse 10, we see the first mention of a theme that we will see throughout this gospel: Jesus was repeatedly misunderstood. He created the world, but the world didn't recognize him; even his own—the Jews—didn't recognize him. But to those who did receive him, they were born into a new life, a spiritual life, by the power of God.

- D. **Read John 1:14-18.** In these verses John shoots down a third heresy—gnosticism. Remember, the gnostics asserted that Jesus didn't really come in the flesh; he just appeared to, being only spirit. That was consistent with their belief that what went on in the flesh wasn't important—only the spirit mattered. Thus, one could live a life of debauchery in the flesh and still maintain a life pleasing to God if one was spiritually enlightened. There is more to gnosticism than this, but you get the picture. God, they contended, wasn't concerned about what went on in the flesh. In one short sentence John destroys the foundation of gnosticism in saying, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his Glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." As an aside, John whispers to us that the Baptist recognized Jesus as the one "who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." He also says as an aside that the law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (the Messiah). And it is Jesus, and him alone, who has made God fully known.
- E. **Read John 1:19-28.** What John has written to this point has been prologue, highlighting what he is going to show us about Jesus in his gospel. In verse 19, he begins his narrative of the ministry of Jesus. But he begins with the appearance of an investigative committee consisting of priests, Levites, and Pharisees. The Baptist had created such an upheaval among the people that the Jewish leaders formed a committee to go investigate him. One reason they were curious about John is that he was the son of a priest, Zachariah (see Luke 1:5-25), which made John a priest, but he wasn't acting like any priest they were familiar with. They asked John, "Who are you?" What they were really asking was, "Are you the Messiah?" You can almost hear a sigh of relief when John says, "No," because the appearance of a Messiah who would try to kick out the Romans would have brought an immediate brutal response from Rome, thereby throwing out the existing Jewish leadership who had a cushy relationship with the Romans. So, they then ask, "Are you 'Elijah?'"—a reference to Malachi 4 which says that Elijah would appear before the coming of the Messiah. John humbly denies it (even though Jesus later identifies John as Elijah in both Matthew and Mark). "Are you the Prophet"—a reference to Deut. 18 in which Moses says that in the future God will send a prophet like himself to Israel to declare what God has spoken. Again, John denies being the Prophet. They then ask, to paraphrase, "Then who in world are you? We have to take back a report to our leaders. Who do you say you are?" John responds by quoting Isaiah 40:3 "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."
- F. At this point, the Pharisees speak up: "If you are none of these, why are you baptizing?" Remember that Pharisees were concerned primarily with ritual purity. They believed the only ones requiring baptism were Gentiles converting to Judaism. They did not

believe Jews needed baptism because they were already the people of God. So why was John baptizing? John deflects in response to this question, saying that he only baptizes with water, but one coming after him—“for whom I am not worthy to be his slave”—will baptize with the Holy Spirit. As we shall see, the appearance of Jesus occurs the very next day.

- G. **Read John 1:29-34.** These verses describe what happened the next day. John sees Jesus and identifies him publicly as “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” The term “Lamb of God” is one the Jews were familiar with, although they didn’t then fully understand it. There was the Passover lamb in Exodus 12, offered in sacrifice. Isaiah had said the Messiah would be led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is. 53:7). The Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God to represent the fact God himself will provide a sacrifice—just as God did for Abraham in Genesis 22—but this time it will be God’s only son that becomes the sacrifice. In verse 31, John says he didn’t know Jesus. What he means is that he didn’t know that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” until that was revealed to him during Jesus’ baptism. Remember, John was a cousin of Jesus, and Luke tells us John leaped in his mother’s womb when he heard the greeting of Mary visiting Elizabeth. But he did not yet know fully who Jesus was or what his role would be. God had revealed to John how to identify the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He would see the Spirit descend like a dove and rest on that person. It’s not clear exactly when the baptism of Jesus took place. Given Matthew’s account of Jesus going into the wilderness to be tempted immediately after his baptism, those events had probably occurred weeks earlier. John is now remembering what happened during Jesus’ baptism when he sees Jesus again and makes his public declaration of Jesus being the Lamb of God. God had revealed to the Baptist that he would see the Spirit descend like a dove on the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He is now announcing publicly that Jesus is that person.
- H. **Read John 1:35-42.** The story picks up again on the following day. John is standing with two of his disciples as Jesus walks by. As he did the day before, John exclaims, “Here is the Lamb of God,” whereupon the two disciples take off following Jesus. One of them is identified as Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. The other isn’t identified, but it is reasonable to assume it was the author, John. After all, we know Andrew, Peter, James and John were all in the fishing business together, and we are being given an eyewitness report. Jesus turns and asks them a question all of us sooner or later must respond to from Jesus: “What are you looking for?” Given that they were disciples of the Baptist, we must assume they were looking for the redemption of Israel and the coming of the Messiah—the Christ. But all they could come up with is, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” John helpfully explains that “Rabbi” means teacher. Jesus, perhaps with a nod and a smile, says, “Come and see.” They were curious, and Jesus was inviting them to come satisfy their curiosity. Providing eyewitness detail again, John writes that this encounter occurred at about 4:00pm. We aren’t told what they discussed that day, but by the following day Andrew goes to find his brother Simon and tells him, “We have found the Messiah.” (John: Messiah is translated Anointed). Keep in mind that although almost all in Israel believed in a coming Messiah, at this point there were many different ideas about just what the Messiah would be. Most did not understand that the Messiah would literally be the Son of God. They were thinking more of a military leader—anointed by God—that would throw out the Romans. But whatever Simon may have

thought about the Messiah, he follows his brother Andrew to meet Jesus. Jesus looks at him for a long moment before saying to him, “You are Simon, but you will be called Cephas.” Cephas is the Aramaic word which is translated in Greek as Peter, which means “rock.” Giving Simon a new name is a foreshadowing of the day to come when Jesus will ask his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” And Peter will respond with, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” whereupon, Jesus says, “Blessed are you, Simon, for on this rock—the faith exemplified by Peter—will I build my church.”

- I. **Read John 1:43-51.** John continues his chronological account on the following day. Jesus decides to return to Galilee. He was where the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan River, east of Jerusalem and just north of the Dead Sea. Galilee is well north of there. John tells us that Jesus “found” Phillip—he must have been looking for him— and said (commanded?) “Follow me.” Phillip was from Bethsaida, in Galilee, where Andrew and Peter were also from, so they probably all knew each other. Phillip, in turn, then tells his friend Nathanael, “We have found him about whom Moses wrote—a prophet like me—and also whom the prophets wrote about.” At this point, Nathanael is probably pretty excited. But then Phillip adds: “Jesus of Nazareth.” When he hears that Jesus is from Nazareth, Nathanael is clearly unimpressed: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Phillip responds, probably with a smile, “Come and see.”
- J. The story of Jesus encountering Nathanael is beautifully told in “The Chosen.” We don’t know for sure this is exactly what happened because scripture doesn’t give all the details, but the Chosen portrays Nathanael at a low point in his life. He is alone, under a fig tree with no one else around. He is discouraged personally; he is discouraged for Israel, and he is despairing that the Messiah has not come to relieve Israel from its misery. He begins to wonder if God is even listening to him when he prays. And he lays all of this out to God in prayer. We don’t know if this happened a day or two before Nathanael meets Jesus or even earlier. But he is puzzled when Jesus greets him with, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” “Where did you get to know me,” he responds. Jesus just looks directly at Nathanael and softly says, “I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip called you.” Nathanael is mystified, then stunned. No one could know what he poured out to God in prayer under the fig tree, except God alone. In an explosion of faith, Nathanael responds, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.” Jesus responds with a smile, “Do you believe because I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these. You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” In an instant hope has returned to Nathanael.
- K. We would do well to remember when life has brought us a tragedy or a difficult time or a loss that has sucked all of the joy of life out of us that we can sit under the fig tree—or go to our prayer closet—and pour out our hearts to the Lord. Just as he heard Nathanael, he will hear us, he will respond to us, and he will assure us that better days lie ahead if we will put our faith in him, either in this life or the life to come.

### III. Lesson III/Chapter 2

- A. **Read John 2:1-12.** Chapter 2 begins during the same week John wrote about in chapter 1. Remember, Jesus had left the area where John the Baptist was baptizing, not far from

Jerusalem, and he returned to Galilee. The first verse of chapter 2 shows us at least one reason why he left—to attend a wedding in Cana. Cana was a small town in Galilee quite close to Nazareth. So, Jesus, his mother and his disciples had left to attend the wedding. Again, this story is beautifully told in “The Chosen.”

- B. Before we get into the specifics of what went on at the wedding, and Jesus’ miracle there of turning water into wine, let’s acknowledge that this might be considered a minor miracle—at least compared to making the lame walk, giving sight to the blind, or raising the dead. Had Jesus not turned the water into wine, the bride and groom would still have been married, and life would have gone on as usual, although it would have been a humiliation to the newly wedded couple, and perhaps their parents as well, that they ran out of wine.
- C. I, for one, am glad that his first miracle was a minor miracle. We all feel sympathy for a lame, sick or diseased person, but we are not as quick with our sympathy for someone just because they ran out of wine at a somewhat extravagant wedding reception. But Jesus understood and was ready to pour out his grace on this family to prevent an embarrassment at the wedding. It might be considered a small grace compared to redeeming someone for all eternity, but this small grace shows how extravagant God’s love is for us.
- D. Remember in chapter 1, John says, “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” What John was saying is that Jesus has shown us by his own life what life was intended to be when God created us. Everything in Jesus’ life was an extension of grace to those about him, even when he was telling the people truths that were hard to hear. While we will likely never turn water into wine, give sight to the blind, or raise the dead, we can and should, as followers of Jesus, always be ready to extend small graces to others as often as we can. And not only to those whom we know and love, but also to those who dislike us or disagree with us. If we do this, we will fulfill Jesus’ command that we love one another just as he has loved us.
- E. Now, let’s look at the story. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was invited to the wedding. Given how the rest of the story plays out with Mary telling the servants to do what Jesus tells them, she was probably a relative of the bride or groom, perhaps even the sister of the mother of the bride or groom. Wedding celebrations were a very big event in Jewish life, and the family was expected to throw a party. Wine was a very big part of their celebrations, and running out of wine would be a more than just a social faux pas; it would have been a humiliation that would not quickly go away. Why did they run out of wine? John doesn’t tell us. Perhaps it is because they invited more people at the last minute than they had planned for—such as all of Jesus’ disciples. Or perhaps they didn’t have enough money to properly plan for the festivities. Whatever the reason, Mary becomes aware that they had run out of wine or soon would, and she knows what an embarrassment that would be to the hosts.
- F. Mary immediately goes to Jesus. That in itself is telling. She knows her son; she has known him from birth, and she knows his heart. She also knows somehow that he will be able to address the lack of wine. Jesus’ response to Mary seems a little harsh to us: “Woman, what concern is that of ours?” But the language used here in the Greek

doesn't translate well into English. First, it was not an insult to call his mother "Woman." Remember, on the cross he uses the same word when he says to her, "Woman, your son"—referring to John, who would thereafter care for Mary for the rest of her life. Furthermore, Mary's response clearly shows she understood that Jesus was about to do something to resolve the problem. She instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them.

- G. At this point, imagine yourself in the shoes of the servants. Jesus tells them to fill up the stone jars used for ceremonial cleansing with water. There were six jars that held 20-30 gallons each. They clearly would have been mystified by such a command when the issue was running out of wine, not water, but they did it, filling each to the brim with fresh water. The next command would have mystified them even more. Jesus tells the servants to take some of the water to the chief steward—the one responsible for serving the food and wine. Imagine their shock when the chief steward carefully tastes what they thought was just water and then announces it is some of the best wine he has ever tasted—so much so that he goes to the groom and, in essence, asks why did you save the best wine for last? Most people serve the best first and the poor wine later when palates are dulled. Not only is it the best wine he has ever tasted, but there are six stone jars full of the best wine—although scripture doesn't tell us he was aware of that.
- H. Try to imagine also the relief of the bride and groom and their families. The wedding celebration that was about to come to an embarrassing end would not be ruined by a lack of wine due to what Jesus did. The family, the servants, and Jesus' disciples all knew what happened, and John says it revealed Jesus' glory. It also revealed his compassion for an ordinary family in the midst of one of the most important days of their lives. John also says his disciples believed in him, recognizing that they had witnessed a miracle. It was one of his minor miracles, but it perfectly demonstrated the grace of Jesus.
- I. Verse 12 tells us Jesus, his mother, his brothers, and his disciples then left for Capernaum, which was Jesus' headquarters for most of his ministry.
- J. **Cleansing the Temple. Read John 2:13-25.** Following a few days back in Capernaum with his family and disciples, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover. As we will see, Jesus' actions there don't support the oft-given description of him being meek and mild, and for good reason.
- K. Context: During the Passover feast, the population of Jerusalem would swell to 3 or 4 times its normal population, making it a powder keg for rebellions against the Romans, so security precautions were at a high level by the Romans. All of those coming to Jerusalem for Passover would have to pay a Temple tax and offer a sacrifice, which required a sacrificial animal. Obviously, among other things, this would pump up the economy in Jerusalem; it was also good for the Temple treasury. The Temple tax could only be paid in the Jewish shekel, so moneychangers were necessary. There was also the requirement that any animal offered for sacrifice had to be pure, with no defects. These requirements led to a high level of buying and selling sacrificial animals and money changing hands during Passover. The historical data indicates that all of this



commercial activity had previously taken place on the Mount of Olives which was outside the gates of Jerusalem. However, about this time, the high priest decided to move the money changers and animal merchants into the Court of the Gentiles, which was part of the Temple complex. Keep in mind that when scripture refers to the Temple, it is not just a building but a 35-acre area that included the Temple building and several different large courts, with the Court of the Gentiles being the outermost court.

- L. So, Jesus arrives at the Temple and, probably unexpectedly, finds the Court of the Gentiles filled with people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and moneychangers as well. He observes and then acts very intentionally. He makes himself a whip out of cords, and he proceeds to drive all of the animals (and their owners) out of the Temple complex. He also overturned the moneychangers' tables, throwing their coins on the ground. You can imagine the mad scramble among the moneychangers trying to recover their coins and those who might try to make off with some of the coins.
- M. Jesus yells at the people as he does this, "Get these things out of here. Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." Jesus is loudly expressing righteous anger over the situation, and John whispers to us that his disciples later remembered that Psalm 69 says, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Indeed, this episode is one of the charges against Jesus later when he is brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin Court prior to the Jews taking him to the Roman Procurator Pontus Pilate to get him crucified.
- N. The response of the Jewish leaders to Jesus' actions is interesting. They don't ask *why* Jesus did what he did. They asked, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" They seem to be implicitly recognizing that what Jesus did was not wrong but questioned why he thought he had the authority to do what he did. Jesus' response demonstrates another instance of his being misunderstood. Jesus says, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews took this literally and mocked him. John again whispers to us that Jesus was referring to the temple of his body, although his disciples didn't recognize this until after the resurrection. This was the first dust-up between Jesus and the Jewish power brokers, and it would not be the last.
- O. Verses 23-25 tell us that Jesus performed many signs during this Passover period, although John gives no specifics. He does tell us, however, that many believed in Jesus because of the signs he performed. Then he then makes a statement that is somewhat puzzling when one reads it: "But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them because he knew all people." Remember, this is early in Jesus' ministry. Although Jesus clearly knew the cross was ahead for him, the time was not yet right for him to declare that he was the Son of God. His disciples still had to be trained, and he had more to do to demonstrate what the Father was like. The people in Jerusalem believed because of the signs, but Jesus knew they did not yet understand all of what being a follower of Jesus included. He also understood human nature, and he knew that most of the followers who believed in him after seeing signs would abandon him when they discovered the cost of discipleship and that sacrifices inherent in Christian service had to be made—exactly what happened later in his ministry. Jesus even asked his own disciples if they were going to abandon him also. (John 6:66-68). So, Jesus was not ready to entrust himself to those who believed he was the Messiah because of the signs he

performed. He had not yet revealed to them that he must die for their sins and the sins of the world. Indeed, his own disciples were not yet ready for that revelation.

#### IV. Lesson IV/Chapter 3

- A. **Read John 3:1-21.** In last week's lesson we read that Jesus performed many signs while he was in Jerusalem for the Passover, and as a result many believed in him. Jesus also apparently caught the eye of one of the leading citizens of Jerusalem at the time—a man named Nicodemus. We know that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin Court, which was similar to a combination of our Congress and Supreme Court, with the High Priest being somewhat similar to our president. There were 70 members of the Sanhedrin, and they came from a variety of the different sects—Pharisees, Sadducees, and perhaps others. It was the Sanhedrin which conducted the Jewish trial of Jesus before he was taken to Pontius Pilate. We also know that Nicodemus was a wealthy man, perhaps one of the richest in Jerusalem. In John 19:39, we are told that following Jesus' death Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, which only a rich man could have afforded, to prepare Jesus' body for burial.
- B. To understand why Nicodemus came to Jesus, we have to understand something about the Pharisees. There was much about the Pharisees that was admirable. Indeed, there were many Pharisees among the early Christian church. There were only about 6000 Pharisees at any one time, so they were not numerous. Given their mission in life, that is not surprising. They took a pledge to observe every detail of the scribal law. We are talking about much more than the Ten Commandments. The scribes had taken every element of the law and described in detail what it included. For example, one of the commandments was to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy, and on that day no work must be done by a man, his servants or his animals. In the Mishnah, which is the scribal law, no fewer than 24 chapters were spent on what it meant to do no work on the Sabbath. In addition, the Talmud, which is the explanatory commentary on the Mishnah, runs to 64 columns. For example, they declared that to tie a knot on the Sabbath was work and therefore forbidden. As was untying a knot. But then they had to define a knot. Any knot by a camel driver or a sailor was work and forbidden; on the other hand, any knot which could be untied with only one hand was not forbidden. Interestingly, a woman was permitted to tie a knot for a slit in her shift and in her girdle. So, a man wanting to let down a bucket in a well for water on the Sabbath could not tie a knot on a rope to let the bucket down, but he could tie a knot in a woman's girdle to let it down because that was legal. Can you imagine trying to live your entire life in harmony with all such regulations? It was exhausting, but the Pharisees did it out of devotion to the law. Note that in the gospels, Jesus often criticized the Pharisees. But he criticized them because of what they did, not because of what they taught.
- C. What is surprising is that Nicodemus wanted to meet with Jesus at all. But we see from the first few verses of this chapter that Nicodemus saw something in Jesus that caused him to recognize that he was from God. Otherwise, Jesus could not perform the miracles he was performing. But Nicodemus was befuddled because Jesus' teaching was unlike any other Rabbi's teaching—as the gospels frequently tell us. Before we get to their conversation, note that this meeting occurs at night. John doesn't tell us why, but it appears that Nicodemus was not yet ready to be seen in public with Jesus. Similarly, Jesus was probably not ready to disclose publicly all he said to Nicodemus because it is still early in Jesus'

ministry and declaring himself the Son of God would have cut short his public ministry. Finally, Nicodemus was clearly earnest about trying to understand Jesus and he may have wanted Jesus to himself while he was exploring what Jesus' teaching was all about.

- D. So, he comes to Jesus and says we know you are from God or otherwise you couldn't perform these miracles. Jesus' response seems unconnected to Nicodemus' statement. He says unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. What Jesus is saying is "Don't get too caught up in the signs. What you need to do is change the inner man so much that it is like you are reborn as a new person." Nicodemus, on the other hand, takes this statement literally and asks if someone can actually enter the womb again. This seems to me to be intentional obtuseness. After all, the idea of being reborn was not unheard of in Judaism thought; it was just that being reborn only applied to Proselytes—Gentiles who converted to Judaism. Jesus is now saying that even good Jews, including Pharisees, also had to be born again. Nicodemus doesn't want to hear it, and therefore asks an inane question—can one enter the womb again?
- E. Jesus' response in verses 5-8 essentially repeats what he said before: to enter the kingdom of God requires being reborn in a spiritual sense. Remember, Jesus is talking to a Pharisee. The Pharisees believed that one entered the Kingdom of God by observing every jot and tittle of the law—which was largely a pursuit of the flesh—through discipline and "works." Jesus is telling him he cannot *earn* his way to heaven through fleshly pursuits but must become a new person inwardly—one who is spiritually awakened through belief in the One from Above—God's only son. Jesus goes on to make a comparison between the wind and the Spirit. Essentially, he says you don't know where the wind comes from, but you feel its effects and you see the result of the wind blowing. You may not understand fully how the Spirit of God works, but like feeling the wind, you know when the Spirit of God is upon you and you can see his effects on your life. Living like this would clearly be a major departure from the life of a Pharisee who has his extensive list of do's and don't's by which he lived his life, so this would not be easy for him to accept. In fact he doesn't seem ready to accept what Jesus is saying
- F. Nicodemus claims to be mystified: "How can these things be?" Jesus' response seems to be a bit of a put down. "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?" Rather than a put down, Jesus is saying that it is essential that you and your Pharisee brothers understand this so you will not lead Israel astray.
- G. In verses 11-14, Jesus follows up on this point. He says he has testified to what he has seen and knows, but you (using the plural *you* to refer to all Pharisees and Sadducees) have not received our testimony. If you don't understand earthly things (such as parables Jesus told to simplify and make his point) how can you believe heavenly things (which are more complicated). Then he proceeds on to tell Nicodemus more complicated spiritual things: the Son of Man—referring to himself—has descended from heaven, and just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9) the Son of Man must be lifted up (a clear and well-known reference to crucifixion) so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. So, here are the spiritual things that Jesus said Nicodemus must understand: just as the Israelites looked on the serpent on a pole in faith that they would be healed—and they were—Jesus, the Son of Man, would be lifted up so that whoever believed in him would be spiritually healed and have eternal life.

- H. What follows in verses 16-21 is a matter of disagreement among biblical scholars. The issue is whether John is quoting what Jesus told Nicodemus in these verses, or whether this is John whispering to us again and explaining what Jesus meant. Most versions of the Bible put these verses in quotes, signifying that Jesus is speaking. I agree with it being a quote of Jesus because the next verses amplify and complete the point he was making. Jesus has just said that he would be “lifted up,” which means crucified, so that whoever believes in him might have eternal life. In verses 16 & 17, Jesus makes clear that it is God who gave his son up to death and that he did it out of love for mankind. God wants his sons and daughters to have eternal life, which comes only through Jesus. So, Jesus came not to bring the judgment of God, but salvation. Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are under condemnation already because they preferred darkness rather than light. This is a succinct summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And these verses are the most quoted of all verses in the Bible.
- I. John does not provide us with a response by Nicodemus to what Jesus said to him. Nicodemus only appears twice more in scripture, once in a debate within the Sanhedrin Court and once following the death of Jesus. It is Nicodemus, along with Joseph of Arimathea, who prepared Jesus’s body for burial and placed him in the tomb from which Jesus would arise on the third day. (John 19:38-42). I prefer to think that Nicodemus did eventually become a believer, and eventually came to understand what Jesus told him when they met that night.
- J. **Read John 3:22-30.** Once the Passover had concluded, Jesus leads his disciples into the Judean countryside to continue to teach them, and they baptized new converts. The story then reverts to John the Baptist who was also baptizing not too far from where Jesus was. This all takes place before John is imprisoned. What happened next is very human. John’s disciples are perplexed and disappointed that many of John’s followers are leaving him and following Jesus, even as Andrew did. The Baptist once more reveals his humility by saying “I told you I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.” John then tells his disciples a parable to explain vividly what his role was. He says Jesus is the bridegroom, and John is the best man—in Judaism, the *shoshbin*. The *shoshbin* was more than the best man at a modern wedding. He arranged the wedding; he sent out the invitations; and he presided at the wedding feast. His biggest role though was to guard the bride until the groom returned from the wedding feast to the bride. This was not an unimportant role at a time when kidnapping a bride for a ransom was not unheard of. The *shoshbin* would wait outside the bridal chamber until the groom returned; the *shoshbin* would recognize the voice of the groom—his best friend—and reunite the groom with his bride and then rejoice that his best friend had found the love of his life. In this parable the bride is Israel and John is telling his followers that his role has been to make preparations for the coming of the bridegroom, the Messiah, to his bride—Israel—and he rejoices in that role that he has now fulfilled. Therefore, he would decrease, while Jesus would increase.
- K. **Read John 3:31-36.** Again, there is disagreement among biblical scholars about whether these verses are part of what the Baptist said to his followers or whether the author John is again whispering to his readers. I tend to believe the latter, and the NRSV does not put these verses in quotes. Note that what is said here is similar to what Jesus told Nicodemus. The one of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks of earthly things, whereas the one from above speaks of what he has seen and heard in heaven. Yet his testimony has not

been accepted by the Jews. But he speaks the truth and is loved by the Father. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who disobeys the Son will not see life. In short, this is a summing up of what came before in this chapter.

## V. Lesson V/Chapter 4

- A. **Read John 4:1-9.** This is one of the most beautiful stories in this gospel. It demonstrates Jesus' compassion and willingness to break down any barriers to reconciliation with God as well as any story in the New Testament does. To fully understand what is going on, we need to understand the background. First, who are the Samaritans? You will recall that when Israel was led out of Egypt to the Promised Land, they eventually settled on land allocated to each of the 12 tribes of Israel. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were the southernmost tribes and eventually became known just as Judah or Judea—from whence comes the name Jews. When the Israelites demanded a king, Saul was appointed by God as king of all 12 tribes. Following his death, David became king over Judah; one of Saul's sons was the king over Israel for about 7 years before the kingdom was again united under David and continued under Solomon. Following Solomon's death, however, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah split, not to be reunited until modern times. In 720 BC the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom (Israel but not Judah) and carried off most of the population which became known as the lost tribes of Israel. The Assyrians also resettled the land with foreigners who intermarried with the Israelites left behind. They eventually became known as Samaritans. Later, the Jews from Judea were also invaded and carried off to Babylon. Unlike the northern tribes, however, the Jews in Babylon did not intermarry but kept their separate racial identity. When they returned to Judea after 70 years in Babylon, the Samaritans offered to help them rebuild the temple and their land—because they had a common ancestry in Israel—but the southern kingdom Jews rejected their assistance, treating them with contempt for intermarrying with Gentiles. From that time forward there was enmity—often hatred—between the Jews and Samaritans.
- B. To compound the problem as between Jews and Samaritans, over time the Jews settled in the area north of Samaria around the Sea of Galilee (which is really just a large lake through which runs the Jordan River). Just to the north of the Sea of Galilee is the mountainous area known today as the Golan Heights. There was a considerable amount of commerce and travel between Judea—the area around Jerusalem—and Galilee, and the fastest and most convenient way to make this trip was to go through Samaria. This is what Jesus and his disciples are doing as this story opens—they are leaving Judea and heading back to Galilee through Samaria. Keep in mind that the entire length from the southern end of Judea to the northern edge of Galilee is only about 120-150 miles, but in that small area—no bigger than Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties—were three distinct areas—Judea, Samaria and Galilee.
- C. As the scene opens, Jesus and his disciples have just arrived at Jacob's well. This is the well that Jacob dug centuries earlier and eventually gave to his son Joseph. It was well known to all Jews and Samaritans and was near a Samaritan town called Sychar. They have been traveling by foot from Judea on their way to Galilee; it's about noon and they are tired, hungry, and ready for a break. They apparently have no food, so Jesus sends his disciples into Sychar to buy food for them. Jesus decides to stay by the well to rest until his disciples return.

- D. After the disciples leave, a Samaritan woman shows up to draw water, and Jesus asks her for a drink of water. This seems a reasonable request to us, but it is fraught with cultural baggage for several reasons. First, the woman is a Samaritan, and as John whispers to us, “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.” So, even if this had been a Samaritan man, it would have been an unusual request. Remember, the reason Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan was so shocking to the Jews was that the hero of that parable was a Samaritan rather than a Jewish priest or Rabbi. Second, this is a woman, and good Jewish men—especially Rabbis—simply didn’t speak to women in public. So, she has two strikes against her. The Samaritan woman acknowledges this and asks Jesus, incredulously, “How is it that you, a Jewish man, ask me—a Samaritan woman—for a drink of water?” She is surprised that Jesus would make such a request.
- E. **Read John 4:10-15.** The conversation at this point follows the same pattern we saw in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. The woman asks a question—what’s a Jewish man doing asking a Samaritan woman for a favor?—and Jesus responds with a statement that doesn’t seem directly responsive, but interjects a spiritual thought into the conversation (he has living water for her—similar to telling Nicodemus he needed to be born again), whereupon she takes the statement literally, although she surely knew Jesus was hinting at something deeper. In essence, Jesus said “If you recognized who it is speaking to you, you would have asked me for the water that sustains life.” The woman recognizes that Jesus is hinting at something more, particularly as it pertains to himself. She first says, “You have no bucket, and the well is deep, so how are you going to get this living water?” She then makes a snide remark to Jesus, “Who do you think you are to offer living water? Do you think you are greater than our ancestor Jacob who dug the well that has sustained us all this time?” She is pushing back hard against this Jewish man who probably seems a little impertinent to her. Jesus, as usual, does not take offense. He says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give won’t thirst again because the water I give will become a spring in the person gushing up to eternal life.” These references to living water should remind her of the Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah would bring living water—a metaphor for the Spirit of God—and remind her of references in the Psalms to the thirst of the soul that only God could quench. A Samaritan, like a Jew, would probably recognize these references.
- F. By now, she surely knows Jesus is referring to something more than his asking her to fetch him a drink of water from the well. But, like Nicodemus, she is being intentionally obtuse, and instead of asking Jesus to explain what he means, she makes a reference to the pitiful state of her own life. As we will see, her life is a mess. The reason she is outside the town of Sychar drawing water which she will have to haul back to town is that she appears to be something of a social outcast. It was highly unusual for a woman to be drawing water in the heat of the day, and there were wells in Sychar where she lived. She is wrapped up in the mess of her own life and her comment shows how miserable she is. She says, in effect, “I am so tired of coming here—far from town—to draw water. Whatever this living water is you say you have, give me some so I don’t have to keep coming here for water.” She is feeling sorry for herself, which is understandable given the present circumstances of her life. Like many in life, she was so caught up in her own problems and the mess she had made of her life, she was unable to recognize or appreciate the hope that was right in front of her.

- G. **Read John 4:16-26.** At this point, Jesus decides to confront the woman with the truth about her life in a way that will cut through the barriers she keeps raising. He asks her to go get her husband and bring him back. She says she has no husband. I picture Jesus just slowly looking at her with compassion before saying, “That’s the truth; you’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now isn’t your husband.” At this point, the woman is stunned; he couldn’t possibly know that unless he were a prophet from God. As these thoughts run through her mind, she is reassessing Jesus and trying to figure out how to respond. But she still isn’t ready to have an honest conversation with him. It’s obvious that Jesus is trying to get her to the point she acknowledges her need for the presence of God in her life, but she is a wounded woman who isn’t yet ready to open up to anyone. So, she does what many do when the conversation turns spiritual—she raises a theological question, one which won’t affect her personally nearly as much as the statements Jesus has been making. She asks whether it is the temple in Jerusalem or the one in Samaria that is the proper place for worshiping God. Jesus answers her in a way that responds to her question but tells her she isn’t asking the right question. He says, in essence, the day is coming when you won’t worship God in either temple (they would both be destroyed), but salvation is from the Jews—referring to himself. The time has come that you must deal with *how* you worship—it must be sincere worship in the spirit—rather than *where* you worship. Jesus is now finally getting through to her. She responds by saying she knows Messiah is coming—and I see her making that statement with at least some glimmer of hope for the future. And then Jesus shatters her entire world—he says, “I am he.”
- H. Just for a moment, try to put yourself in her shoes. She has trudged out to Jacob’s well in the heat of the day to fetch water. Her life is a mess; she has nothing but pain and sorrow in her past and in her present circumstances, and no hope at all for the future. This is probably the last place she would expect to find any hope for the future. And who shows up but a Jewish man who at first seems to be impertinent. But he quickly says things that pierce her to her soul and force her to confront the state of her life and the absence of God from her life. And after revealing to her things about herself he couldn’t possibly know he tells her he is the Messiah! She is beyond stunned; she is dumbstruck. She is overcome with surprise, shock, amazement, and probably for the first time in a long, long time, a strong helping of hope. Just at that moment, the disciples arrive.
- I. **Read John 4:27-38.** When the disciples show up, they are as astonished as the woman was that Jesus spoke to her, but by now they knew not to question Jesus about what he was doing. I picture them arriving just after Jesus has told her he is the Messiah. She looks at him, then looks at the disciples who were apparently looking rather contemptuously at her. She considers what Jesus has just told her, and then she abandons her water jar and takes off running back to town to tell others there what has just happened to her. It seemed to her too good to be true, but it was.
- J. The disciples then urge Jesus to eat, but he again makes a statement they don’t understand. “I have food to eat you don’t know about.” They don’t understand, but he quickly explains that his food—what sustains him—is to do the will of the Father. And he tells them to look about, the fields are ready for harvest. It is interesting that he made that statement in the middle of Samaria, a people most Jews viewed as the enemy of God.

- K. John then tells us that the people of Sychar came out to see for themselves what Jesus had to say, and for two days Jesus remained and taught them. And many believed, telling the woman, “We now see for ourselves that this is truly the Savior of the world.”
- L. **Read John 4:43-54.** After Jesus’ two-day delay to teach at Sychar, he and his disciples continue on to Galilee where he intended to go. The reports of what Jesus did at Passover had preceded him and he was welcomed by the Galileans.
- M. He returns once more to Cana, where the story of his turning water into wine would be widespread. And there, a royal official approached Jesus. Given he is described as a royal official he was probably in service to King Herod who had jurisdiction over Galilee. The official’s son—who was in Capernaum, about 20 miles away— was quite ill, near death, and he begs Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son. Jesus’ response again seems to say that you—the plural you—won’t believe unless you see miracles performed, perhaps testing his faith. The official responds by again begging Jesus to go heal his son before he dies. Jesus then tests his faith again by saying, “Go; your son will live.” It took faith for him to accept Jesus’ word. He asked Jesus to go heal his son because he thought Jesus would have to touch him—or at least see him in person—to heal him. But Jesus did neither; he simply said, “Go; your son will live.” The official believed Jesus, left to return to Capernaum and met his servants along the way. They told him the fever left his son at the same time he spoke to Jesus the day before. John tells us something more; the official’s *entire household* became believers.
- N. John whispers to us that this is the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee. The first sign was turning the water into wine. This second miracle was also performed in Cana. If the first miracle was a minor one, this one is major! Jesus not only heals a young boy at the point of death; he does it remotely. Jesus is in Cana and the boy is in Capernaum, 20 miles away. With a word from Jesus the fever departed him, and he was restored to his family. This is a part of the great harvest that Jesus has just told his disciples is ready for reaping.

## VI. Lesson VI/Chapter 5

- A. **Read John 5:1-18.** As chapter 5 opens Jesus has returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish feasts, although John does not identify which one. This story centers around a pool called Bethesda which is close to the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. The sick, blind and lame would gather there because there was a belief that when the water stirred it was because an angel stirred it and the first one into the water would recover from the disease or injury, although not necessarily immediately. Jesus learns of a man there who had been ill for 38 years; John doesn’t tell us what the illness was, but it is generally accepted that the man was lame, thus Jesus healing him by telling him to take up his mat and walk.
- B. Again, we have a one-on-one conversation between Jesus and an individual. Jesus asks, “Do you want to be healed?” Interestingly, the man doesn’t respond to the question; he offers an excuse why he hasn’t already been healed. He says he has no one to help him and someone always beats him to the pool. John records no further questions to him from Jesus to test his faith; he simply orders the man to get up, take his mat and walk, whereupon he does so.



- C. Note that Jesus doesn't tell the man his faith has made him well, probably because there is no evidence the man had any faith in Jesus at that point. In fact, he didn't even know who Jesus was. Jesus' healing the man and telling him to take his mat and walk seems to us like an act of compassion, but there was a problem as far as the Pharisees were concerned. Remember all the rules and regulations they had added to the law given to Moses? Their additions were known as the Oral Law. One of the prohibitions of the Oral Law was that one could do no work on the Sabbath, and this day was the Sabbath. So, instead of celebrating the healing with the man, the Pharisees accuse him of acting unlawfully by carrying his mat on the Sabbath, which they considered impermissible work and therefore sinful. His defense: the man who healed him told him to take up his mat and walk. But he had not taken the time to even learn the name of the man who healed him, so he couldn't identify his healer. John tells us that Jesus later found the healed man in the Temple—which implies Jesus went looking for him—and admonished him to sin no more so that nothing worse might happen to him. I gather from this statement, and the man's behavior, that his illness may have resulted from some sinful acts by the man, although that is not expressly stated. What is clear, however, is that upon Jesus presenting himself to the man and telling him to sin no more, the man goes straight to the Jewish authorities and identifies Jesus as the man who healed him on the Sabbath and then told him to take his mat and walk. His behavior seems to confirm the old adage that no good deed goes unpunished. At the very least it was an ungenerous response by the man toward Jesus who had just healed him.
- D. This incident signifies the beginning of strong opposition to Jesus among the Jewish leadership. To them, he committed two cardinal sins: (1) he was flaunting the law with regard to the Sabbath, and (2) he was calling God his own father, thereby claiming to be equal to God. Remember that one of John's purposes in writing his gospel was to refute heresies that had arisen. One of those heresies was that Jesus was not divine but only human. The Jews were correct that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God, as the remainder of the chapter clearly demonstrates. And they were also correct that this would be blasphemy if it were not true—a possibility they were not willing to consider. So, to those who contend that Jesus claimed only to be a wise and good teacher and nothing more, Jesus' own words refute that argument. Further, even his biggest critics never took that position; they acknowledged he claimed divinity. Indeed, that is why they were persecuting him, and eventually had him crucified.
- E. **Read John 5:19-29.** The reasoning of the Jewish leaders was that although healing a lame man appears to be a good and godly thing to do, since it was done on the Sabbath it cannot be from God for God would never approve of someone violating the Sabbath. Remember that the act in question here was not prohibited in the Ten Commandments but only in the oral law that the Jews had added to the law over the years. In these verses, Jesus defends what he has done and clearly states that everything he is doing comes directly from God his Father. He makes claims about himself that would have been outrageous to the Jewish leaders—the Rabbis, Pharisees and Sadducees. We will break down these verses in shorter segments.
- F. First, in **verses 19 and 20**, Jesus says he is not acting on his own but does only what he sees the Father doing. That alone was enough to make them grind their teeth because he says he is the Son of God. The Jews denied that God had a son in the sense of being of one

substance with the Father. In short, Jesus says I am doing what I see my Father doing, including healing on the sabbath, and I am doing it out of obedience to him. He also says the Father loves the Son. So, Jesus is telling them they have the law all wrong if they think it is wrong to show compassion and heal on the sabbath. The entire foundation of their religion is extreme and minute obedience to the law, and Jesus is telling them God told him to do the very act they believe is a violation of the law. Not only that, he says you will see greater acts than these. It took great courage for Jesus to make such statements; he well knew they would be inflamed by his statements, and indeed they were. John says they wanted to kill him. Jesus is fearless in making these statements to them.

- G. In **verses 21-23**, Jesus points out that just as the Father has the power to raise the dead, so also does he as the Son of God. This statement has a two-fold meaning. Jesus is referring to being raised from the dead spiritually—as in being “born again” as Jesus told Nicodemus—and also being raised from physical death into eternity. He also addresses another function that is for God alone—judging the living and the dead. He says the Father has delegated the whole function of judging to the Son and the Son will thereby be honored even as the Father is honored. If these statements were difficult for the Jews to accept, his next statement was even more so. “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” At this point, the Jews would have been dumbstruck.
- H. In **verse 24**, Jesus clarifies about his function in bringing judgment. He says the one who listens to him and believes on him who sent Jesus *has* eternal life, thereby affirming that eternal life begins not upon physical death but upon believing in Jesus. The believer is not on his way to judgment, but rather has passed from death to life. Thus, Jesus says, God has delegated to his Son the power over life itself; “He who has the Son has life.” Again, this type of reasoning was foreign to the Jews. They believed that keeping the law brought life, but Jesus is saying that life arrives when one believes in him and the Father who sent him.
- I. In **verses 25-29**, Jesus makes his strongest claims to being the Messiah. He says the hour has come when the dead—the spiritually dead—will hear the voice of the Son and live. And he refers to himself as the Son of Man, which was an unmistakable Messianic title from the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. The entire function of judging has been given to him, and he will judge each person on the basis of whether the person believed in him or not. Those who have accepted him will pass from death to life, but those who do not accept him will be subject to judgment resulting in death for all eternity.
- J. In **verse 30**, Jesus returns to the idea that he is doing nothing on his own. In other words he is not making it up as he goes along. He is doing what the Father tells him to do and what he sees the Father doing. So, any judgment he makes is based upon what he hears from the Father; therefore, his judgments are just because they are from the Father. It would be hard for the Jews to argue that God’s judgments are not just, but they did not believe Jesus was hearing from God.
- K. **Read John 5: 31-38**. In verse 30 Jesus uses a form of reasoning familiar to the Rabbis. In essence, the Rabbis, Pharisees and Sadducees were demanding some evidence from him that these extraordinary claims he was making were true. Jesus acknowledges that they don’t have to accept any testimony he gives about himself because for a fact to be accepted it must be testified to by two or more independent witnesses. (This is somewhat

comparable to the rules of evidence used in our courts of law today, although under our rules one is entitled to testify on his own behalf) He first references the fact that John the Baptist testified as to who Jesus was so there is one witness, although Jesus says he does not have to rely upon human witnesses. He has testimony greater than John's that support the claims he has made about himself. He says the works he has performed are evidence as to who he is and prove that he was sent by the Father. Remember what Nicodemus said, "We know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus is saying that these signs testify on his behalf that the Father has sent him, so God himself is testifying on Jesus' behalf. Jesus goes on to say that you—the Jewish leaders—do not recognize God's word because you do not believe the Son whom God has sent.

- L. **Read John 5:39-47.** What Jesus says in these verses would have really stung and astounded the Jewish leaders. He says that you search the scriptures to find eternal life, but the very scriptures you search testify that the One to Come—the Son of Man— will bring eternal life, and yet you have not recognized me. The one who will accuse you for failure to believe is Moses on whom you have set your hope. Yet it is Moses that has written about me. If you won't believe what Moses said about me—and you profess to believe what Moses said—how will you ever believe the truth of what I have said. In verse 41, Jesus says he does not accept glory from men. What he is saying is that he has not come seeking their approval and glory but to save them. They, on the other hand, are constantly seeking approval and glory from one another rather than approval from God. In short, they had not searched the scriptures for God's will, but had rather come up with their own theology and then searched the scriptures to support their own views thereby nullifying the intent of the law God had given them. The law was given to bring righteousness, justice, and compassion to Jewish life. But while God had intended the law for good, they had turned it into a burden upon the people.
- M. We will see these arguments presented again in future chapters. It is worth noting that despite the evidence of Jesus' power as revealed in his miraculous acts, most of the Jewish leaders were not convinced by them. They would demand signs, but not believe when the signs were performed. It is a sad but true example of the fact that we humans often believe what we want to believe for our own purposes even when the truth is right in front of us. Even Jesus' resurrection from the dead did not convince many of them that he was from God.

## VII. Lesson VII/Chapter 6

- A. **Read John 6:1-15.** This chapter opens about six months after the events described in chapter 5. Jesus is now back in Galilee with his disciples. They have been traveling around the Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberius), and crowds have been following Jesus. John tells us the crowds have been following Jesus because they saw the signs he was performing by healing the sick. We can assume the sick came to him for healing but many came just to see the miracles taking place. John also tells us that Jesus went up a mountain and sat down—which means he was teaching the crowd. The mountain was likely the Golan heights, or the vicinity of it, just north of the Sea of Galilee. This would place them a few miles north of the town of Bethsaida. John also tells us this is a time close to the Passover, so it would have been in the spring. Jesus was in Jerusalem for Passover the previous year

and will be in Jerusalem for Passover the following year—which will be the year of his crucifixion.

- B. Seeing such a large crowd—about 5,000—Jesus poses the question to Philip, “Where will we get food for all these people?” Remember, Philip was from Bethsaida as we learned in chapter 1, so he is asking the person with local knowledge. John whispers to us that Jesus was just testing Philip; he already knew what he was going to do. Philip clearly thinks trying to feed all these people would be hopeless because even if they could find food to buy, they couldn’t afford it. The wage for a worker for 6-8 months or more was 200 denarii and even that wouldn’t be enough to give this many people more than a bite or two. Andrew pipes up with information that shows just how desperate the situation is. The only food available is the lunch of one boy—five barley loaves and two fish. The two fish would have been the small variety found in the Sea of Galilee. Barley loaves were not the finest of breads; in fact, they were deemed more appropriate for slaves.
- C. Put yourself in the disciples’ shoes at this point. There are thousands of hungry people there and they had no food to offer them except the five barley loaves and two fish from a little boy. Yet Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit down—as Mark tells us, in groups of a hundred and groups of fifty. And then Jesus offers thanks, breaks the loaves and has the disciples distribute the multiplied food to all, and all ate their fill. The disciples were as dumbfounded by what they saw as we would be had we witnessed what happened. Then, as was customary in that culture, Jesus had the disciples gather up the leftovers, which came to 12 baskets full. The baskets referred to were small baskets in which one would pack a lunch for the day, so there was enough for another meal for the 12 disciples. Nothing was wasted.
- D. Some commentators have attempted to characterize this miracle as Jesus convincing the people to become unselfish with the food they all had with them so that by sharing they all had sufficient food. But that thought is refuted by verse 14 which states that when the people saw the miracle they declared, “This is the prophet who is to come into the world.” Remember, this is the name of the prophet Moses said would come to deliver the Jews—another name for the Messiah. They were not ready to declare someone the Messiah just for making the people act unselfishly. It took seeing a miracle to make such a declaration. Verse 15 shows Jesus’ response to this. His time had not yet come, and he did not come to be the kind of king these people were looking for. So, he slipped away to the mountain to pray and be by himself.
- E. **Read John 6:16-21.** This miracle is the only one that is included in all four gospels. Mark’s gospel tells us Jesus instructed the disciples to get into their boat and head back toward Capernaum, which was about 4-5 miles away across the lake. Night falls as the disciples were rowing into a headwind back across the lake, and they aren’t making much progress; they are straining against the wind and the waves. All of a sudden they look up and see a man walking on the water coming near the boat. You can imagine how shocked and afraid they were—just as we would be. Mark’s gospels tell us that they thought it was a ghost and “cried out.” Jesus quickly identifies himself and gets in the boat, whereupon the wind died down and the waves ceased, and suddenly they were at the shore. Why this miracle? Neither John nor the other gospel writers explicitly tell us why, but remember that John has chosen what he included in his gospel carefully. He said he included what he did to

convince the reader that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing we may have eternal life (John 20:30-31). So this episode is another confirmation that Jesus is God in the flesh whom even the elements obey, and Jesus is very intentional about getting his disciples to understand this. They have to know this to carry out the mission Jesus will eventually charge them with.

- F. **Read John 6:22-27.** The following day the crowd (or at least some of them) that he had fed realized there had only been one boat and Jesus didn't get on that boat with the disciples, so they got on their boats and headed for Capernaum to look for Jesus. They find him and ask, "when did you get here?" As Jesus often does, he doesn't respond to the question being asked but goes to the heart of the situation. He says, in essence, "You aren't looking for me because you saw signs of who I am; you ate your fill and are looking for another meal. You should be looking for food that leads to and sustains eternal life, which I am willing to give to you, and the Father has put his seal of approval on me.
- G. **Read John 6:28-34.** Their response to Jesus' statement about food that leads to eternal life is telling: "What must we do to perform the works of God?" They are bound up by the "works-righteousness belief system" that was common at the time. They felt they had to find and perform the works that God requires for their salvation. Jesus' response was that the only work God requires of you is that you believe in the one God has sent, referring to himself. They respond by asking what sign Jesus will give to convince them they should believe his words. Keep in mind they had just seen a miraculous sign the day before. John was quite clear that they recognized that the feeding of the 5,000 was a miracle and they proclaimed him to be the prophet that comes into the world, as Moses had prophesied. Interestingly, they even refer to the manna from heaven their forefathers had eaten, and they attributed the manna to Moses. In short, they seem to be saying that if you want us to truly believe you are the prophet to come you must perform a miracle similar to Moses giving our fathers manna to eat. Jesus immediately corrects their error. It was not Moses but God himself who gave them the manna, and, Jesus says, it is God who now gives them true bread which comes down from heaven to give life to the world. Without truly understanding what Jesus is saying they ask for this bread always.
- H. **Read John 6:35-40.** Jesus gets very specific with them in response. They asked for the bread which Jesus has described, and he plainly tells them he himself is the bread of life. This is another analogy Jesus gives—similar to telling the woman at the well he can give her living water or similar to telling Nicodemus he must be born again. The hungry person wants bread which sustains life, but he will quickly get hungry again. The person receiving Jesus as the bread of life which sustains us spiritually will not get hungry again, or thirst again, for spiritual life. But there is a problem which Jesus addresses: they have seen his miracles and heard his teaching, but they still don't believe who he is. He tells them he will receive all whom the Father has given him, and he will cast none of them out. He has come down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the Father who has sent him. The Father's will is that all who believe in the Son will have eternal life, and he will raise them up on the last day.
- I. **Read John 6:41-51.** Although the crowd has just said they want the bread Jesus is talking about, they begin to complain not about Jesus saying he is the bread of life, but rather that he said he came down from heaven. "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph whose father and

mother we know?” Jesus' response is blunt: stop complaining; everyone who listens to God will be drawn to me and will find salvation—and be raised up on the last day. Jesus again compares himself to the manna their ancestors ate in the wilderness to sustain their lives, but they eventually died. He is the bread of life come down from heaven that will enable them to live for eternity. Jesus then astounds them by saying, “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Again, Jesus is speaking metaphorically but they misunderstand and have visions of cannibalism. The grumbling and complaining grow.

- J. **Read John 6:52-59.** As these verses show, the Jews were definitely having difficulty understanding what Jesus was saying. Among themselves they ask, “How can he give us his flesh to eat?” At this, Jesus doubles down and says again that unless they eat his flesh and drink his blood they will not have eternal life. Biblical scholars have a variety of ideas about just what Jesus meant with these words, but clearly, he was not speaking literally. He was telling them that his incarnation would be the source of their salvation, but to have eternal life they must be partakers of the life of Christ by abiding in him. He may also be looking forward to the Eucharist—which he had not yet instituted—for it also symbolizes the fact that by faith we abide in him, thereby partaking of the very life of God. Again, he points out that the manna from heaven did not prevent the Israelites from eventually dying, whereas those who eat the bread of life—Jesus himself—will live forever. John then whispers to us that Jesus said all this while teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. It's safe to say that none of them had ever heard teaching like this before in the synagogue.
- K. **Read John 6:60-71.** This teaching by Jesus was not only hard for the Jewish leaders to accept; John points out to us that many of his own disciples (remember, Jesus had many disciples in addition to the 12) were finding it difficult to understand and accept his teaching. Jesus asks if this teaching offended them and asks further whether it would offend them to see Jesus returning to heaven where he was before. This addresses their mumbling over Jesus saying he had come down from heaven. But Jesus adds a helpful hint as to what he means by his statements. He says, “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless.” So the comments he has just made are to be taken in a spiritual sense. But he knows and tells them that even some of his followers did not believe in him. John helpfully adds that Jesus knew from the beginning who did not believe and who would betray him.
- L. Despite Jesus' attempt to get them to understand his statements in a spiritual sense, some of his disciples—although not the 12, other than Judas—rejected him and no longer followed him. In fact, so many left that he asked the 12, “Do you also wish to go away?” Peter responds on behalf of the 12, “To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Jesus' response is interesting. In an apparent acknowledgment that his teaching might be difficult to accept, he says that he himself chose the 12, yet one of them is a devil—referencing Judas Iscariot, although he doesn't identify him. It is a low point in Jesus' ministry, and as we see time and again in John's gospel, even those closest to him often didn't understand him or understand what his mission was. As we will see in the next chapter, this was also true of his own family.

## VIII. Lesson VIII/Chapter 7

- A. **Read John 7:1-9.** Following the events of chapter 6, Jesus has fewer followers, but he continues to go about teaching in Galilee. As John points out, Jesus was avoiding Judea

because the Jewish leaders there were looking for an opportunity to kill him. He was a marked man as far as they were concerned. So we see that Jesus' life was in peril in Judea but it was safe for him in Galilee. That is because the Jews in Galilee were much less strict in observance of the oral law and traditions. Remember, it was Jesus' healing a lame man on the Sabbath that had so enraged the Rabbis and Pharisees in chapter 5.

- B. It was time for the Festival of Booths which was celebrated in late September and early October—the festival lasting about 8 days. The festival was intended to remind the Israelites of their wandering in the wilderness when they left Egypt. So we are about six months removed from the events of chapter 6 which took place around Passover, and six months away from his crucifixion.
- C. In these verses we see the appalling attitude of Jesus' own brothers about him. They challenge him to go to the festival “to show your disciples the works you are doing.” They mock him by saying you can't do things in secret if you want the world to know who you are. John whispers to us that not even his brothers believed in him. That is an understatement; John has just told us Jesus was staying out of Judea because he is a wanted man there with many of the leaders wanting him dead. So, his brothers were cruelly challenging him to do something that may end his life. Jesus' response is that his time has not yet come—a phrase he has used before and will again. But the word he uses in response to his brothers here is a different word, referring more to an opportunity. In essence, he was saying to them, “I am not going now because the time is not the best opportunity for me to accomplish my mission.” So he does not go with them, which is understandable; he does not want to be there at the opening of the festival with so many people looking for him to kill him or imprison him. He tells his brothers no one is objecting to you or trying to kill you because you are of the world. I have testified against the world that its actions are evil and the world—think Jewish leaders—hate me for it.
- D. **Read John 7:10-24.** His brothers go on to the festival, but Jesus hangs back a few days and then decides to go despite telling his brothers he isn't going. There is nothing surprising about this. His own brothers have challenged him to do something that could easily end his life; he doesn't want them to know he is going. He plans to go secretly and telling them could result in his attendance being more public than he wanted it to be until he was ready to reveal his presence at the festival. Verses 11-13 reveal how controversial Jesus had become. The Jewish leaders are asking where he is because they want to arrest him or worse. The opinions among the people ranged from those believing Jesus was a fraudulent deceiver that was leading the people astray while violating the law to those believing he was a good man, as evident from his miracles. But most of the muttering of the people is being done privately because no one wanted to get crosswise with the Jewish leaders. Obviously, there was a lot of tension in the air.
- E. Then, in the middle of the festival Jesus boldly goes into the temple and begins to teach publicly. This took an extraordinary amount of courage. Jesus was defying the Jewish leaders in the courtyard of the temple! This was totally unexpected by the leaders, and they were astonished that Jesus would do this, and they were even more astonished that he taught as he did. They were astonished because he had never been to Rabbi school or Pharisee school; to them he was an ignorant carpenter, but yet he had insights and was teaching on his own authority rather than citing all of the Rabbis and Pharisees they liked to

cite in their teaching. Jesus response to their astonishment: it is similar to what he told the Jews in chapter 6. “This isn’t my teaching; it comes from the one who sent me and anyone who is truly committed to God will recognize whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Anyone who speaks on his own is just seeking glory for himself, whereas the one seeking approval from God is a true witness with nothing false in him.” Jesus is drawing a stark contrast between what he is doing compared to what the Rabbis and Pharisees are doing. And he presses this point home. He says, “Moses gave you the law but none of you keeps that law. If you did, you wouldn’t be trying to kill me.”

- F. The leaders respond that he must have a demon because no one is trying to kill him, which is contrary to what John has just told us about their intent. They did not want to publicly admit what they clearly wanted to do. Jesus then points out how hypocritical and contrary to the law they are acting. He says, “you are astonished because I healed a man on the sabbath. Moses instituted circumcision (and John helpfully points out it originally came from the patriarchs, not Moses) and circumcision, which was always administered on the eighth day, can still go forward without violating the law, even if the eighth day was the sabbath. So why are you angry with me for healing a man’s whole body on the Sabbath. Your judgment on these matters is all wrong.”
- G. **Read John 7: 25-31.** The people of Jerusalem are now really confused. They ask, quite reasonably, “Isn’t this the man our leaders want to kill and here he is speaking openly in public, and they say nothing to him. Do they know something about him we don’t? Could he be the Messiah?” Note that the leaders have just accused Jesus of having a demon for saying they want to kill him. Now the people have just confirmed what their leaders really want to do—kill Jesus. Then they entertain the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah, but quickly dismiss this idea because they knew where he came from. This is a confusing statement to us, but it references a belief among the Jews at the time that the Messiah would just suddenly appear at his coming with no one knowing where he came from. They believed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as referenced in Old Testament scriptures, but nothing else would be known about him before his appearing. All they knew about Jesus at the time was that he was from Nazareth and there were no scriptures suggesting the Messiah may come from Nazareth.
- H. Jesus’ response to this argument is essentially, “So you think you know me and where I have come from? I have come from God, who sent me, and I know him because I came from him, and speak on his authority.” This statement just infuriated the Jewish leaders further. John tells us they wanted to arrest Jesus, but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come. The Jews’ reticence to arrest Jesus was due in part to the fact many people there did believe in him and acknowledged that when the Messiah comes he probably won’t perform more miracles than Jesus has performed. If they had tried to arrest him then in the midst of the people a riot would probably have broken out, leading to the Romans shutting down the temple in the midst of the festival. So they instruct the temple police to arrest Jesus instead. As we will see, that doesn’t work out well either.
- I. **Read John 7:32-36.** The Chief Priests and Pharisees learn of the muttering among the people about Jesus and decide to have the temple police arrest Jesus. They would want the police to arrest Jesus at a time he was not teaching a crowd because that could lead to a riot. About this time, Jesus announces to the crowd that he will only be with them a little



longer (this was about 6 months before his crucifixion); then he would return to the one who sent him, and they could not come. This further confuses the Jewish leaders and the people. They speculate that Jesus may be planning to go to the dispersion among the Greeks. This refers to the fact that many Jews were living outside of Judea and Galilee due to the various wars and invasions that had driven many Jews to foreign lands. Although they still worshiped God and kept the law to some degree, they lived abroad, returning to Judea only for festivals such as Passover or the Festival of Booths, which is the one involved here. The Jewish leaders would have loved for Jesus to leave for a foreign land. They lived in constant fear that someone like Jesus would stir up the people and lead a rebellion that the Romans would brutally put down. It had happened many times before, and each time it diminished the Jewish leaders' authority.

- J. **Read John 7:37-44.** On the last day of the festival, Jesus returns to the metaphor he used with the woman at the well in chapter 4—living water. He invites all to come and drink, and John whispers to us that Jesus is referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, although this had not yet occurred but would after he was glorified. Again, the response to these words, and Jesus' other teaching, was mixed. Some said he was the prophet, others the Messiah. But still others—probably Rabbis and Pharisees—say he couldn't possibly be the Messiah because the Messiah will not come from Galilee but rather from Bethlehem, the city of David's birth. Some even wanted to arrest Jesus then and there, but in the confusion no one arrested him.
- K. **Read John 7:45-52.** In these verses we see the temple police returning to the Chief Priests and Pharisees empty handed. They have not arrested Jesus, and the leaders want to know why not. Their only response was that no one had ever spoken like Jesus spoke. This is a telling comment. The temple police were not believers, but they were so impressed and awed by what Jesus said and did—including healings and other miracles—they could not bring themselves to arrest Jesus. Although John doesn't explicitly say so, the police probably also noticed the effect Jesus was having on the crowds and realized that arresting Jesus in the midst of the crowds would lead to a riot. The Chief Priests and Pharisees were angry and frustrated at this response. They accuse the police of being deceived just like the crowds were and then give them an arrogant put down: None of the Jewish leaders or Pharisees have believed in Jesus—as if their opinions are the only ones that matter. They then show their contempt for the people and the height of their own arrogance: they say the crowd is accursed and don't know the law. Is it any wonder that Jesus criticized the Pharisees more than any other group of people—far more than ordinary sinners? They, in their ignorance and arrogance, believed that only they had found favor with God because they alone knew and observed the law. In fact, they had ignored the essence and intent of the law while striving mightily in their own power to observe the letter of the law.
- L. At this point our friend Nicodemus speaks up. Remember, Nicodemus was a Pharisee and one of the members of the Sanhedrin court. He asks a very pertinent question that should have caused the other Chief Priests and Pharisees to pause and consider what they were doing. They had already judged Jesus and found him guilty of violating the law. Nicodemus quite appropriately asks, "We can't judge Jesus and find him guilty without first giving him a hearing to find out what he is doing that is illegal, can we?" It would be similar to someone in our society being arrested and then brought before a judge for sentencing without formal charges being brought, followed by a trial to determine whether a conviction is warranted.

That cannot be done because it is a denial of due process of law. The Jews had some of the same sort of protections we have today, and they were clearly violating their own law by being ready to Judge Jesus, as they will eventually formally do. So they had no valid response to Nicodemus; instead, they insult him by accusing him of being a Galilean and apparently ignorant of scripture because no prophet is to arise from Galilee. They were simply unable to accept what Jesus was saying to them even in the face of his miraculous powers and inspired teaching. While we can't say for certain that Nicodemus had become a disciple of Jesus by this time, he was open to Jesus' teaching, and he was insistent in a forum among other Rabbis and Pharisees that Jesus be afforded all the protections that Jewish law provided.

## IX. Lesson IX/Chapter 8

- A. **Read John 8:1-11.** Chapter 8 picks up the day after the end of chapter 7. Jesus has returned to the Temple—again he is in one of the courtyards of the temple—early in the morning to resume teaching. By now the scribes and Pharisees are determined to come up with legal grounds to charge Jesus with a violation of either Jewish law or Roman law. Either one would suffice to silence Jesus either temporarily or permanently. Failing that, they wanted to at least put Jesus in a bad light before the people so he would lose his popularity and no longer have a large following. An opportunity arises when a man and woman are caught in the very act of committing adultery—*in flagrante delicto*. The Jewish leaders learn of this and conspire to place Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. They bring the woman to Jesus—not the man, who was equally guilty under the law, and subject to the same punishment—to confront him with the question of whether she should be put to death as stated in the law of Moses. Jesus has been preaching that we humans should judge not and be willing to forgive (see the Sermon on the Mount), so if he instructs to carry out the death sentence, he will be acting contrary to what he has been preaching. He would also run afoul of the Romans who have forbidden the Jews to carry out the death penalty without their consent; in fact, it was Pontus Pilate who instituted that rule. On the other hand, if he simply said, “Let her go if she repents,” he would be defying the Jewish law and thereby ruining his standing as a prophet. At least this is what the scribes and Pharisees thought. Keep in mind, the sole purpose of presenting the woman to Jesus was to force him to declare his ruling and, as a result, to get rid of Jesus. John whispers to us they did this to test Jesus to find grounds to bring a legal charge against him.
- B. Jesus' response to this situation was not at all what the Jewish leaders expected. He made no reply; instead, he bent down and started writing on the ground, although John doesn't tell us what Jesus wrote. This just infuriated the Jewish leaders, and they continue to press Jesus for an answer; undoubtedly, they threw in a few taunts as well. Finally, Jesus straightens up and says, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” This shifts the focus from the woman—who clearly has violated the law—to those who would be her judges and executioners. Although we can't know for sure what Jesus was writing on the ground, many bible scholars have opined that Jesus was writing a list of the sins of the Pharisees there who would be her executioner; that makes sense to me and would be consistent with the outcome. Once Jesus makes his response he bends over again and continues to write on the ground. At this point the Pharisees, beginning with the oldest, realize that it is they who are now in a predicament. If they continue to insist on putting the woman to death they will be revealed as the hypocrites they are, so they begin

to slip away one by one until all have left. Jesus then straightens up and asks the woman, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

- C. Try to put yourself in the woman’s shoes at this point. She has committed a serious sin, and as a Jewish woman she would have known how serious it was—a capital offense. Yet she did it anyway, and was caught in the very act. She is then hauled into a courtyard of the temple by a group of scribes and Pharisees who are zealous to see the law enforced, which can only be done by putting her to death. She was undoubtedly surprised they would take her to Jesus, and she had no idea this would help her cause. In fact, it turned out to be her salvation. After Jesus gives his response to the Pharisees, she is soon left alone with Jesus (and some of his disciples and followers); she still doesn’t know what the outcome will be. Jesus asks whether anyone has condemned her, and she responds, “No one, sir,” but she is still awaiting Jesus’ verdict. She had, after all, been taken to him so he could pass judgment on her. But Jesus isn’t there to be her judge; he is there to bring salvation. Just try to imagine her relief as Jesus says, “Neither do I condemn you.” But he doesn’t stop there. He tells her to go and sin no more. In essence, Jesus tells her that he forgives this sin, but it is a sin, and she must not commit this sin again. It’s the same thing he tells us each time we go to him to repent and seek forgiveness, such as during the Eucharist. John tells us nothing more about this woman, but after such an encounter with Jesus when she passes from being condemned to death to being set free within a few minutes, I can’t help but believe she became a follower of Jesus.
- D. **Read John 8:12-20.** These verses are reminiscent of the arguments described in chapters 5-7. Here Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world. Saying this during this festival of tabernacles would have been particularly striking because one of the significant events of the festival was the lighting of four very large candelabra at night which would light up the entire area. And as they were lit, the prayer offered was: “Oh Lord of the universe, thou commanded us to light the lamps to Thee, yet Thou art the Light of the world.” You can imagine Jesus then making his statement that he was the light of the world soon after this prayer was offered, and how it would have been received by the Pharisees. Jesus is clearly making his claim to be from God.
- E. The response of the Pharisees is the same as it was previously. They say to Jesus, “You are testifying about yourself, and it isn’t valid.” Jesus responds as he did before that his testimony is valid because it is not only his testimony but also his Father’s. The Jews again ask him where his father is, and Jesus responds, “You know neither me nor my Father.” John whispers to us that all of this took place in the treasury of the Temple, but no one arrested him.
- F. **Read John 8:21-30.** These verses also continue some of the arguments Jesus had with the Jewish leaders. He says again he is going away but they can’t follow. Although they will search for him, they will die in their sins. The Jews response was cynical and contemptuous. They ask, “Is he going to kill himself?” This is not asked out of concern but to indicate what they thought of Jesus. The Jews believed that suicide was a sin and that anyone who committed suicide was going straight to Hell. Remember, they had already accused him of having a demon, so now they are saying they believe he will return to what they thought was his true home. Jesus’ response is, “You are the ones from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not.” And he warns them that they will die in their sins unless they

believe that he is who he says he is.” Their response is, “Who are you?” To which a clearly frustrated Jesus responds, “Why do I talk to you at all?” John tells us the Jews did not understand that Jesus was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus gives them a hint of what to look for. When he is lifted up—meaning crucified—they will finally realize who he is, that he came from the Father, and that he is speaking what he hears from the Father. John tells us that as a result of what he said, many believed in him, although these believers didn’t come from the scribes and Pharisees.

- G. **Read John 8:31-38.** In these verses Jesus is addressing the Jews who believed in him, and not the Jewish leaders, although as we will see, these believers wind up arguing with Jesus just like the Jewish leaders did. He tells them they must continue in his word to be his disciples, and the truth of his word will set them free. This puzzles them because they believed that being descendants of Abraham meant they had always been free and not slaves. Jesus quickly lets them know he is speaking of slavery to sin. They have become slaves to sin and can only obtain their freedom from him. He goes on to tell them he knows they are descendants of Abraham, but he implies they are not *true* descendants of Abraham because they are not acting as Abraham acted. Remember, Genesis 15:6 tell us that Abraham believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to Abraham as righteousness. In other words, Abraham was in a righteous relationship with God because he believed God. Jesus says he is declaring what he hears in the Father’s presence, and they should do what they hear from Jesus because it is from the Father.
- H. **Read John 8:39-59.** These verses echo the earlier contentious arguments between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They claim to be Abraham’s children, but Jesus points out they are not acting as Abraham did; instead, they are trying to kill him. Jesus says you are acting like your father—implying Satan—and they claim God is their Father, to which Jesus replies, essentially, you aren’t acting like it. He says, in effect, if you were of God you would recognize the truth of what I say. At this point, the crowd resorts to insult, saying Jesus is a demon possessed Samaritan. Jesus flatly tells them he doesn’t have a demon; they are just dishonoring him. Then he points out that those who believe in him will never see death, and further says that Abraham rejoiced that he would see Jesus’ day. Of course, this statement blows their mind, and they ask whether Jesus—not yet being 50 years old—really claims to have seen Abraham. Jesus’ response enrages them. He says, “Before Abraham was, I Am.” This is a plain claim to divinity, calling himself “I Am,” the same name God gave for himself when he confronted Moses at the burning bush (Exodus, ch. 3). To the Jews this was blasphemy, and they picked up stones to stone Jesus to death. John tells us Jesus hid himself and left the temple.
- I. By now, the opposition to Jesus is growing stronger and the final confrontation is growing closer.

## X. **Lesson X/Chapter 9**

- A. **Read John 9:1-5.** It is unclear when the events of this chapter occur. They may have occurred soon after the events of chapter 8, or sometime later. However, we do know that Jesus was still in Jerusalem because that is where the pool of Siloam was. Jesus sees the blind man and learns that he has been blind from birth. This is the only example in the gospels of Jesus healing someone stricken from birth. The fact he was born blind leads the

disciples to ask an interesting question: Whose sin was it that caused the man to be born blind. It seems a strange question because if it were the man's sin, he would have had to sin before he was born because he was born blind. In fact, there was some rabbinic teaching that suggested a person could actually sin in the womb, although there is no good support for that in scripture. The alternative is that perhaps the parents sinned, and the consequences of their sin was visited on the son. For this idea, there is some biblical support. The sins of the fathers are said to lead to punishment as far as the third or fourth generation. (Exodus 20:5) (But note in Exodus 20:6 God promises steadfast love to the thousandth generation for those who love him and keep his commandments). This warning was given by God to lead us to understand the far-reaching consequences of sin. Tragically, most of us when thinking about sinful behavior only consider the consequences to ourselves without considering the consequences to others, not least our own family members.

- B. The disciples' question arose out of the general belief that all punishment (including sickness) comes from sin. Jesus ignores the question of whether the sin comes from the man himself or from his parents, and points out that, in this case at least, it comes from neither. Rather it was an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God. We will see this point again when Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave. Another instance of Jesus' teaching on the connection between sin and punishment is found in Luke chapter 13. He was asked by some of his followers from Galilee about other Galileans being slaughtered by Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, as they were in the middle of offering sacrifices. They asked what sin was committed to cause such punishment to fall on them. Jesus' response was that those Galileans were no worse sinners than anyone else. I think what Jesus is saying is that there is such a thing as *innocent* suffering. Yes, some illness or suffering can be the result of sin, but we should not automatically assume that *all* illness or suffering is the result of sin.
- C. With this man Jesus says the man was born blind so that God's works could be revealed in him. And Jesus went on to say that we must do God's work in the world while it is day; he points out that the time will come when no one can work—apparently referring to Judgment Day. While he is in the world, Jesus is the light of the world and intends to heal the man.
- D. **Read John 9:6-12.** So Jesus proceeds to heal the man in an unusual fashion. He spits on the ground to make mud and then spreads the mud on the man's eyes, telling him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash the mud off. He did so, and then returned able to see. This method of healing may seem strange to us, but there were reasons for it. First, using spittle to heal was not uncommon at that time; many believed there was healing power in the spittle of a righteous man. But perhaps a better explanation is that Jesus is using this occasion to once again point out to the Pharisees the error of their ways. Later in this chapter John points out that the day this occurred was a sabbath. And making mud was considered work pursuant to their oral tradition. So making spittle was prohibited on the sabbath because it might even accidentally make mud. In any event the man was healed, which was "work."
- E. When the man returned he created quite a stir. He was a beggar, and those who knew him were confused. Some were amazed that he is now able to see; others were denying this was the formerly blind man, saying he just looked like the blind man. He kept saying, "Yes,

it's me." So, then they want to know how it happened, and he tells them exactly what happened. Then they want to know where Jesus is—probably hoping Jesus could do something for them. Of course, he doesn't know. He has still never seen Jesus. When he left to go to the pool of Siloam, he was blind, and when he returned Jesus wasn't there.

- F. **Read John 9:13-17.** With such a stunning event occurring, and on the sabbath at that, the Pharisees open an investigation, and the formerly blind man is taken to them. They ask him how he received his sight, and he tells his story once more. The response from the Pharisees is consistent with their past actions. Some of them say Jesus cannot be from God because he does not observe the sabbath—referring to Jesus doing “work” by making mud and healing the man on the sabbath, which violates their oral law. But others ask, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” They can't reconcile this among themselves, so they ask the man who was healed. “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” Not surprisingly, the man who was healed has a very positive view of Jesus, and says, “He is a prophet.” Again, the Pharisees, or most of them, were unable to even consider that their view of God's law and its purpose may be wrong. They were sick spiritually and weren't even aware of it. They preferred that the man remain blind rather than be healed if the healing was to take place on the sabbath.
- G. **Read John 9:18-23.** This investigation is going nowhere. It appears most of the Pharisees still did not believe the man had been blind and then healed—it conflicted with their “world view.” So they summon the parents of the man to examine them. They ask, “Is this your son who you say was born blind? How is it he can now see?” At this point the parents are in a difficult position. It is well known that the Pharisees are opposed to Jesus. The Pharisees have already threatened to kick out of the synagogue anyone who supports Jesus, and the synagogue was the center of their lives for most Jews. So, they are afraid of the Pharisees and knew they had to be cautious in their response. So they stuck to the facts. “Yes, he is our son; he was born blind; we don't know how he now is able to see or who healed him; you should ask him.”
- H. **Read John 9:24-34.** By now, the Pharisees are frustrated. Their investigation is not going as they hoped; so they recall the healed man yet again to testify. Their address to him is telling. Their statement to him, “Give glory to God,” is the equivalent in our day of a court telling a witness to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Then they follow up with the statement, “We know this man is a sinner.” Clearly, this is no longer an inquiry after the truth. They have already passed judgment on Jesus, and they are urging the man to join in their condemnation of him. But this man was a man of integrity. He stuck to the truth and what he knew. And in his simplicity, he gave the most beautiful testimony one can give about Jesus: “This I know, once I was blind but now I see.”
- I. The frustration of the Pharisees is now palpable. They ask yet again how this healing occurred, namely how Jesus made the mud. By now the man is also frustrated, but he responds with humor, and in his own way mocks the Pharisees. He says, “I have already told you, but you won't listen. Do you really want to hear it again? Do you also want to become one of his disciples?” At this point the Pharisees abandon all pretension of seeking the truth and turn to insult. They say, “You are his disciple; we are disciples of Moses. As to this man—Jesus—we don't even know where he is from.” Interesting comment since they clearly know Jesus is from Galilee. This is really a backhand way of saying Jesus was from

Satan. Now, it is the man himself who proclaims spiritual truth. “This is astonishing. You claim you don’t know where he comes from, but he opened my eyes. We know God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he does listen to those who worship and obey him. Never has anyone opened the eyes of one born blind; if Jesus were not from God he couldn’t do this.” His simple reasoning is spot-on, and the Pharisees don’t even attempt to refute it on the merits. Again they resort to insult, telling him he was born in sin—perhaps suggesting pre-birth sin—and yet you think you can teach us. And then, they drove him out. In other words, he was banned from the synagogue and from most of Jewish life, which was a terrible punishment for any Jew. This is a reminder to us that there is a cost to discipleship in the Christian life. This man will suffer for proclaiming what Jesus did for him. But the benefit of knowing and being healed by Jesus was so much greater than the price he paid.

- J. **Read John 9:35-41.** Jesus learns that the man had been banned and went looking for him. He is the good shepherd going after the lost sheep. Although the man has recognized that Jesus was from God, he still does not fully understand who Jesus is. In fact, until Jesus finds him, he had never actually seen Jesus; remember, he was blind when Jesus put the mud on his eyes. When he finds him, Jesus asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man still doesn’t quite understand and asks Jesus to tell him who the Son of Man is so he can believe in him. And just as Jesus told the woman at the well, he tells this man, “I am he.” Again, this man’s spiritual insight is profound. He says, “Lord, I believe,” and worships Jesus. Note the progression in his view of Jesus. He originally told the Pharisees a “man” put mud on his eyes and healed him. Upon further questioning he said he believed Jesus was a “prophet.” Now, he proclaims Jesus “Lord” and worships him.
- K. In verses 39-41, Jesus says he has come into the world for judgment. Note he does not say that he has come to judge the world. He is saying that he has come to reveal the truth so that people may judge what is true and what is not. Because of him, those who were blind to spiritual matters may understand what is true spiritually, but those who think they already know the truth about spiritual matters will be revealed as blind. This statement did not pass over the heads of the Pharisees; they knew he was talking about them. They ask, “Surely you don’t think we are blind, do you?” Jesus’ response is that your problem is that you think you know all truth when you do not. Because you think you are spiritually pure, your sin remains.
- L. This chapter, as much as any in the gospels, is a powerful story of Jesus’ amazing grace and compassion. The healed man’s faith and courage is inspiring. But the conflict with the Jewish leaders continues to grow.

## **XI. Lesson XI/Chapter 10**

- A. **Read John 10:1-6.** These verses are about as close as John comes to giving us a parable. The first part of this chapter is apparently a continuation of the discussion Jesus was having with the Jews after he healed the man born blind. Remember, in the last part of the previous chapter Jesus told the Pharisees they were spiritually blind. Here in this chapter he uses a different metaphor—that of a shepherd—to try to get the Jews to understand his mission and who he is. He begins by comparing himself to a shepherd of the sheep. It is an image that would have resonated with the Jews. The Judean area was more amenable to raising sheep than for agriculture. So the responsibilities of a shepherd for the sheep was

familiar to them. It was a dangerous job. There were wild animals such as wolves and bears that would feast on sheep if given an opportunity. But sheep were also the target of thieves and robbers. Sheep are very vulnerable animals. They can't defend themselves from predator animals and they can't outrun them. If that weren't bad enough, they also have a tendency to wander off on their own. So sheep were never left out of the fold unless a shepherd was with them for protection. There were no sheep dogs in Judea as are now prevalent in some parts of the world, so the full burden of protecting the sheep fell on the shepherd. He had to keep them together and keep them safe. Given the animal and human predators that were around, it was a dangerous job. At night the shepherd would usually bring the sheep into the sheepfold by an entrance to an enclosed area. Sometimes it would have a physical gate, but more often the sheepfold would just have a narrow opening the sheep would pass through to get into the fold. There the shepherd would sleep at night to ensure the sheep remained in the fold. The shepherd himself was, in effect, the gate for the sheep.

- B. Jesus begins his parable of the shepherd by announcing that the one who enters the sheepfold other than by the door or gate is a thief and a robber. In other words, anyone who seeks to get to the sheep other than through the shepherd at the gate is up to no good and will harm the sheep. The keeper of the gate (apparently referring to God) opens the gate only for the shepherd, not the robber or thief. The one trait of sheep that protects them is that they are capable of recognizing the voice of the shepherd and distinguishing his voice from others that might lead the sheep astray. So, Jesus is saying that the shepherd will lead the sheep out of the fold and go before them to lead them where they need to go. They recognize his voice and will follow him. They won't follow a stranger because they don't recognize the voice of the stranger.
- C. Given the discussion with the Pharisees from chapter 9, Jesus appears to be telling the Pharisees that although they haven't seen the light in Jesus' teaching, the sheep—those who have believed in him through his teaching and his miracles—have recognized the truth of what Jesus has taught and who he is. And they will follow him because they recognize his voice as coming from the Father. They won't follow a stranger—referring to the Pharisees—because they don't recognize the voice of the stranger. John helpfully whispers to us that they did not understand what Jesus was trying to tell them.
- D. **Read John 10:7-10.** Jesus recognizes the Jews did not understand what he was saying, so he expands on the metaphor. He explicitly says, "I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters by me will be saved." Remember, the shepherd usually slept at the door of the sheepfold at night and no sheep could get into the fold except through him. The sheepfold represents being in a safe place, protected by the shepherd. So, any sheep that enters through him—at the gate—will be saved. And the shepherd will protect the sheep, going in and out to pasture. Others trying to enter the sheepfold by any other means than through the shepherd are there to kill and destroy. Jesus wants the sheep to have life and have it abundantly. Now contrast this with what the Pharisees and most other Jews understood about how to get into the sheepfold. They thought this would come not from a person, but by strict adherence to the law. So, this teaching by Jesus probably sounded like a heresy to most of the Jews.



- E. **Read John 10:11-18.** In these verses Jesus expands on the role of the shepherd. What he is saying about the role of the shepherd would have been fully understood by the crowd. A good shepherd won't leave the flock when danger approaches, whether from a wild animal or from a thief. The good shepherd will defend the flock even to the point of giving up his own life. The hired hand won't do this; he will run away when danger appears because he doesn't really care about the sheep; he's just there to earn a wage. Jesus then gets very explicit. He is the good shepherd, and he is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. Just as the Father knows and loves Jesus, Jesus knows and loves his sheep, and will lay down his life for them. This is his most intentional reference to his death that he has given thus far. And it contrasts dramatically from what the hired hand is prepared to do.
- F. In verse 16, Jesus gives a hint of what is to come after his death and resurrection. In his great commission, he tells his disciples to go into all the world to make disciples. The Gentiles to which Jesus is referring here are the "other sheep that do not belong to this fold." Jesus foretells bringing Gentiles into the flock so there will be one flock—the church—and one shepherd. Of course, at this time no one present would have imagined that Jesus was talking about bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, but John is writing many years after the events he is describing. By the time he writes his gospel there were more Gentiles than Jews in the church, but they were all one church, one flock, with Jews and Gentiles alike. By the time John writes these words he is able to recognize how prophetic Jesus' words were—even though they likely made no impression at the time.
- G. Jesus continues to point to his coming death in verses 17-18. He says the Father loves him because he will lay down his life before taking it up again—a reference to his resurrection. But he makes it quite clear that he will lay down his life; no one will take it from him. In other words, it is a voluntary act by him, as we will see when we get to chapters 18 and 19. Furthermore, he will lay down his life voluntarily because it is the Father's will that he do so.
- H. **Read John 10:19-21.** In these verses we see the same dichotomy of opinion about what Jesus is saying. Part of the Jews continue to say that Jesus has a demon. In other words, his teaching is of Satan. Others, however, say these are not the words you would hear from a demon. Besides, what demon can open the eyes of the blind? Once again, Jesus is misunderstood, and the opposition to him among the Jews continues to grow.
- I. **Read John 10:22-30.** John tells us the events beginning with verse 22 take place during the festival of dedication, which is better known by its Jewish name—Hanukkah. So, it is several months after the events of the previous verse. It is winter, probably mid to late December. We are now only 3-4 months away from the cross. The opposition to Jesus among the Jewish leaders has continued to grow. They confront Jesus in the portico of Solomon in the Temple and demand that he tell them plainly whether he is the Messiah. Keep in mind what they are asking. They are not asking Jesus whether he is God's son. They are asking whether he is the military leader that will lead an uprising of the Jewish people to kick out the Romans and establish Israel once more as a leader among the nations. While Jesus is the Messiah, his role is not the one the Jews are expecting. That is probably at least one of the reasons for the response Jesus gives here, as well as previously. He says, "I have told you, but you don't believe me." He also reminds them that the works—the miracles—that he has performed testify that he is doing the work of the Father. But they don't believe the works reveal who he is either because they are not part of his sheep. By this, Jesus is saying

that his sheep are those who believe he is from the Father and doing the works of the Father. He also says these sheep will have eternal life and not one of them will perish or be taken away from him. He concludes by saying, “The Father and I are one.” Jesus has made such a statement before, and it is blasphemous to the Jewish leaders.

- J. **Read John 10:31-42.** When Jesus makes the statement that he and the Father are one, they took up stones to stone him to death. This gives us an idea of how furious they are with Jesus. Remember, Pontius Pilate had given an order prohibiting the Jewish leaders from employing the death penalty without Pilate’s consent. They are so emotionally overcome with Jesus proclaiming his divinity—being equal with God—that they are willing to risk disobeying Pilate to get rid of Jesus. As they are making their preparations to stone Jesus, he asks them for which of the deeds he has done—referring to his miracles—do they intend to stone him. The response is—not for any good deed but rather for claiming equality with God. It’s important that we fully appreciate what the Jews are saying. One heresy from the time of the early church right up to modern times is that Jesus was a good man and a good teacher, but only a man, and he never claimed to be anything else. Recognize that the Jewish leaders here are ready to kill Jesus precisely because he was making the claim of being God’s son. Indeed, as we will soon see Jesus is actually convicted by the Sanhedrin court on the charge of blasphemy. So, if even Jesus’ enemies are saying he committed blasphemy by contending he and the Father were one, it is specious to say Jesus was only a man and never claimed to be anything else.
- K. Verses 34-36 are difficult for us to understand. Remember, in these verses Jesus is responding to a group that included Rabbis and Pharisees. Jesus’ argument is directed to them, and they would understand the argument, although they won’t agree with it. He quotes Psalm 82:6, which includes the words, “You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you.” This psalm is a warning to unjust judges. Judges were specially commissioned by God to bring the justice of God to the people, and in carrying out this mission they were doing the work of God. The Jewish word for judges was *Elohim* but that word also means *gods*. At various places in scripture, men who were called or specially commissioned by God to a task were referred to as *gods*. Jesus is saying, “If those who have been commissioned by God for a particular task in scripture have been referred to as *gods* (and scripture cannot be annulled) how can you condemn me—one who has been commissioned by God to do the works I have done—because I have said I am God’s Son. It was an argument that made perfect sense using reasoning familiar to his Jewish audience, but they of course were not ready to concede Jesus’ miracles were from God. Jesus follows up this argument with another that goes essentially like this: Even if you don’t believe I am from the Father, recognize that the works themselves are of the type you expect from God so that your minds may be opened to understand I am from the Father, the Father is in me, and I am in the Father. Their minds, however, are still closed despite all of the evidence that God was working in Jesus. They try to arrest him again, but John tells us Jesus escaped without providing details of how he did so.
- L. Jesus then leaves Jerusalem; it clearly isn’t a safe place for him any longer; he is a wanted man. He goes to the area where John the Baptist had been baptizing, east of the Jordan, although by now John is dead. He gathers more followers there who recognized that his works or signs were from God and became believers. He will remain out of Jerusalem until his triumphant return on Palm Sunday.

## XII. Lesson XII/Chapter 11

- A. This chapter recounts the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which is the climax of all of the miracles performed by Jesus. As we will also see, it is the final act by Jesus that led the highest court in the land to decide to have Jesus killed. This chapter is one of the most profound in all of scripture. It shows both the power of Christ's divinity but also his humanity as he grieves over the death of his dear friend.
- B. **Read John 11:1-16.** Bethany is a small village only about two miles outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was in this small town that Lazarus and his two sisters—Martha and Mary—lived. At some point they had come to know Jesus, believe in him, and become good friends with him. Jesus had apparently stayed in their home, as is recorded in Luke 10:38, and he was close to them. John identifies Mary as the one who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume, although that story isn't told until the next chapter.
- C. When Lazarus becomes seriously ill, the sisters immediately sent a message to Jesus saying simply, "The one whom you love is ill." Note that the message does not ask Jesus to come heal him. That's because Bethany is in Judea, just outside Jerusalem. At the end of the last chapter, we saw that Jesus was a wanted man in Judea; it was not a safe place for him to go. Although the sisters clearly hoped Jesus would come heal Lazarus, they didn't want to put Jesus' life in danger by demanding that he come. When he receives the message, Jesus tells the disciples the illness won't lead to death. He repeats the statement he made about the man born blind that this is an illness that will reveal the glory of God. John informs us that although Jesus loved them, he then remained two days longer where he was. This should remind us that although God answers our prayers, he doesn't always do it on our schedule. Jesus had his reasons for delaying, and there were benefits to Lazarus, as well as to Jesus' followers, in the delay. For Lazarus, he would never fear death again after being raised from the dead. As for Jesus' followers, this miracle should remove any remaining doubt they may have had about Jesus.
- D. After the two-day delay, Jesus announces to his disciples he is ready to return to Judea. And he gets the response from his disciples one should expect, given the events of the last chapter: "They are trying to kill you in Judea! Are you seriously considering going back there?" Jesus responds with another figure of speech, referring to 12 hours of daylight in which people can walk without stumbling; when the night comes walkers stumble because there is no light. This is another way of saying he is the light of the world, and he must do God's will while he is among them. Jesus then directly responds and says Lazarus is asleep, which they take literally and try to use as an excuse to convince Jesus not to go back to Judea. He then plainly tells the disciples Lazarus is dead, but he adds that he's glad he didn't go to heal Lazarus for their sake, hinting that something greater than healing a disease is on the horizon. Obviously the disciples still didn't want to go, but it's Thomas who gloomily speaks up: "Let's go with him so we may die with him." Thomas has been labeled as "Doubting Thomas" because he doubted the initial reports of Jesus' resurrection, but as these verses show, he should also be recognized as, "Courageous Thomas," because he was the one who led the disciples to decide to follow Jesus to what they all thought would likely be death.

- E. **Read John 11:17-27.** The Jewish burial custom was to put the body in a tomb as soon as possible after death, usually the same day or the day after. After about a year, when all that was left of the body was bones, the bones of the deceased would be cleaned and then put in an ossuary, which is a large jar designed for holding bones, and there they would remain. Relatives and friends would be in heavy mourning for seven days following death, and lighter mourning for 30 days thereafter. So, Jesus arrives four days after Lazarus was put in the tomb, and in the midst of the heavy mourning. Martha learns first of Jesus' arrival nearby—Jesus probably wanted to speak to her apart from the mourners present—and she goes to meet him. Her greeting shows her faith, but she is a little accusatory. “If you had been here my brother would not have died.” Remember, she did not ask him to come, but clearly she expected him to, despite the risk he would take by going. But she adds in faith that even now God would do whatever Jesus asked of him. Jesus assures her Lazarus would rise again, but she assumes he means at the final judgment—the last day. Jesus responds with words that would have astounded anyone who heard them: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Jesus is saying as clearly as can be said, he alone has control over who lives and who dies for all eternity, and he assures us that all who believe in him will live—they will be resurrected. Martha makes her profession of faith in him and then leaves to get her sister Mary.
- F. **Read John 11:28-37.** Martha's sister Mary had remained at the house and Martha meets with her there privately, away from all the mourners, to tell her Jesus has arrived and wants to see her. Jesus has remained away from the house, probably so he could meet with Martha and Mary privately, away from all the mourners. Mary then leaves the house to meet with Jesus and the mourners see her leaving and followed her. When she meets Jesus, she drops to her knees and makes the same statement Martha had made: “If only you had been here my brother would not have died,” as she continues to weep. These verses portray the humanity of Jesus as well as any verses of scripture. Jesus knew he was there to raise Lazarus from the dead, which will bring glory to himself and to the Father and strengthen the faith of the disciples, except for Judas. Yet, as he looks at Mary weeping and the other mourners weeping over the loss of their brother and friend, John tells us he was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” In fact, he was moved to the point of tears. Why? Many explanations have been put forward. To me, the best explanation is Jesus was sharing the grief of his friends caused by the death of Lazarus. Lazarus and the sisters were people he loved deeply, and he could relate to the pain in those who remained; he felt it himself. But additionally, Jesus may have been disturbed in the sense of being angry about the terrible consequences of sin that came into the world when Adam and Eve sinned. Death was the result of their sin, and Jesus is once more seeing its consequences play out with Lazarus. This doesn't mean Lazarus had sinned, but he lived in a sinful world full of death and death had caught up to him. The consequences of sin would also soon play out in Jesus' own life. He will go to the cross to pay for the sins of the world.
- G. Jesus then asks where Lazarus has been laid and they lead Jesus to the tomb, apparently weeping as he went. The mourners accompanying Jesus as they head to the tomb appear to join the sisters in complaining that Jesus—who had opened the eyes of the blind—could have save Lazarus if he had got there in time.
- H. **Read John 11:38-44.** Tombs were usually just natural or manmade caves with a large stone rolled in the opening. When they arrived at the tomb, Jesus orders the stone to be rolled

away. Martha appears to be aghast at his order. Her faith may have been wavering somewhat at this point; When Jesus issues the order, she reminds him the stench of the deceased will be overwhelming. But Jesus reminds her he said that if she believed she would see the glory of God. So, the sisters allow the stone to be rolled away—a major act of faith by them given the circumstances.

- I. Put yourselves in the shoes of the mourners and onlookers at this point. Lazarus has been dead and buried for four days. They know without doubt he is dead; they have been part of the mourning rituals. They then hear Jesus offer a prayer asking not for God to give him the power to heal Lazarus, but saying he was offering this prayer for the benefit of those standing by, thanking his Father that he always hears him and that what is about to happen will lead those standing by to believe in him. In other words, Jesus is publicly saying before it happens that what is about to happen should convince any and all that Jesus was sent by God to do the works he is doing. All standing around Jesus at this time must have been dumbfounded and in astounded disbelief. What could Jesus be planning to do?
- J. There is no hocus pocus, no magic. Jesus simply yells out: “Lazarus, come out!” In my imagination I see nothing happening for 20-30 seconds as the dead man wakes up, tries to discern where he is and why he is wrapped in burial garments. It’s dark in the tomb but there is light coming in where the stone has been rolled away from the entrance. Then he gets up and stumbles out of the tomb, still bound hands and feet. The crowd issues a collective gasp as they see Lazarus, the man they knew beyond doubt to be dead, and here he is alive still wrapped in his burial garments standing right in front of them. Jesus orders them to unbind Lazarus and let him go. They have just witnessed the most amazing miracle of Jesus’ ministry.
- K. **Read John 11:45-57.** John tells us that many of the Jews believed after this miracle, but as always some did not. Some of them went straight to the Pharisees and told them everything they had seen. At this point the Pharisees called a meeting of the council. This refers to the Sanhedrin Court. Remember, this council had Pharisees but probably more Sadducees and priests. The Sadducees were much more political than were the Pharisees, and they were much more concerned about the political consequences with the Romans if Jesus kept doing deeds like this one. John explains in verses 47-48 what their concern was, and it was a legitimate concern. They feared that if Jesus continued to perform signs like raising Lazarus from the dead, all the people would soon follow Jesus. The concern was not that they just become religious followers of Jesus; the Romans usually allowed conquered peoples to continue to worship their own gods so long as it did not create civil uprisings. But any civil uprising would be considered a revolt against the emperor, and it would be squashed brutally. Remember on several occasions earlier when Jesus had performed a miracle the people there were prepared to declare him king and to have him lead an uprising against the Romans. This happened following the feeding of the 5000. Jesus would always slip away to avoid being crowned king. As he later told Pilate, his kingdom is not of this world. He did not come to throw the Romans out, but this is what the Sanhedrin feared might be attempted.
- L. After some debate about what to do, Caiaphas, the high priest, declares that it is better for one man to die for the people of the country rather than for the temple and the entire country to be destroyed. In making this statement, Caiaphas implicitly accepted the idea

that all would soon follow Jesus if he continued performing miracles. He also implicitly accepted the argument that the followers of Jesus would eventually declare him king and lead an uprising against the Roman occupiers. Jesus, of course, never intended to lead a physical uprising against the Romans. He came to bring about a spiritual renewal that would not rebel against the Roman government having civil authority but would declare Jesus king and Lord in the spiritual realm. But the Jewish leaders never understood this and were never willing to even consider it.

- M. John points out that in making his statement, Caiaphas, acting as the high priest, was not acting on his own but was prophesying for the nation that one man—Jesus—would die for the country. Interestingly, the very thing that Caiaphas feared—the Romans brutally putting down an uprising by the Jews—eventually happened. In A.D. 70, following an uprising, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem totally and drove all of the Jews out of the land. The Jews did not become a nation again until 1948 when the United Nations declared the State of Israel to be a sovereign nation.
- N. The Sanhedrin Court adopted Caiaphas' analysis of the situation and decided it was expedient for one man to die for the country. From that day forward, they planned to put Jesus to death. So, although it will be some 4-5 weeks before Jesus is actually tried by the Sanhedrin Court, they have already decided the outcome of the trial. Jesus is a convicted man to them.
- O. So, why is this action by the Sanhedrin court so important. Earlier we have read about various groups—primarily the Pharisees—attempting to arrest or kill Jesus. But none of those groups were acting as the highest Jewish authority in the land. When the issue came before the Sanhedrin earlier, Nicodemus reminded them they should not convict someone without hearing what the person had to say on his own behalf. Here, the Sanhedrin—the highest court— has determined that Jesus should die, and they have convinced themselves that it's in the best interest of the country that he should die. As it turns out, Jesus did die for the country, as well as the rest of the world, but not in the way they intended it.
- P. Jesus knew he was a wanted man and therefore left Bethany and went to a town called Ephraim where he remained until the Passover. John tells us that as Passover approached many people arrived early in Jerusalem to be purified before Passover started, as was the custom. At the top of the list of gossip items among those arriving early was the question of the day: Would Jesus come to the festival? Word of his miracles had spread widely, with the raising of Lazarus from the dead drawing the most attention. The Sanhedrin had issued orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should notify them so he could be arrested. The stage is now set; emotions are running high; Jesus will soon make his triumphal entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to begin the most consequential week in human history.

### **XIII. Lesson XIII/Chapter 12**

- A. **Read John 12:1-8.** The events of this chapter begin about a month after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Recall that Jesus left Judea because he was a wanted man. His life was in danger if he were to be found by the authorities in Judea, so he left Judea for Ephraim. But Passover was approaching, and Jesus planned to attend Passover in Jerusalem regardless of the consequences. Indeed, he realized his time was near and he intended to

complete the mission given to him by his Father. As we discussed previously, Jerusalem would fill up with Jews and proselytes from all over the world at Passover. The population would increase four-fold or more. Therefore, accommodations would be difficult to find in Jerusalem. Matthew tells us that Jesus stayed in Bethany the night of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. As this chapter opens Jesus has arrived in Bethany the day before he plans to enter Jerusalem on what we now know as Palm Sunday. A dinner is arranged to honor Jesus; Matthew tells us that it was held at the home of Simon the Leper. Scripture doesn't tell us who this Simon is, but most biblical scholars believe it is someone whom Jesus had healed, and there was a leper colony just outside Bethany. John tells us Martha was serving, and Lazarus was reclining at the table with Jesus, as was the custom. Because Martha was serving, Simon may have been a relative of theirs or perhaps Martha was simply doing what she always did—serve others. Clearly, Jesus was the guest of honor, but Lazarus—recently raised from the dead—was also an honored guest, given a place of honor at the table.

- B. At some point during the meal Mary appears with an alabaster jar containing about a pound of very expensive perfume. She approaches Jesus, kneels and begins to anoint his feet with the perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. John tells us the fragrance of the perfume filled the entire house. Those present would have been stunned into shocked silence, at least initially, by what Mary did—for several reasons. First, the perfume used was extraordinarily expensive. It was an over-the-top extravagant act by Mary. The perfume was worth about 300 denarii, which was about a year's wage for an average worker. If this happened today, the perfume might be worth \$30,000 to \$40,000, which would make the anointing extravagantly shocking if it happened in our presence. Second, one would normally anoint someone by pouring oil or perfume over the person's *head*, and it was an honor to anoint someone in this manner, just as it was an honor to receive an anointing in this manner. But Mary shows her humility by taking on the role of a servant to anoint Jesus' feet. Servants were the ones who would normally wash the feet of a visitor, and Mary takes on that role, but expresses her total devotion to Jesus by using the expensive perfume instead of water. Third, Mary lets down her hair and dries Jesus' feet with her hair rather than with a cloth. This would probably have been somewhat scandalous to those present because Jewish women simply did not let down their hair in public and would never use it to dry someone's feet. Mary, however, is showing her total devotion to Jesus, and this is taking place at a time of great danger for Jesus which all present would be aware of. Indeed, according to Mark's gospel, Jesus said she has done this to prepare me for my burial. Mark also adds that Jesus prophesied that wherever the gospel is preached what Mary has done will be remembered. And so it has been.
- C. As we have seen with Jesus' miracles, they often bring about very different reactions from those observing the miracles. The same is true with this very extravagant act by Mary. Jesus clearly is moved by what she has done. Judas, on the other hand, wants to know why this perfume was not sold for what it was worth and the proceeds given to the poor. This is a question that probably others at the dinner also wondered, but John is quick to point out Judas wasn't concerned about the poor; in fact, he was the keeper of the purse and had often pilfered from it. This, of course, was not known by the disciples at the time, but they learned of this later. Jesus quickly rebukes Judas, pointing out to him that the poor will always be with you, but you do not always have me. We don't know if this rebuke of Judas was the last thing that led him to betray Jesus or not. What we do know is that it was only a

day or two later that Judas goes to the high priest to offer to betray Jesus into their hands for 30 pieces of silver.

- D. **Read John 12:9-11.** The party for Jesus apparently attracted not just Jews in Bethany but also some of the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem. They were curious not only to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus. Lazarus was a particular problem for the Sadducees, who it is believed made up a majority of the Sanhedrin Council. You will recall that the Sadducees were quite different from the Pharisees. They were more political in their outlook and were collaborationists with the Romans. Theologically, they also differed from the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, whereas the Sadducees did not. They believed that when one died that was the end. So, when Lazarus was resurrected from the dead, that was a theological problem for them as well as a political problem. Politically, they were concerned that Jesus would lead an uprising against the Romans which would be brutally put down and perhaps destroy their role as leaders of the Jews. Theologically, it became difficult for them to assert there is no resurrection when it was plainly evident that Lazarus was dead and then—at Jesus' command—was resurrected to life again. So, the Sadducees joined with the Pharisees in deciding to get rid of Jesus. Additionally, since Lazarus himself was living proof of what Jesus could do, they determined to get rid of Lazarus as well. There are no scriptures that tell us whether they were ever successful in getting rid of Lazarus, but once Jesus was sent to the cross, they likely lost interest in killing Lazarus.
- E. **Read John 12:12-19.** These verses describe what occurs the day following Mary anointing Jesus' feet. The crowds are beginning to flow into Jerusalem for the entire week of Passover; indeed, many have already arrived. The interest in Jesus is sky high. By now, the news of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead has been widely distributed, along with news of Jesus' other miracles. For festivals such as this, when large crowds flowed into Jerusalem, large numbers of Roman soldiers would also be present in force to put down any riots or uprisings that may occur. When the crowd learns that Jesus is coming, they cut down palm branches and spread them on the path ahead of Jesus. The palm branch was a national symbol that appeared on the Jewish coins, so there are national overtones to what is happening, especially with the people declaring "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." But that wasn't all; they also were yelling out, "Blessed is the king of Israel." So, without question, Jesus is entering Jerusalem, where he is a wanted man, as a royal figure.
- F. Jesus, of course, realizes the significance of the moment, and he finds a young donkey to sit on as he enters Jerusalem. This is a fulfillment of Zachariah 9:9 which was a prophecy that the king who was to come would be riding on a donkey's colt. A lot was going on at the time, and even the disciples did not fully understand what was occurring; as John tells us, they only understood the meaning of what occurred *after* Jesus had been raised from the tomb. The fact Jesus chose to enter on a donkey's colt was a clear messianic claim by Jesus, but it also declared for anyone who had eyes to see just what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. What the Jews were looking for was a David-like figure—a warrior who would lead the nation into a rebellion against the Romans. But warriors don't come riding on a donkey; warriors come riding on a horse. Conquering warriors usually rode in on a white horse. The fact Jesus chose a donkey on which to enter Jerusalem confirmed his messianic role, but it also proclaimed what kind of Messiah he would be—not a conquering warrior but rather the



humble lamb of God who came in peace to take away the sins of the world. But in the turmoil of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the crowds only saw what they wanted to see in a Messiah—a conquering king. Once more, Jesus was misunderstood, even in this triumphal moment, and even by his own disciples.

- G. The response of the Pharisees upon seeing the crowds proclaiming Jesus as king confirmed just how zealous the crowds were for Jesus at this moment, and it also confirmed their worst fears. "Look, the whole world has gone after him!" They are more determined than ever to get rid of Jesus.
- H. **Read John 12:20-36.** At this point in time—right after the triumphal entry to Jerusalem—the other three gospels tell the story of the second temple expulsion in which Jesus drives out the money changers and those selling animals for sacrifice, just as he had done early in his ministry. John doesn't include that story but instead substitutes for it the story of a group of Gentile Greeks who ask to meet with Jesus. Although we can't be sure, it is possible they are coming to thank Jesus for driving the commercial businesses out of the temple—remember it was in the Court of the Gentiles where the money changers and animal sellers had been doing business. Once Jesus drove out the money changers and merchants from the Court of the Gentiles, the Gentiles had a place in the temple to pray. These Gentiles approach Phillip, perhaps because he has a Greek name, and Phillip and Andrew inform Jesus they want to see him. Jesus' response may seem strange, but it has to be put in context. Previously, Jesus has said repeatedly that his time had not yet come. Perhaps the Gentiles coming to seek Jesus was the sign to Jesus that his time finally had come; his response to Phillip and Andrew was: "The hour *has come* for the Son of Man to be glorified." He follows that statement up with others that hint as to what lies ahead: 1) The grain of wheat must fall to the earth and die; 2) The man who hates his life will keep it; 3) Whoever serves me must follow me. These statements are followed up by one of the most comforting statements Jesus ever uttered: "Whoever serves me, the Father will honor." What more could anyone ask?
- I. The next statement by Jesus reveals the profound nature of the moment and shows that Jesus was wrestling with the Father's will—which he will continue to do until the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed. He says: "Now my soul is troubled." And yet he acknowledges this is the moment he has come for, and he asks God to glorify his (the Father's) name. To the shock of all standing there, a voice from heaven responds, "I have glorified it, and I will again." The people are confused again; they heard the voice but weren't sure what they heard.
- J. Jesus promptly tells the crowd the voice from heaven they have heard is for their sake, not his. And he tells them the day of judgment has arrived and the ruler of this world—referring to Satan—will be driven out. Jesus goes on to say that when he is "lifted up from the earth" he will draw all people to himself. Some have interpreted this statement to refer to Jesus' ascension, but it actually refers to his crucifixion, and the crowd gets it—they understand he is referring to crucifixion. And this statement causes more confusion. They say: scripture says the Messiah will remain forever, so why do you say he must be lifted up? And by the way, who is this Son of Man? Jesus responds with a figure of speech he has used before—that of light and darkness. He warns them the light will only be with them a little longer and they should walk in the light while they can and become children of the light. Then in verse

36 John tells us Jesus hid from them. Remember, Jesus has just come out of hiding to attend the festival; and now he—the wanted man—returns to hiding.

- K. **Read John 12:37-43.** In these verses we find John whispering to us the meaning of what he has just written about. The people, or most of them, still don't believe in Jesus despite having seen sign after sign: the eyes of the blind opened, the lame walk, thousands fed, and the dead raised. It reminds John of a passage from Isaiah 53 where Isaiah asks a rhetorical question: Who has believed our message? John follows that quote with another quote from Isaiah which at first glance appears to say God intentionally hardened the heart of unbelievers to prevent them from believing. Indeed, some who believe in strict predestination often quote these passages from Isaiah. But what Isaiah was referring to was the stubborn disbelief which existed during his time, and John is pointing out it also existed during Jesus' ministry. The statement about God hardening their hearts is referring to God turning the people over to the consequences of their own stubborn disbelief after God has made overtures through the prophets time and again, and now by God's own son, to change the hearts of the people. There comes a point where God gives the stubborn disbelievers over to their own hardness of heart and the consequences of sin that will play out in their lives if they continue to pursue living a sinful life. Indeed, Paul discusses this very process in Romans 1:18-32. John also says Isaiah wrote what he did because he foresaw the coming of the Messiah and prophesied that many would reject him.
- L. According to John, many people—even many of the authorities—believed in Jesus but were unwilling to proclaim him publicly because of the threat by the Pharisees to ban anyone from the synagogue who professed faith in Jesus. John also whispers that they prioritized human acceptance and approval over acceptance and approval from God. Remember, the synagogue was at the center of Jewish life and, for many, being banned from the synagogue was too high a price to pay for following Jesus—even if they believed in him. That is one of the sadder statements in all of John's gospel.
- M. **Read John 12:44-50.** These verses are the last public teaching by Jesus—or at least the last recorded by John. The remaining teaching will be solely to his disciples and followers. And we find that these verses are a summary of his teaching. John says Jesus "cried aloud," referring to speaking in a very loud voice. In this loud voice, he proclaims that whoever believes in him believes in God, and whoever sees him has seen God, who sent him. He has come to be the light of the world so people that believe in him will not walk in darkness. He hasn't come to judge people—even those who don't accept his word—but rather he has come to bring salvation. But for those who don't believe him, the words he has spoken will be their judge on the last day. And the words he has spoken come not from Jesus but from the Father. The words from the Father that he has spoken are eternal life. Having summarized his gospel for the last time publicly, Jesus turns his attention in the coming chapters to preparing the disciples for what lies ahead.

#### XIV. Lesson XIV/Chapter 13

- A. **Read John 13:1-17.** This chapter begins on the Thursday following Palm Sunday. Jesus has been in Jerusalem throughout that week, although apparently retreating to Bethany each evening. John has omitted discussing what was going on during that week before Thursday, but those events are described in detail in the other gospels. As John points out, Jesus knew

his hour had come to leave this world—in other words to be executed on the cross as a common criminal. John’s emphasis is on how Jesus loved his own—his disciples and those who followed him—to the end. John also tells us Judas had succumbed to Satan’s temptation to betray Jesus. Neither John nor any of the other gospel writers tell us *why* Judas decided to betray Jesus, other than to say Satan entered him. Given the fact that Judas gave the money back to the office of the High Priest after Jesus’ crucifixion, it suggests that Judas may have become impatient because Jesus appeared unwilling to assume the role of the military Messiah. Perhaps Judas was trying to force Jesus into assuming that role. Or, perhaps he was just greedy—as indicated in chapter 12 where John mentioned that he used to pilfer money from the common purse. Whatever the reason, Satan tempted him at his weakest point, and Judas surrendered to the temptation. There is a lesson for us in this: we too will be tempted in our weaknesses, and we must rely on prayer and our faith in God to see us through such temptations. Judas did not do this, and his name has become the most loathsome in history.

- B. Beginning with verse 3, John describes Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. The context for this can be gleaned from the other gospels. Although this is Thursday night rather than Friday night, Jesus and his disciples are celebrating the Passover dinner. Whereas the Judean Jews celebrated Passover on Friday evening, the Jews of the diaspora and the Galilean Jews observed it on Thursday night. This explains why the Jewish authorities wanted to get Jesus down from the cross before night fell on Friday so they would still be ritually pure to observe Passover. A new day began for the Jews at nightfall, so Passover began for the Judean Jews at nightfall on Friday (which would be the beginning of Saturday, just as the Galilean Jews would be celebrating Passover at the beginning of Friday). So, the events described in these verses are taking place at a Passover dinner which we now call The Last Supper, and it is taking place on Thursday evening. John does not describe the introduction of the Lord’s Supper—the Eucharist—by Jesus during the Passover meal, but begins by describing Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Luke gives us a detail that explains why Jesus did this. In Luke 22:24 he tells us that a dispute arose among the disciples as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. You may remember that this had happened before. James and John’s mother had approached Jesus with both of them in tow asking that her sons would be the ones to sit at Jesus’ right hand and his left hand—in other words have the highest positions—in the royal court they expected Jesus to set up after overthrowing the Romans. So, this is the setting: They are celebrating the Passover meal in Jerusalem where Jesus is a wanted man; Jesus has told them his hour had come and that he would be leaving them soon; and yet they are still arguing among themselves over who will be regarded as the greatest among them. It was not their finest hour, and it shows the degree to which they still failed to understand who Jesus was and particularly what his mission was.
- C. Jesus had rebuked the disciples previously for such attitudes, but this time he decided to show them what he expected of them. As Jesus took off his robe and put a towel around him as a slave would, the disciples would have been aghast. He begins to wash their feet, which was a role reserved only for slaves or servants. They are too astonished and embarrassed to say anything as Jesus goes from one to the next, washing their feet just as a slave would. Keep in mind that Judas is still among the disciples at this time; he doesn’t leave until later. So Jesus is demonstrating humility not only to those who honor him and believe in him, but also to his betrayer. No one says anything until he gets to Peter. He is

not about to let Jesus wash his feet because Jesus is his master and Lord; he should be washing Jesus' feet. Jesus tells him he doesn't understand now but will later, but Peter persists in his refusal. Only when Jesus tells Peter he can have no share in him unless he washes his feet does Peter relent, and then he wants not just his feet washed but his whole body—in other words, a bath. This is consistent with Peter's behavior throughout the gospels: he is headstrong and impetuous, and says what he feels, sometimes before engaging his brain, but he was fully committed to Jesus.

- D. Beginning in verse 12 Jesus did something he didn't always do with the disciples: he explained what he had just done. The disciples did not yet get it that their role was not to lord it over one another or over other believers. Their role was to follow the example of their teacher, the one they had committed their lives to. Jesus explained, "You call me lord and teacher, and I am, so you should follow the example I have just set for you and serve each other." He continues, "Slaves are not greater than their masters, nor messengers greater than the one who sent them. Follow my example and you will be blessed." Although Jesus had not been able to get this message through to the disciples before, this time his message—which was a living parable—connected with them. There is no further reference in scripture to the disciples ever arguing again over who would be the greatest. It's a lesson we should all remember: Service to God and service to one another in an attitude of humility, rather than position or accolades, are to be the measure of our devotion to God.
- E. **Read John 13:18-30.** John provides more details concerning Judas' betrayal than any other gospel. Jesus is clearly disturbed by the fact that one of the 12 he had personally chosen had already betrayed him. He announces that "the one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." This is a quote from Psalm 41:9, which is another prophesy being fulfilled. And Jesus informs the disciples he is telling them this now so they will understand when it happens. Lifting one's heel to show someone the bottom of their foot was a means of showing disdain or betrayal in Semitic culture. When Jesus makes his announcement that one of them will betray him, the disciples are shocked, apparently having no idea whom Jesus was referring to. Had they known, Judas would not have left that room alive. Peter motions to John—the disciple whom Jesus loved—to find out who Jesus is referring to. To understand what happened next, we must understand the seating arrangement at the Last Supper. John is reclining—as they all were—next to Jesus on his *right*. They would recline on the left arm, so John's head would be close to Jesus. Judas was apparently next to Jesus on his *left*. In Jewish culture, to be seated on the left was a place of high honor, the place of the close friend. So, by placing him there, Jesus was appealing to Judas until the end. After John asks Jesus who it is that will betray him, he whispers to John it is the one to whom he will give the bread after dipping it in the Passover relish. Jesus then hands the bread to Judas who is to Jesus immediate left. As he does so, John whispers to us that Satan entered Judas. Note that Judas could have repented and abandoned his betrayal at that very moment, but he chose not to, and Satan entered him. Seeing that, Jesus tells Judas to do quickly that which he was about to do. At that moment, Judas knows that Jesus knows what Judas has done, and what he is about to do. So, he gets up and leaves. The disciples still don't know what Jesus' statement about betrayal involves and they just assume Jesus has sent Judas to buy provisions for them or to give a gift to the poor. Remember, one of the themes that runs throughout John's gospel is that of light and darkness. John tells us that as Judas went out it was night. Judas has just left the light of the world for the deepest

darkness he could enter. Keep in mind that although it was God's will that Jesus should die a sacrificial death for all mankind, that does not negate the culpability of Judas' treachery.

- F. Jesus' exchange with Judas reminds us of something else. Some have asserted that the death of Jesus was the result of Jesus getting swept up in events that he was unable to control, and it was not intentional that he went to the cross. But look at the events that have led him this far toward the cross. For some months the Jewish leaders have wanted to arrest him. Following the resurrection of Lazarus, the highest court in the land has determined to kill him. Nevertheless, he returns to Jerusalem for Passover; indeed, he enters in a highly public royal entrance. Had he wanted to avoid death, he could have remained away from Jerusalem. At the last supper, he could have called out Judas to the disciples who would have ensured Judas would not carry out his betrayal of Jesus. But he did not; he told Judas to do quickly what he intends to do. Later, he will take his disciples to Gethsemane where he often went and where Judas knew he would go. As we will also see, Jesus will put up no defense when he is accused of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin Court. In short, Jesus' actions could not be more intentional than they were. As he said, he will lay down his life; no one takes it from him.
  
- G. **Read John 13:31-38.** As soon as Judas leaves, the atmosphere changes. Jesus addresses the remaining disciples as "Little Children," the only time in John's gospel that Jesus does this. It must have made an impression on John. In his first letter—I John—he uses the term seven times. Jesus first words to the disciples here also show how different the Kingdom of God is. Jesus says the Son of God is glorified and God is glorified in him. Normally, one thinks of receiving high praise and adulation when a person is receiving glory, along the lines of what happened on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Now, however, he is squarely faced with two humiliating legal proceedings, brutal beatings and finally crucifixion on a Roman cross. Jesus is letting his disciples know that true honor and glory in the Father's kingdom come from sacrifice, and he is letting them know that now before these events occur.
  
- H. Jesus also gives the disciples a new commandment: They must love one another just as Jesus has loved them. How is that? He has loved them sacrificially. They don't yet understand the extent of the sacrifice Jesus must make, but they will soon know. And, Jesus adds, the mark that identifies you as my disciples will be that you love one another. They must have taken Jesus words to heart because the comment many people—even non-believers—made about Christians in the early days of the church was that it was remarkable how much they loved one another.
  
- I. We also see Peter being bothered by Jesus saying once again that where he was going they couldn't follow now but would follow later. This doesn't satisfy Peter, and he asks why he can't follow him. He is ready to go anywhere to follow Jesus and says he is even ready to lay down his life for Jesus. We have every reason to believe that Peter meant it 100% when he said this. But Jesus foresees what lies ahead not only for himself but also for his followers, including Peter. He knows Peter will be so shaken by the events to come that he will even deny he is a follower of Jesus—not once, but three times. Peter is ready to prove Jesus wrong, but Jesus' statement was prophetic, and Peter, the impetuous one who professes he is ready to follow Jesus anywhere, will deny he even knows his Lord when the time of trial begins.

## XV. Lesson XV/Chapter 14

- A. **Read John 14:1-14.** Jesus' farewell discourse with the disciples began in the previous chapter. It continues in earnest in this chapter. At the end of this chapter, Jesus and the disciples will leave the upper room where the Last Supper, the foot washing, and Jesus' exchange with Judas occurred. They will head to Gethsemane—a garden outside Jerusalem where Jesus often met with his disciples—where after a time of intense prayer Jesus will be arrested, beginning a series of events that will lead to the cross. In the previous chapter, Jesus talked about some troubling things with the disciples: he will be betrayed; he's going to a place they can't follow; and Peter—the leader among the disciples—is told he will deny Jesus three times before morning. In this chapter, he offers reassuring words. He tells them not to let your hearts be troubled; although he is going away, he is going to prepare a place for them. He also promises to come back and take them to be with him. Undoubtedly, the anxiety in the room would have eased somewhat as Jesus spoke these comforting words.
- B. There is also an honest exchange between Jesus and the disciples as Jesus speaks to them. In fact, he will be interrupted three times by different disciples as he speaks to them. The first interruption is by Thomas, who speaks for all the disciples when he says, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus has made the statement that he is going away several times over the past few chapters—both to the disciples and to public audiences. They are still struggling with the idea of their master, whom they have followed for three years, is going away. Remember, they believe he is the Messiah, and therefore he is the one that is to restore the kingdom to Israel. The Romans will be kicked out and Israel will return to being a leading nation of the world. Jesus' statement that he is going away is inconsistent with all they have been expecting of him and inconsistent with all they thought their futures would be. So, Thomas' statement was on the mind of everyone of them. As he will do with the other questions they will ask this night, Jesus points to himself. "I am the way, the truth and the life." Jesus has used other figures of speech previously, such as being the gate for the sheep. All of these figures of speech deal with the question of how they are to have a proper relationship with God—one in which they are living in harmony with and in obedience to the Father. Jesus is trying to show them *that* is the real issue for them, not whether Israel will again take its place as a leading nation, or whether they will hold high positions in the restored Israel. And to have that relationship with God, it must come through Jesus, for he is the way to the Father. In fact, as Peter will announce to the Sanhedrin Court in Acts, chapter 4, there is no other name under heaven whereby we may be saved. Jesus is also telling the disciples that if they want to know the truth about God—how he loves them, how they should live to please the Father—they should look to him. He embodies the truth; he is the truth, the living truth. And he is also the life, the very life of God. By trusting in Jesus, we enter into the life of God through him. It is not by accident the church is known as the body of Christ. These are the truths Jesus is trying to get the disciples to understand as his time on earth grows short. He realizes they still don't fully understand, but he knows they will understand later once he has fulfilled all the Father has sent him to do.
- C. When Jesus says in verse 7 that to know him is to know the Father, Philip is the next to interrupt. Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father and they will be satisfied. It's not an

unreasonable request, but in asking, Philip is acting somewhat like the crowds that asked for a sign even after they had seen sign after sign. Philip and the other disciples have heard the voice from heaven on several occasions; they have seen all the miracles; and they have heard Jesus say repeatedly that he is not speaking on his own but only what he hears from the Father. So, if they truly believed what Jesus has been saying all along, they would know that Jesus and the Father are one. But being human, they still wanted to see the Father in person for themselves. At that point it would no longer require faith to believe in God for they would have seen him face to face. We can hear the disappointment in Jesus as he asks Philip, “How can you have been with me so long and still not understand that the Father and I are one?” By now they should have all recognized that Jesus is perfectly aligned with the will of the Father. He has said repeatedly he did not come on his own accord but was sent by the Father. All that he has done and said has been directly from the Father. Jesus says: if after hearing and seeing all of that you can’t believe me when I say the Father and I are one, then believe me because of the works that I have done that could only have come from God. It is a rebuke—but a mild one—to all the disciples for their continued lack of faith. But Jesus follows that up with a promise to them that should have brought great encouragement.

- D. In verses 12-14, Jesus tells them they will do greater works than he has done, and he will grant them any prayer they ask in his name. Exactly what Jesus meant by these statements has been interpreted very differently throughout the history of the Christian church, including the present. What is undisputed however is that whereas Jesus only taught and preached in Israel and nearby areas, his message has been spread throughout the entire world by his followers. Likewise, the healing miracles that Jesus performed were on a limited number of people in a small part of the world. Jesus’ followers have taken the healing power of Jesus throughout the entire world. People have been healed wherever the name of Jesus has been proclaimed through the establishment of hospitals and through prayer throughout the entire world. When we pray in accordance with God’s will—which is what praying in Jesus’ name means—God answers our prayers. Remember, even when Jesus healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, there were many others there who were not healed by Jesus. The fact that not everyone is healed does not distract from the miracle of the one who was healed by Jesus. Likewise, the fact that not everyone is healed today does not distract from the fact that many are healed today through the efforts of Christian doctors, nurses and hospitals, and through the prayers of faithful Christians following the admonition of Jesus that we love and care for one another.
- E. **Read John 14:15-31.** After telling the disciples they will do greater things than he has done (verse 12), Jesus turns to the relationship between obedience and loving him:
- Verse 15: If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
  - Verse 21: The one who...keeps my commands is the one who loves me.
  - Verse 23: If anyone loves me he will keep my word.
  - Verse 24: The one who doesn’t love me will not keep my words.
  - Verse 31: I love the father, just as the father commanded me, so I do.
- Conclusion: Those who love him will obey him. So, we must *know* his commandments and commit ourselves to obeying him. Saying we love Jesus while ignoring what he taught is not an option.
- F. Jesus recognizes that being obedient to him all of the time will be difficult. Look at the great difficulty the Israelites had over the centuries in their efforts to be obedient to God. So he

promises to send the disciples a helper, a counselor, an advocate, a comforter. The Greek word is *parakletos*, and it has been translated using all of those words, depending upon the context. Jesus, of course, is telling them he will send the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit acts as helper, counselor, advocate and comforter.

—He is the Spirit of truth; Jesus is the truth.

—The world will not accept him, even as it has not accepted Jesus.

—He will live in them as the Father lives in Jesus.

—Jesus will not leave them as orphans—in other words, comfortless. He will send the Spirit to them.

—Jesus and the Spirit are one, just as Jesus and the Father are one.

- G. The third interruption comes from the other Judas—not Iscariot. He asks in verse 22 why Jesus will reveal himself to the disciples but not to the whole world. This is a logical question for the disciples to ask. How would Jesus go about kicking out the Romans and setting up the new kingdom of Israel without revealing himself to the world? Rather than respond directly to Judas' question, Jesus returns to the theme of obedience being the sign of love for him, reminding them that the word he is giving them is from the Father. The disciples will come to understand what Jesus was talking about after his resurrection. Jesus did not appear to all following his resurrection, but only to his followers. Had Jesus intended to be the Messiah the Jews were expecting, he would undoubtedly have appeared to all as he assumed an earthly throne. But that was not the intent of the Father. Jesus came to set up a spiritual family—the church—on earth, and it was to the believers alone that he would appear after his resurrection.
- H. In verses 25-31, Jesus is summing up what he has told the disciples this evening as they prepare to leave the upper room and head to Gethsemane. He tells them the Holy Spirit will remind them of all he has taught them. He also tells them he will leave his peace with them. The peace they will come to know is not the kind of peace the world gives; the peace he gives does not depend upon the circumstances of the moment. It is the assurance that they are in the will of God. He also reminds them not to be troubled or afraid. He has told them he was going away but also that he would come to them. They should be happy that he is going to the Father. He also reminds them that he is telling them all of this so they will understand and believe when these things come to pass. And he also reminds them that the ruler of this world—Satan—has no power over him. What he is about to do—go willingly to the cross—is the will of the Father, and he will submit to God's will so the world will know he loves the Father. There are echos of John 3:16 in this statement. Jesus is about to demonstrate in his own life how great is God's love for us and the lengths to which the Father and the Son will go to redeem his people from their rebellion against them.
- I. Even as Jesus is speaking these words to the disciples, Judas Iscariot is going to the High Priest to offer to lead the temple police to where Judas knows Jesus will be. Jesus knows his time with the disciples is now very short. It is not a long walk from the walls of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, to Gethsemane. Jesus will give his remaining instructions to his disciples as they make their way to Gethsemane. "Rise, let us be on our way," Jesus says.



## XVI. Lesson XVI/Chapter 15

- A. **Read John 15:1-11.** Jesus' instructions in this chapter and the next take place while Jesus and the disciples are walking from the upper room where the last supper has taken place to the garden of Gethsemane where they will be when Jesus is arrested. This chapter and the next are Jesus' final words to the disciples before the cross. We will see a lot of repetition as Jesus drives home the truths and commandments he wants them to follow. We can almost hear the urgency in Jesus' voice as they make their way toward what will be a mystifying crisis for the disciples when Jesus is arrested. Jesus turns to another figure of speech—comparing himself to a vine—to provide direction for them once he is no longer with them physically. They would have understood why a vine or a vineyard was a good metaphor. Throughout the Old Testament Israel is pictured as the vine or vineyard of God. This idea was so strong that a vine was the emblem on the coins of the Jews during the time of the Maccabees. On the temple there was a prominent golden vine. Wealthy Jews would consider it an honor to give enough gold to the temple treasury for a bunch of grapes—or even a single gold grape—to be placed on the vine. It was the symbol of the nation of Israel, and it encapsulated the Jewish belief that Israel was the vine of God. Jesus is telling his disciples that he is the true vine; simply being Jewish is not enough to save you or to ensure you are in a right relationship with God; you must stay connected to the Father through the true vine—Jesus. This is similar to the metaphor he used of being the gatekeeper of the sheep. It was a concept most of the Jews were unwilling to accept, but he is telling his disciples they must understand this.
- B. He continues on with the vine metaphor by pointing out that the Father is the vine grower, and like a good vine grower he prunes the branches of the vine so it will bear more fruit. The purpose of the vine is to produce fruit. So, Jesus is saying he expects his followers—the branches—to produce fruit. How do we produce fruit? By living the life that Jesus taught us to live, as he described in the Sermon on the Mount; by obeying his commandments, chief among them being that we love one another. In short, Jesus wants us to practice the Christian life in the same way a doctor practices medicine or a lawyer practices law. In both professions they study to learn medicine or law and then live out what they have learned with their patients or clients. They don't study to learn their craft and then ignore what they have learned as they practice their profession; in fact, to keep their license, which they must have to continue to practice, they must give sound advice based upon what they have learned. Likewise, we must not only *learn* what Jesus expects of us, we must accept it and live it day by day; we must produce the fruit of the Christian life. That may cause us at times to be out of step with the culture around us or cause us to be the targets of criticism from those who disagree with us. That can be painful. But our loyalty is to Jesus, and it's to him we must answer.
- C. Jesus also tells us *how* to bear fruit: we must abide in him just as he abides in the Father. Jesus said he only does what he sees the Father doing, and only says what the Father tells him to say. Likewise, we must abide in Jesus by being obedient so that we remain within his will. He understands we won't do this perfectly, but he expects us to commit ourselves to abiding in him. His warning to us is that if we don't commit to abiding in him, we will produce no fruit and become like a useless branch that is pruned. This is not given as a threat to us; it is a loving admonition from our savior who knows what is best for us and who was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice so we could abide in him. And he tells us

again that if we obey his commandments, we *will* abide in him. Moreover, when we do this, we bring glory to the Father, which brings Jesus' joy, and his joy will be in us.

- D. **Read John 15:12-17.** In verse 12 Jesus repeats the commandment he has given them earlier: they must love one another as he has loved them. He points out that he loves them by laying down his life for them, and there is no greater love than this. It's important that we understand what Jesus means by this. We tend to associate love with strong feelings for someone such as a significant other, family or good friends. The Greek language in which the New Testament was written had a number of different words for love. *Eros* was the Greek word for romantic or sexual love. *Philia* is the Greek word for warm affection between true friends. *Storge* was the word for family love such as the love of a child for a parent or parent for child. None of these words is used when Jesus tells us to love one another. The word used is *agape*, which denotes benevolence or goodwill. We will not necessarily have the same *feelings* for others as we have for family or close friends, but we must always treat each other with benevolence and goodwill and be ready to serve each other. In fact, Jesus had just demonstrated this by washing his disciples' feet only an hour or so previously.
- E. In verses 14-17, Jesus points out that they did not choose him; he chose them. This is something we must always keep in mind. Jesus is the one who has pursued us; to the extent we have pursued him it is only in response to his taking the first step toward us. And for all of us who accept him, he calls us friends. Jesus tells his disciples he no longer calls them servants because the master doesn't always confide in servants. Yet he has made known to them all the Father has told him, just as one would with a close friend. He has chosen them—and us—to be friends so we will bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Furthermore, the Father will enable us to bear fruit by empowering us to do his will. In fact, Jesus says, whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you. These are words Jesus has spoken to them previously, but he is reminding them of these things now, as time is short.
- F. **Read John 15:18-25.** To this point, most of Jesus' words have been encouraging; he wants them to bear fruit, and if they abide in him by obeying him, they *will* bear fruit. Beginning in verse 18, however, Jesus warns them of what lies ahead. He does this not to scare them, but to warn them of what they would experience so they wouldn't be discouraged when it happened. He reminds them of something he has told them before: the world hated Jesus and therefore the world will hate them. Servants are not greater than their master and they will be treated similarly to their master; if they persecuted him, they will persecute his followers. He goes on to say the persecutors would have no sin if they acted out of ignorance, but he has taught and performed works which were unmistakably from God, yet they did not believe him and even hated him for what he said and did. Recall that it was the raising of Lazarus from the dead that finally tipped the Sanhedrin Court into action to get rid of Jesus. Before that, the Jews were in an uproar because Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath and caused the lame to walk on a Sabbath. He points out this fulfills prophecy from the Old Testament, specifically Psalm 25:19, which says, "They hated me without a cause."
- G. The prophecy of Jesus that they will be persecuted played out in brutal fashion under the Roman government. The Romans viewed Christians as disloyal citizens. This view arose out of the development of emperor worship. Although the initial emperors of Rome discouraged being treated as a divine being, over time the Roman Empire expanded and

needed a unified force to hold it together. The idea of treating the emperor as divine actually arose from the people rather than being forced on them. They did this out of a sense of gratitude for the peace and prosperity Rome brought to the world. It may be hard for us to imagine today, but Rome did bring more peace and prosperity to the world than had existed previously. So there eventually came a day when every inhabitant of the empire was required once a year to burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar to show his loyalty to Rome and would receive a certificate saying he had done so. He would then have to say, "Caesar is Lord." Thereafter, he could go worship any god he desired, so long as it didn't affect public decency or public order. But the Christians refused to engage in Caesar worship or call him Lord. The Jews also refused, but as Christianity spread among the gentiles, their refusal became a much larger problem, and many Christians were punished for the crime of being a Christian.

- H. There is a lesson for us in the situation Christ referred to when he said if they persecuted me they will persecute you. Although we do not experience persecution in this country in the way they did in New Testament times, that is not true in many parts of the world. More Christians are being killed worldwide today than at any other point in history. Furthermore, even in this country the culture of the world is often having more influence on the church than the church is on the culture. Whenever we must evaluate any issue we face, our first thought must be, "What does God have to say about this." For most issues there will be scriptures that can guide us. For those issues on which there is no clear teaching, we must pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit while looking at any scriptures that might bear on the issue. The fact that some pain may accompany whatever we decide is no basis upon which to decide to ignore what God has to say. Many Christians went to their death rather than say, "Caesar is Lord."
- I. **Read John 15:26-27.** In these verses Jesus turns again to speaking of the comforter, the Holy Spirit. If anyone ever needed comfort, Jesus and his disciples do at this moment. But Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit comes not just to be our comforter but also as an advocate who will testify on behalf of Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus says, you also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. What does Jesus mean by this?
- J. First, Jesus is referring to the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who convicts us that what we hear in sermons and read in scripture and books about Jesus is true, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings us to the realization that Jesus is who he says he is—the Son of God. It's the Holy Spirit within us who moves us to respond to Jesus. If you have been moved by what we have learned about Jesus during the course of our study of the Gospel of John, it is the witness of the Holy Spirit who has been whispering to you that all we have studied about Jesus is true and that you are loved by God more than you can even imagine.
- K. Second, Jesus tells his disciples—and us—they must witness about him. How do we do this? For some people the idea of being a witness for Jesus is scary. They feel they are not competent to witness or that they are not worthy of being a witness. But we need not be afraid to witness about Jesus. Remember, a witness is one who speaks about what he or she *knows* or has experienced. Jesus does not expect everyone to testify about the *theology* of God or Jesus; he expects us to testify about how God had dealt graciously with us. There is nothing more powerful than a believer saying, "This is what Christ has done for me, and I know it was him who did it." Christian witness comes from the inner conviction that God is

present in our lives and will bring us through all of the trials and tribulations of life. When we testify to this through the way we live and through the simple stories of how God has dealt graciously with us, it is powerful. And by doing so, we are being obedient to what Jesus asks of us.

- L. Example from my own life: When I was going through pilot training at Moody AFB in south Georgia, I got behind my classmates because the Air Force wouldn't let me fly until they made sure the concussions I got playing football had no lingering effects that would medically disqualify me from becoming a pilot. Once I was cleared to begin flying, I had to catch up with my classmates, and in the process, my flight instructor didn't have me practice emergency single engine landings as much as I probably should have. When my first check ride came along, the first thing my check ride instructor did after takeoff was pull one of the two throttles back to idle and say, "you have just lost an engine; land the plane." Well, I really messed up the single engine landing—to the extent it was graded unsatisfactory. We then started our climb out to finish the rest of the check flight, but as we did an engine fire warning light came on, indicating we had an engine fire. There were no other indications that we actually had a fire, but because the engine fire warning light was on, we had to abort the mission (There was no fire). So, the flight didn't count as my check ride. During debriefing, though, the check ride instructor told me that had we finished the flight, I would have received an unsatisfactory grade—in effect, an F—due to screwing up the single engine landing. My regular instructor then took me up on several flights to practice single engine landings. A week later I went up for my check ride again and got the highest grade in my class. I went on to have the highest flying grades in my class for the entire program, which I would not have had if my first check ride had been a failing grade. Our flying assignment options after pilot training were based on our class standing. Without the F on my first checkride I was among the top students in my class and had a wide choice as to my assignment. Due to the fire warning light coming on, I was high enough in my class to get a coveted instructor pilot assignment at Moody AFB where I went through pilot training. I was there when I met Mary, which eventually led to my being here with you today. Had the fire warning light not come on, I am convinced I would *not* be here with you today. My life would have turned out quite differently. Some would say that was just a coincidence, one of the vagaries of life no one can explain. However, a fire warning light coming on without there being an actual fire was a rare event; I never heard of another such episode during my flying career, although it may have happened. I am convinced it was the hand of God that turned on the fire warning light at exactly the right time to keep my life going in the direction he wanted it to go. And I am willing to testify about that to anyone who will listen. Can I present tangible evidence that it was God who brought this about? No—but neither can anyone else present evidence God was not involved. It's somewhat similar to the episode in Matthew 17:27 where Jesus tells Peter to go catch a fish in which he will find a coin which Peter should use to pay their temple tax. It's not necessarily a miracle to find a fish with a coin in its mouth. But it is a miracle when the fish with a coin in its mouth is exactly where Jesus said it would be at a particular time. Likewise, a fire warning light coming on during a flight is not a miracle. But for that fire warning light to come on at *exactly* the time I needed it, I consider that a miracle—the hand of God intervening in my life. I am sure most of you have stories about how God has intervened in your life in ways that that are remarkable. The stories don't have to be miracles. It's enough for you to tell someone how God has been gracious to you. That's all Jesus asks of you when you testify for him.

## XVII. Lesson XVII/Chapter 16

- A. **Read John 16:1-4.** As Jesus and the disciples approach Gethsemane, Jesus continues his warnings of what lies ahead for the disciples after his departure. He tells them that all of the warnings he has given them are to keep them from stumbling. Remember, their view of the future had been that Jesus will lead the renewal of Israel, becoming its king, kicking out the Romans, and restoring Israel to its former glory. He knows that their future will be quite different from that, and when their expectations are not met, they may stumble and fall away. That has already happened to Judas Iscariot. Jesus tells them they will be banned from the Synagogue, which is a ban from Jewish life and community, just as he has already been banned. Furthermore, a time will soon come when it is viewed as service to God to kill followers of Jesus. That prophecy was soon fulfilled when Saul of Tarsus and others arrested and put to death some of the early leaders in the Christian church. It took Jesus' confronting Paul on the road to Damascus to turn Saul—soon known as Paul—from his murderous ways. In one of the saddest statements Jesus ever made he says that all this will occur because those who will be persecuting them know neither Jesus nor the Father.
- B. This is an especially difficult time for the disciples, as well as for Jesus who is facing the cross. Jesus knows their expectations are undergoing a life-changing revision and he wants them to know what lies ahead so they won't fall away when the wave of opposition rises up against them. By telling them explicitly what they will face, they will be prepared to deal with the opposition and persecution.
- C. **Read John 16:5-11.** Jesus realizes how difficult it is for the disciples to hear what he is now telling them. He explains he did not reveal all these details to them from the beginning because he was with them and the revelations would have to come more gradually. They could only absorb so much, and he was there in person. But now he is leaving them, and he acknowledges the grief they are experiencing. Yet, he says, it is to their *benefit* that he is leaving because if he doesn't leave, the Helper—the Holy Spirit—will not come to them. Whereas Jesus was in the flesh and could only be at a single place at any time, the Spirit would be in them and in all believers wherever they go. He also outlines for them what the work of the Holy Spirit will be. Essentially, the Holy Spirit will bring to fruition what Jesus has already begun. The Spirit will redefine three of the most basic notions of spirituality and show the world that it is wrong in its understanding of all three.
- D. The world is wrong about sin because it understood sin to be breaking the rules of the law. Jesus says the real definition of sin is refusing to believe in him. Before Jesus came, the opposite of sin was adherence to the law. Now the opposite of sin is faith in Jesus. With regard to righteousness, the world is wrong because it condemned Jesus. His righteousness will be demonstrated by his return to the Father from whence he came. Before Jesus came, righteousness was based on human performance—strict obedience to the law. Now, righteousness is the result of a right relationship with the Father, which can only come through Jesus. Finally, the world is wrong about judgment because Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross will result in the condemnation of the prince of this world—Satan. Remember, the Jewish leaders would soon condemn Jesus to the cross thinking they are serving God by condemning him, when in fact his death was the atonement for sin which actually removed those who believe in him from condemnation and judgment. Convincing the world of the

correct understanding about sin, righteousness, and judgment, Jesus says, will be the work of the Spirit when he comes. And the Spirit has fulfilled that task magnificently. Jesus was tried and convicted by the Roman government as a criminal, after being tried and convicted by the Jewish government as being a blaspheming heretic who had a demon from Satan. He was given the punishment that only the worst of criminals was given. Yet soon thereafter a significant part of the world put their trust for all eternity in this crucified Jewish criminal. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to convince the world of who Jesus really is based upon his resurrection from the dead and his ascension to the Father. When you consider what is really and truly miraculous, this has to head the list.

- E. **Read John 16:12-15.** Jesus tells them he has much more to say to them, but they just couldn't bear any more at this time. He promises them that the Spirit of Truth will lead them into all the truth he has for them. The word for bringing the truth of God to humans is *revelation*. In fact, all of scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the Revelation of John has been an ongoing revelation of God to mankind. And God's revelation did not end with the book of Revelation; it continues to this day. It has been a progressive process that has come gradually at times, and at other times—such as Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection—quite suddenly. As Jesus told his disciples, he had much more he wanted to say to them, but they just couldn't bear any more at that time. He is assuring his disciples—and us—that when the Spirit comes and leads them into Truth, he will be speaking only what he hears from Jesus and the Father, just as Jesus spoke only what he heard from the Father.
- F. There are two ways to look at what Jesus is telling the disciples; the first way is to assume that the truths the Spirit will bring to us are only spiritual truths. While the Spirit will certainly bring spiritual truths to us, I do believe that all truth is God's truth. God created the universe we live in, and he certainly knows what is true about our physical world and what is not. And it is by his grace and revelation that we learn *all* truth. This is something to keep in mind given the condition of our world today. To some people the truth is elastic and can be stretched to mean anything they want to believe to be true. But God's truth is objective truth; it does not change because of what someone wants it to be. As Christians, we should always ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth—God's truth.
- G. **Read John 16:16-24.** Jesus continues to prepare the disciples for what lies ahead. "In a little while you will no longer see me; again, a little while and you will see me." The disciples are totally mystified by this. But by now, they are finally ready to admit they don't know what Jesus is talking about. That is something they haven't always been willing to do in the past, but now they are. Jesus, sensing that they want to understand what he is talking about, takes the initiative and asks them if they are discussing among themselves what he is talking about. He then paints a picture of what will happen over the next few days. They will weep and mourn while the world—think the Jewish leadership—will rejoice over the fact Jesus is dead. But their pain will turn to joy, while the Jewish leadership will learn that their problems with Jesus are just beginning.
- H. Jesus uses the analogy of a woman giving birth to compare the swing in emotions they will experience over the next few days. Most of you know far better than I about the pain of childbirth but also the joy of the newborn child. He tells them they will see him again and no one will take from them their joy of seeing him again. He also lets them know that when that day comes, they will have a new relationship with the Father. When that day comes,

they can ask anything of the Father and they will receive. They can ask anything of the Father while abiding in Jesus because if they abide in him, anything they ask will be in accord with his will, and the Father will grant it. This, too, will be part of their joy. In short, Jesus is telling them of the new age to come. The Jews had anticipated a change from the present age, which was bad, to the age of the Lord, which would be good. The Messiah would usher in the new age, which they understood to be an age in which God would restore the kingdom to Israel, and they would be free from their tormentors—the Romans—and others who would resist God. The disciples would have held this view as well, but they are now sensing the age to come is going to be different than they had anticipated. Jesus is now telling them they will have a new and different relationship with the Father because they accept Jesus, and in this new relationship their joy will be made complete.

- I. **Read John 16:25-33.** In these verses Jesus acknowledges that he has used figures of speech in teaching them. He has used a variety of figures of speech throughout his ministry when speaking in public, and also in teaching the disciples. These have included *living water*, *the light of the world*, *the gate to the sheepfold*, and *the true vine*. Soon—he says—he will no longer use figures of speech but will tell them plainly about the Father. Furthermore, they can go directly to the Father because the Father loves them because they have loved Jesus and believe he came from God. He tells them plainly that he has come from the Father and is now about to return to the Father.
- J. Finally, the disciples understand him. They say they now believe he came from God. In verse 31 Jesus seems to challenge their statement that they now believe. He tells them they will soon abandon him and return to their own homes. But Jesus tells them he won't be alone because the Father will still be with him. Then Jesus says something they must have found to be very strange: He tells them all these things so they may have peace when they take place. Peace is the last thing they are feeling right now. Jesus tells them they will face persecution in the world, but they should take courage because he has conquered the world. They are still struggling with what he has told them.
- K. These verses make four things very clear about Jesus: 1) He would be left alone by his disciples. Although they had been with him from the beginning of his ministry, they will abandon him once he is arrested. But Jesus wasn't overwrought about this because the Father would be with him until he cries out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" 2) The forgiveness of Jesus. Even though they would abandon him, he doesn't rebuke them or condemn them; he forgave them, even knowing what they would do. I find that to be amazingly reassuring. 3) The sympathy of Jesus. He tells them about these things before hand *so they might have peace in him*. Had he not warned them in advance, once the things he foretold actually came to pass, they might have been so regretful and despairing they could not go forward with the great commission he will give them before his ascension. He has warned them, and he has told them he would forgive them and give them his peace after these things take place. He wants them not to despair but remember what he has told them in advance. 4) There is the gift of Jesus. The gift is courage and conquest. They will be able to take courage because they will see him face to face on the other side of the cross. They will see for themselves and know that Jesus has overcome death. Any remaining doubts they might have had will be no more. The world did the worst it could to Jesus, and it could not defeat him. They will see for themselves that Jesus is invincible, and they can be also if they abide in him.

- L. These verses mark the end of Jesus' final instructions to his disciples. Chapter 17 is Jesus' high priestly prayer for his disciples and all who will follow him.

#### **XVIII. Lesson XVIII/Chapter 17**

- A. **Read John 17:1-5.** Jesus has completed his instructions to his disciples before he goes to the cross. Now he prays for them, for himself, and that the Father's will be done. This is the longest and most personal prayer of Jesus recorded in the New Testament. He is facing the most horrible pain, punishment and humiliation that humans were capable of inflicting, yet in this prayer he focuses on "glory." We need to understand what Jesus means when he speaks of glory because it is different than what we think about when we hear the word "glory." We tend to think of a great honor being bestowed, the high praise of fellow humans, perhaps even of pomp and circumstance. But the cross involved none of those things—at least not as Jesus was going through it. To Jesus, the glory in what he was about to go through was due to the fact he was being obedient to the Father. It was the completion of the work he had been given to do. Had he not gone to the cross, with all that involved, there would have been no glory in his ministry—even with all the miracles he performed—because he would not have completed the work he was given to do. But he did go to the cross in complete obedience to the Father, and therein was the glory. It brought glory to the Father; it brought glory to the Son.
- B. Jesus asks the Father to glorify him. How is he asking the Father to do this? By giving him the strength and courage to go through the cross, thereby enabling him to give eternal life to all who believe in him—those the Father has given to him. Jesus then defines exactly what he means by eternal life—to know God and to know Jesus Christ whom God sent. We tend to think of eternal life as referring to duration of life, and it includes that. But it also refers to a quality of life—one lived in relationship with God—and that quality of life begins not at physical death, but at the time we first believe, in this life.
- C. Jesus also proclaims that he has glorified the Father? How has he done that? By completing the work which God gave him to do on earth. And he asks the Father to glorify him in the Father's own presence just as the Father did before the world began. He knows the Father will glorify him because he has been obedient to the Father—he spoke only what the Father told him and did only what the Father told him to do. So, we see that when Jesus uses the word "glory" it is connected with obedience and sacrifice.
- D. **Read John 17:6-8.** Here, Jesus confirms the work he has done with the disciples. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me." In saying, "I have made your name known," Jesus is not referring to just what God is *called*; he is referring to what God is *like*. We don't put our trust in someone just because we know their name. We put our trust in someone once we know their character and their nature. Are they trustworthy? Jesus spent a large part of his ministry teaching and showing what God is like. That's what most of the parables were about. Part of Jesus' teaching about the Father was to correct the Jewish understanding of their relationship with God. To the Jews, the name of God was so sacred they did not speak his name or even spell it completely. It was IHWH—pronounced Yahweh—which name only the high priest would pronounce in the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement. God was the remote, invisible king whose name ordinary people were not to speak. But Jesus spoke of God as the Father; indeed, the Jewish word used was closer to



our word “Daddy.” God is not remote but close, the Father who loves us intimately and who desires that we fellowship with him.

- E. The words in these verses must have been reassuring to the disciples because Jesus says to the Father regarding the disciples, “You gave them to me,” and they accepted as from the Father the words Jesus spoke. They know in truth Jesus came from the Father and that the Father sent him. This is a concept Jesus had been conveying to the disciples throughout his ministry, and he knows they finally get it. Getting the disciples to this point is part of the work God gave Jesus to do.
- F. **Read John 17:9-19.** In these verses Jesus makes clear that he is praying on behalf of his disciples in this prayer, not on behalf of the world in general, although he came to save all who would believe in him. He is doing so because his disciples are the Father’s whom he gave to Jesus. Then, Jesus says the most remarkable thing: “I have been glorified in them.” What could he possibly mean by that? Remember, glory comes from being obedient and completing the work one is given to do. The disciples have not yet completed the work Jesus has given them to do, but he knows they have tried their best to understand him, and he knows how they will do his will in the future. The teacher receives honor and glory when the pupil fulfills his promise. This is something we should always remember. Jesus is glorified when we live the life Jesus commands us to live, when we are obedient to him and when we reflect the love and grace of the Father. We all want to hear Jesus say someday, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” When we are good and faithful servants we should know that it brings glory to Jesus and to the Father. If that isn’t motivation for us to be faithful, I don’t know what is.
- G. Jesus is praying this prayer out loud for the disciples to hear, just as he did before he raised Lazarus from the dead. He goes on to say he will no longer be in the world, but the disciples will be, and he asks for their protection. He protected them while he was in the world, but now that he is leaving, he asks the Father to protect them. He asks God to protect them so they will be one, just as he is one with the Father. Note that it is by being one—in other words, in unity—that they will be protected. When we Christians find our unity in Jesus Christ, we are powerful and a strong witness to the world which desperately needs our witness. It doesn’t mean we have to be in agreement over forms of worship or every point of theology. But it does mean we must be in unity over Jesus Christ being the son of God, crucified and risen, by whom we receive salvation if we believe in him.
- H. Jesus points out he is not asking that the disciples be taken out of the world—otherwise they could not complete the work he has given them to do. But he asks that the Father protect them while they are in the world. They don’t belong to the world and the world will hate them, just as it hated Jesus. They will be protected in the world by being sanctified in the truth, that truth being that they know who Jesus is and that he was sent by the Father. Jesus also says he is sanctifying himself—by going to the cross—so that they also may be sanctified.
- I. **Read John 17: 20-26.** These verses, to me, are some of the most inspiring and reassuring verses in the New Testament. Jesus turns from praying for his immediate disciples to those who will come to believe as the result their word. That includes you and me! On the night before the cross Jesus prays to the Father for us, confident that his disciples—with all their

faults and shortcomings—would spread the gospel across the world and across time. He also prays that they all may be one, just as the Father and the Son are one, and that all may be one in the Father and the Son. What is the basis of this *oneness*? It is a oneness in the relationship. In a family, not all of the relationships are the same; the relationship between husband and wife, between mother and daughter, between father and son, between mother and son, and between father and daughter are all a little different. Yet, there is one family. There is a relationship which all acknowledge within the family that holds them together, that creates the oneness. It is like that with the family of God. We are all brought into the family by the Holy Spirit to have a relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so that we can together participate in the very life of God. But it's not based upon creeds, forms of worship or theology, although all of those are important. It is based upon the relationship. Keep in mind that it is more natural and human for people to fly apart than it is to come together. Coming together is the exception to the rule. So when we come together as Christians to create the oneness Jesus refers to, it makes our witness to the world more powerful.

- J. In verse 21, Jesus says that when the world sees the love in this relationship it will know that it is the Father who sent Jesus. In verse 22, Jesus says that he has given us the *same glory* that the Father has given him. Just contemplate that for a few minutes! The same glory the Father gave the Son has been given to us. But remember, glory comes from being obedient and completing the work one is given to do. Jesus says he has given us his glory *so that we may be one*. If we are obedient to Jesus, and abide in him, we will have the oneness that Jesus desires for us. Furthermore, when the world sees this oneness, it will believe that Jesus was sent by the Father and that the Father loves us just as he loved Jesus.
- K. In verse 24, Jesus asks that his disciples—all his disciples—will see his glory. This includes seeing Jesus willingly submit to the Father's will to suffer, go to the cross and die for our sins and for our salvation out of his and the Father's great love for us. That is the glory he wants us to see.
- L. In verse 25, Jesus repeats his oft spoken words that the world—referring to the fallen world that ignores God—does not know the Father, but Jesus knows him. He has made the Father's name known, and will again as he goes to the cross, demonstrating the love of the Father and the Son for us.
- M. This prayer brings to an end to Jesus' last instructions to his disciples as they head to Gethsemane where Jesus will be confronted by the Temple police and arrested.

## **XIX. Lesson XIX/Chapter 18**

- A. **Read John 18:1-11.** This chapter begins a series of events that can only be described as one of if not the greatest miscarriages of justice in the history of jurisprudence. As we will see, the Jewish leadership, who based their authority and legitimacy upon their commitment to and observance of the law repeatedly and in various ways violated their own law as they arrested Jesus, subjected him to a preliminary hearing and then a trial before the Great Sanhedrin Court, before taking him to Pilate to have Pilate impose the death sentence. All of this they did with the intent to have Jesus dead before nightfall which was the beginning

of Passover. It was a despicable performance by them that more than justified every criticism that Jesus had previously leveled against them.

- B. The story continues as Jesus and his disciples head toward the Garden of Gethsemane. To get there they passed over the Kidron Valley. There was a brook that ran through the Valley. During Passover week as many as several hundred thousand lambs were slaughtered in Jerusalem for sacrifice. The blood of the slaughtered lambs were drained through a channel that ran down to the brook Kidron which would have been flowing red with blood as Jesus and his disciples passed over it, no doubt reminding Jesus that his own blood would soon be shed.
- C. The Garden of Gethsemane was on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Kidron Valley and the City of Jerusalem. On the Mount of Olives—named for the oil press which was located there—was the Garden of Gethsemane, which included a number of private gardens which wealthy citizens of Jerusalem owned. There was no room for a private garden within the City of Jerusalem, but those who could afford a private garden outside the city often chose to have one at Gethsemane. It was probably at one of the privately owned gardens there that Jesus took his disciples, as he had many times before. It was there that Judas Iscariot led an astonishingly large company of Roman soldiers, Temple police and officers of the Temple to arrest Jesus. It was a small army that numbered in the hundreds. They no doubt anticipated they would have to hunt for Jesus among the trees and hillside nooks, and they also anticipated they would be faced with armed resistance by Jesus' disciples and followers. So they were armed and carried torches to light their way, ready for a fight or an extended hunt for Jesus.
- D. John does not recount Judas identifying Jesus with a kiss, but the other three gospels do. What John emphasizes is that rather than running or hiding, Jesus meets the army coming for him, asks whom they are seeking, and then identifies himself as that man. Far from running from what lies ahead, Jesus turns himself over to those sent to arrest him and asks that they let his disciples go. It is at this point—with the stunned disciples trying to make sense of an army of hundreds coming to arrest Jesus—that Peter, the man who will deny Jesus three times before morning, commits an incredibly courageous act. Despite the disciples being overwhelmingly outnumbered, Peter draws his sword and swipes at the high priest's slave, Malchus, cutting off his ear. Jesus rebukes Peter and tells his disciples to put away their weapons; then as Luke tells us, he heals Malchus' ear. Jesus' purpose at this time is clear: He says he is ready to drink the cup the Father has given him. Whereupon, as Mark tells us, all of Jesus' disciples fled, abandoning him and leaving him alone with those that came to arrest him.
- E. As mentioned before, there were numerous violations of Jewish law as the leaders proceeded legally against Jesus. The illegalities began with his arrest. Under Jewish law, an arrest was to take place during daylight, not at night. But this arrest is late at night. Second, no arrest was supposed to take place through the agency of a traitor or informer. The leader taking the army to arrest Jesus—namely Judas Iscariot—was a traitor who had been bought off by the very chief priest who would preside at the subsequent trial. This is a total violation of the neutrality of the judge—the chief priest—who will preside at Jesus' trial. Third, the arrest was not the result of a legal mandate from a court whose intention was to

conduct a lawful trial for the purpose of reaching a righteous judgment. As we will see, it was a kangaroo court from the get-go.

- F. **Read John 18:12-14;19-24.** The trial of Jesus by the Jewish authorities consisted of three parts, not all of which are addressed by John's gospel, but which we will address using other gospels so you can see the fullness of the corrupt process which led to Jesus being convicted by the Sanhedrin Court. The three separate parts are: 1) a preliminary hearing before Annas, a former chief priest and the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest; 2) a trial before the Sanhedrin Court in which Caiaphas improperly demands that Jesus confess whether he is the Son of God; and 3) an early morning meeting of the Sanhedrin Court in which they concoct an official charge against Jesus under Roman law to bring to the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate.
- G. In the first phase, Jesus is taken to the home of Annas whom John refers to as the high priest. In fact, Annas was not then the high priest and held no judicial authority; it was totally illegal for Jesus to be taken to him for questioning. Annas had been the high priest from A.D. 6 to 15. Four of his sons were eventually the high priest and Caiaphas—the high priest at the time—was Annas' son-in-law. Annas and the other high priests were Sadducees and all of them were collaborators with the Romans; otherwise, they would not have been appointed high priest because the Romans had to approve that appointment. Furthermore, Annas and his sons and son-in-law had become wealthy by controlling the sale of animals fit for sacrifice in the temple. Only those animals the high priest certified as pure and unblemished could be offered for sacrifice, and those were offered for sale in the court of the Gentiles at inflated prices. Remember, Jesus had driven out the animal sellers and money changers from the court of the Gentiles not once but twice. Thus, Annas was particularly interested in getting rid of Jesus, who had attacked his vested interest in controlling the sacrifice trade. The preliminary hearing before Annas was a mockery of Justice. First, Annas had no authority or jurisdiction to hold such a hearing. He was no longer in office. Next, the normal procedural process was not to ask questions of the accused about the charges against him; as in our courts today, the accused was under no obligation to testify. The court was supposed to question witnesses who had knowledge of the facts. In verses 19-21, Jesus is calling out Annas for the totally improper questions he was posing to Jesus. In effect, Jesus is telling Annas, "Don't ask me questions; ask those who heard me. Get your evidence in the proper and legal way." When Jesus says this the policeman struck Jesus—another illegal act—saying he was showing disrespect for the high priest—an office Annas did not then hold. Jesus responds by saying, "If I am wrong about the proper procedure to follow show me my error." Of course, Jesus was absolutely right, and Annas had no answer. Instead, as John tells us, Annas sends Jesus off to Caiaphas, his son-in-law and the actual high priest. In addition to the other illegalities of this proceeding, keep in mind that it was illegal to hold any kind of legal proceeding at night. But at this point, the Jewish leadership was not going to allow the law to get in the way of their getting rid of Jesus.
- H. **Read John 18:15-18; 25-27.** It is somewhat unclear whether Peter's denials recounted here took place in the courtyard of Annas or of Caiaphas, but that doesn't really matter. The first question is how Peter managed to get into the courtyard of the high priest in the first place. He is with another disciple, which most biblical scholars believe was John himself; this disciple, John tells us, was known to the high priest. Most biblical scholars believe that

John's family was known to the high priest because John's family was in the fishing business and they had likely sold fish in Jerusalem to, among others, the high priest's household. In any event, Peter and the other disciple manage to get into the very courtyard where the hearing is taking place. Peter has been castigated throughout history for denying Jesus three times this night, and it is mystifying that Peter did so, given his previous vow to follow Jesus even unto death. However, keep in mind that Peter has just cut off the ear of the personal slave of the high priest—Manchus—and he is fearful of being arrested himself if those present discover who he is. Peter took a huge risk in being present in that courtyard, and the pressure got to him when he was confronted with the accusation he was a follower of Jesus. It doesn't justify what Peter did, but it does help us understand Peter's human failure at the time.

- I. **Read Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1-2.** John omits the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin court, but we are including this hearing from Matthew so we can understand the appalling scope of the corruption of justice taking place. These verses show that the court was trying to present witnesses who would testify to acts by Jesus that would justify convicting him of a violation of law worthy of the death penalty. To get such a conviction, they needed at least two witnesses whose testimony would agree that such a violation of the law had occurred. Despite their best efforts, they could not get two witnesses to agree on any charge. Thus their prosecution failed. At this point, Caiaphas demanded that Jesus answer the question directly whether or not he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Keep in mind, Jesus was under no legal obligation to answer the question. As in our courts, an accused could not be forced to testify against himself in a criminal proceeding. In our courts, Jesus' lawyer would have advised him to remain silent. But to accomplish the Father's will, Jesus did truthfully answer the chief priest's question, saying he was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, and he quoted from the book of Daniel about the Son of Man coming on the clouds, a clear reference to the Messiah. Thus, it was upon Jesus own testimony—which he was under no legal obligation to provide—that he was convicted of blasphemy.
- J. In Matt., 27:1-2, the third phase of the trial is described. The Sanhedrin court, having convicted Jesus of blasphemy, met in the early morning hours to come up with charges they could present to Pilate to justify the death penalty. Pilate himself had taken away the power of the Sanhedrin court to impose the death penalty without his permission, and they knew Pilate would not impose the death penalty based solely upon a conviction under Jewish religious laws, so they had to come up with a violation of Roman law to get Pilate to send Jesus to the cross.
- K. This Jewish trial of Jesus violated Jewish law in so many ways it is stunning. Some of these ways include: 1) The trial was preceded by an illegal arrest which occurred at night, as mentioned before; 2) the trial itself took place at night which was illegal; 3) the trial took place on the day before the Sabbath and the day before Passover, which was in effect a legal holiday on which legal proceedings were prohibited; 4) it was illegal to conclude a trial for which the death penalty would be imposed in a single day; such a trial had to have at least one day for the judges to reflect on their verdict before imposing the ultimate punishment; 5) the conviction was based upon Jesus' uncorroborated confession; under Jewish law, even a confession by the accused required corroboration by a witness; 6) Jesus was given no opportunity to present a defense. Truth of who he claimed to be would be a complete defense to the charge of blasphemy, but as the scripture reveals, once Jesus

claimed to be the Son of God, he was summarily declared guilty without any further evidence being taken. In short, the very court that was charged with upholding the law, totally ignored the law in their haste to put Jesus to death before Passover which would begin at nightfall that very day.

- L. Next week we will take up the trial before Pilate under Roman law and the punishment imposed by Rome—crucifixion.

## **XX. Lesson XX/Chapters 18, 19**

- A. **Read John 18:28-40.** Having convicted Jesus of blasphemy and having concocted a charge under Roman law to bring against Jesus to get him crucified, the chief priests who were part of the Sanhedrin bring Jesus to Pilate. As John tells us, it is early morning. Any business to be accomplished with the Romans had to take place early because the Romans—at least the upper-class Romans—reserved the rest of the day for their leisure activities. Additionally, the Jews were under a time deadline; they had to get rid of Jesus before nightfall because nightfall ushered in their sabbath and their Passover celebration for which they must remain ritually pure. So, we have the unsavory picture of the chief priests and government authorities of the Jews conspiring together to press a charge against Jesus under Roman law they know to be false and rushing forward with unseemly haste to ensure his death before nightfall so they can remain ritually pure to celebrate Passover. As John tells us, they refused to enter Pilate’s headquarters because that alone would render them defiled; they insist Pilate to go outside to meet with them, which he does. Clearly, they know their charges are unlikely to be taken seriously by Pilate because when he asks what charges they bring against Jesus, they don’t assert any at that time because they know Pilate will recognize their charges as a sham. Instead, they just say if he weren’t a criminal they wouldn’t be there. Pilate responds, “Go judge him yourselves under your own law.” He finds out what their real motive is when they reply they don’t have the authority to put Jesus to death.
- B. This catches Pilate’s attention, and he brings Jesus into the praetorium to question him directly, out of the presence of the Jews. Pilate has apparently heard some things about Jesus because he asks if he is the King of the Jews. This could be a serious charge under Roman law because a king not authorized by Rome would be considered an insurrectionist. Jesus makes clear he is not a king in the earthly sense, but he has come to testify to the truth. The truth is something Pilate is not particularly concerned about, and he responds to Jesus with a cynical rhetorical question, “What is truth?” Before we condemn Pilate too severely for this response, however, we should acknowledge that in our culture today many ask the same question, often with as much cynicism as Pilate did. Many today convince themselves that the truth is whatever they want it to be. Remember, Jesus said that he is the truth, and for Christians at least, he must always be the measure by which we determine the truth, no matter what our culture or our own emotions might be telling us.
- C. By now, it is clear that Pilate realizes Jesus has not violated any Roman law that would justify any punishment against him. But rather than just reject all charges against Jesus he tries to negotiate with the Jews who brought Jesus to him. Why would he do this? It is due to the complicated relationship Pilate had with the Jews due to events which occurred earlier in his term as procurator, which we will address shortly. Due to this complicated

relationship Pilate wanted to placate the Jews by offering something to the Jews, so he asks whether they want him to release Jesus or Barabbas, a convicted bandit and insurrectionist, as part of a Passover gift to the Jews. Consider how convoluted that offer was. Pilate is asking whether they wanted him to release a convicted criminal, or Jesus whom he has just publicly declared is an innocent man. Jesus should have been immediately released without further judicial proceedings against him under Roman law. In presenting the question to the Jews, however, Pilate intentionally shows his disdain for the Jews by asking if they want him to release the “King of the Jews.” He knows the Jewish belief is that they have no king but God alone, and using this phrase has the effect of Pilate poking them in the eye.

- D. **Read John 19:1-15.** The miscarriages of justice against Jesus continue. Pilate has just told the Jewish leaders that Jesus has done nothing to justify any charge against him. Yet in an effort to appease the Jewish leaders he has Jesus flogged. This word “flogged” sounds benign, but in fact it was so severe many people died as a result of being flogged. Sometimes it is confused with the 39 lashes that was a Jewish synagogue punishment which Paul received five times. Although painful, the Jewish 39 lashes was minor punishment compared to Roman flogging. Roman flogging was administered with leather straps into which bone, glass and lead balls were embedded. The number of lashes was unlimited. The person was to be lashed until the flesh hung from his back. Some were actually disemboweled by flogging and many died from flogging. Because it is such a severe punishment, Pilate apparently thought that flogging Jesus would appease the Jews. Pilate then brings Jesus out to them after he had been flogged, beaten, insulted, and given a crown of thorns and a purple robe to mock his status as king of the Jews. Rather than appeasing the Jews, however, it was like throwing bloody meat into a sea of hungry sharks. They immediately begin shouting, “Crucify him.”
- E. Pilate again repeats his statement to the Jews that he finds no case against Jesus, despite nearly killing him by flogging, and he tells the Jews, “Crucify him yourselves,” which he knows they cannot do. At this point, the Jewish leaders finally tell Pilate that Jesus has claimed to be the Son of God, which is blasphemy to them. As John tells us, this statement causes fear to arise in Pilate. It’s a serious charge under Roman law because no one but Caesar could claim to be divine, the Son of God. Any claim against the sovereignty of Caesar must be investigated; if Pilate failed to investigate this charge he could lose his position as procurator, and he was already in a precarious position with Rome, for reasons we will now discuss.
- F. Pilate was procurator of Judea from A.D. 26-36. It was a coveted position for a Roman civil servant and he obtained this post from his mentor and sponsor, Sejanus, who was the Roman consul who effectively was the co-emperor with Caesar Augustus, and later with Tiberius, until Sejanus tried to overthrow Tiberius and was put to death in A.D. 31, two years before Jesus’ crucifixion. Pilate’s tenure as procurator got off to a bad start due to some poor decisions by him. Pilate’s headquarters were at Caesarea, but he would often visit Jerusalem where a contingent of Roman soldiers were kept, and he would bring more of his soldiers with him to ensure his safety. Almost immediately after becoming the procurator in A.D. 26, Pilate visited Jerusalem for the first time with his detachment of soldiers. The soldiers had their standards—their flags that identified them—and on the top of the standards there was a small bust in metal of the reigning emperor. To the Romans, the emperor was a god and therefore to the Jews the bust of the emperor was a graven image

of a foreign deity. It was an outrage to the Jews for the graven image to enter Jerusalem, the holy city. Previous procurators had removed the bust from the standards when visiting Jerusalem, but Pilate refused to do so. When he went back to Caesarea, the Jews followed him, demanding that he remove the bust on all future visits to Jerusalem. Pilate again refused and set a trap for them; once they were trapped, he told the Jews to leave or he would kill them all. The Jews' response was to bear their necks and invite the soldiers to kill them. Even Pilate couldn't do this, and he backed down over the issue of the bust on the standards. Word got back to Rome about this episode, and it was a bad beginning for Pilate. Later, a second crisis arose when Pilate built a badly needed aqueduct for Jerusalem, which was good, but he raided the temple treasury to pay for it, which led to a riot in Jerusalem which was brutally put down by the Roman soldiers. Again, reports were made to Rome, and Pilate was once again on the hot seat. A final postscript about Pilate took place roughly three years after the crucifixion when Pilate was called back to Rome by Tiberius for atrocities against the Samaritans. While he was enroute back to Rome to face the consequences, Tiberius died, relieving Pilate of the charges against him. However, Pilate disappeared and nothing further is known about him in history. There were rumors that he committed suicide, but those rumors were unconfirmed.

- G. So, it's with this background in mind that, upon hearing Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, Pilate takes Jesus back into his headquarters to question him further. Pilate asks Jesus where he is from—really asking to see if he would claim to be from heaven. Keep in mind, Pilate already knows Jesus is from Nazareth. Jesus refuses to answer, and Pilate reminds Jesus he has the power to release him or to crucify him. Jesus finally responds, telling him he only had that authority because it has been given to him from above—referring to God—and adds that the Jews who handed him over are guilty of a greater sin. Pilate by now is convinced of Jesus' innocence, and, as Matthew tells us, receives a message from his wife advising Pilate to do nothing to this innocent man. So, Pilate goes back out to address the Jews who are, in effect, acting as prosecuting attorneys against Jesus. Pilate tells them once more that Jesus is innocent of any charge under Roman law.
- H. Sensing that Pilate desperately wants to release Jesus, the Jews play their trump card, bringing into the discussion Pilate's background and shaky position with the emperor. They say, "If you release this man you are no friend of the emperor. Anyone claiming to be a king sets himself against the emperor." This was a blatant blackmail statement. They were letting Pilate know that they would bring to the emperor's attention his refusal to deal with someone whom—according to them—blatantly defied the emperor. Pilate still tries to release Jesus; he takes water and washes his hands—as Matthew recounts—declaring again that he believes Jesus to be innocent. He presents Jesus again—all bloody and beaten and wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe—and says, "Shall I crucify your king?" The Jews who brought Jesus to Pilate by now are desperate and apparently willing to do anything to see Jesus crucified. Although they always claimed they had no king but God himself—Yahweh—they now respond to Pilate that they have no king but the emperor. This was the height of hypocrisy by the Jews; Pilate knew it, and the Jews knew that Pilate knew it. By now, Pilate knew they would do anything they could to anyone who stood in their way of getting rid of Jesus, including reporting Pilate to the emperor. He simply did not have the moral courage to do the right thing despite potential adverse consequences to himself. He caved to the pressure and turned Jesus over to them to be crucified. Again, a total miscarriage of justice.



- I. **Read John 19:16-37.** The crucifixion of Jesus speaks for itself. It is the most horrible form of punishment ever invented by mankind. If you are interested in seeing just how gruesome and horrible it is, I recommend you see the movie *The Passion of Christ*. It is very well done, and accurate to the point I can't bear to see it again. It is brutal. A few points to remember from John's account of the crucifixion: 1) Jesus was crucified between two convicted criminals, which fulfilled scripture; 2) Pilate insisted that the crime for which Jesus was being crucified be inscribed on the cross as "King of the Jews," which he refused to change when the Jews protested; 3) the soldiers cast lots for his tunic. It was customary in Jewish culture for the mother of a young man leaving home to give a woven tunic to the departing son; it is likely that Mary herself had woven and given this tunic to Jesus, the one for which the soldiers cast lots; 4) Apparently the only disciple at the foot of the cross was John, but Jesus' mother, her sister (Salome—mother of James and John), Mary the wife of Clopas (of whom we know nothing), and Mary Magdalene were also there. Jesus tells John and his mother that John is to take care of her thereafter, and he did; 5) When Jesus says he is thirsty, he is given a sponge soaked in sour wine, which he took and then announced, "It is finished," and gave up his spirit. He willingly died, having completed the work the Father gave him to do. 6) Since the Jews didn't want the bodies to still be on the cross at nightfall, they ask that the legs of those on the cross be broken to hasten their death. This was done to the other two, but Jesus was already dead, so the soldier pierced his side with a spear to insure he was dead, fulfilling scripture that none of his bones would be broken.
- J. **Read John 19:38-42.** The body of a crucified person usually was just left at the site for the dogs to eat. But Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus go to Pilate to ask for the body, which was a bold and courageous act. After all, the Sanhedrin had just condemned Jesus to death and prosecuted the case before Pilate. Nicodemus provided the spices for Jesus' burial and Joseph provided the tomb—an unused one which Joseph apparently owned—and they placed Jesus there as the day of Passover was fast approaching, rolling a large stone over the opening to the tomb. Matthew tells us (Matt 25:62-66) that the Jews then approached Pilate and asked that soldiers be placed around the tomb and it be sealed to prevent Jesus' body being stolen away on the third day. Pilate tells them to take their own soldiers and make it as secure as they can. Next week we will see how well that turned out.

## XXI. Lesson XXI/Chapter 20

- A. **Read John 20:1-10.** Remember that Jesus died mid-to-late afternoon on Friday before Passover. Immediately thereafter, Joseph of Aramathea and Nicodemus went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so they could give it a proper burial. But they had to rush to get the body into the tomb before nightfall which was when Passover began. The Judean Jews celebrated the Passover meal on the evening of Passover (which would have been Friday night—the beginning of Saturday, their sabbath and Passover), whereas the Galilean Jews celebrated the Passover meal on Thursday evening, the beginning of their preparation day for Passover. Since Saturday was the sabbath, and Passover to boot, the disciples stayed hidden away as did the women following Jesus. Remember all the sabbath rules? They included a strict limit on how far one could walk on the sabbath; furthermore, tending to a dead body on sabbath was forbidden as work. Thus, Jesus' disciples and followers remained hidden away all day Saturday, in what must have been the most discouraging and miserable day of their lives. All of their hopes and dreams for Israel, for themselves, and for the cause of the Messiah appeared to have been destroyed. Furthermore, they feared that the

authorities, having gotten rid of Jesus, might be coming for them next. So, their sorrow was mixed with fear—a toxic combination if there ever was one.

- B. It's against this background that we find this little band of women making their way in the pre-dawn hours of Sunday morning to the tomb, where they intend to complete the preparation of Jesus' body for burial with the spices which Nicodemus had provided. John mentions only that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, but Matthew tells us another woman named Mary also went with her, and the other gospels mention other women who may have been there also. Remember, they were expecting the tomb to be sealed, and guards from the Temple police standing watch. But when they got there, the guards were gone and the stone blocking the entrance had been rolled away. Matthew tells us that before the women arrived an angel of the Lord had appeared, scared the guards nearly to death and then rolled away the stone. We don't know the exact moment that Jesus regained life and was resurrected, but it was likely about the time the angel appeared and rolled away the stone. In any event, when Mary arrives, she is stunned by the empty tomb, apparently believing someone had broken into the tomb—despite it being sealed and guarded—and had stolen the body of Jesus. She immediately runs back to find Peter—apparently joined by the other woman with her—whereupon Peter and John run to the tomb to see for themselves. John brags on himself a little, pointing out that he outran Peter to the tomb, but John stops at the mouth of the tomb and looks in. When Peter finally catches up, he goes right into the tomb and sees the linen that Jesus was wrapped in lying there together with the cloth that had covered Jesus' head, as was customary for a Jewish burial. So, now they know the tomb is empty but they do not yet know how it came to be empty. Peter and John then head back to where they were staying, puzzled as John tells us because they still did not understand the scripture that Jesus must arise from the dead. At this point, they probably thought this was yet another indignity to the man they had devoted their lives and future to.
- C. **Read John 20:11-18.** While Peter and John returned home, Mary Magdalene, who had returned, stayed by the tomb. Her grief is overwhelming; her entire life has seemingly come to an end; she has lost everything. Jesus had freed her from the hell of demonic possession, and—according to tradition at least—from a life of prostitution. He had been her hope, and she was devastated by his death. In the midst of weeping, she glances into the tomb once more, but now sees two men dressed in white sitting on the stone platform in the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid. She apparently didn't recognize them then as angels. They ask why she is crying, and she responds, "They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have taken him." Then she senses someone behind her and turns to to see a man who asks her again why she is crying. Through her tears this person seems to be the gardener, so she asks him to tell her where the body is so she can go get it, and as she does so, she looks again into the tomb. But as she does so, the man behind her speaks her name in a voice she now recognizes. Jesus simply says, "Mary. . ." In my imagination I see the entire arc of Mary's life flash before her in an instant—The degradation and hellishness of the life Mary had known before Jesus came to her, called her by name and then delivered her from the demonic oppression that had controlled her life, followed then by several years of serving Jesus as a follower and seeing him perform miracle after miracle while also teaching and demonstrating what the kingdom of God was really like. He had brought her hope and a future serving her messiah, all of which appeared to be cruelly crushed by the Jewish and Roman leaders who had sent Jesus to the cross, bringing his ministry to a dismal

end. She had lost everything. But now, here he is standing before her—not dead but more alive than ever—speaking her name and looking at her with compassion and joy. She is stunned as never before in life and as she never will be again. She cries out, “Rabbouni,” which means “My teacher,” as she drops to her knees and holds on to his feet, not about to let go. Jesus response—don’t hold onto me—seems a little strange, but what Jesus was essentially saying is, “You don’t have to cling to me; I haven’t left yet.” Then he gives her perhaps the greatest honor he could bestow upon anyone: he gives Mary the privilege and honor of being the very first person to announce to anyone—in this case the disciples—that he has risen from the dead and would ascend to his Father and to their Father. But, as Luke tells us, the disciples didn’t believe her.

- D. **Read John 20:19-23.** The events in these verses take place on Sunday evening, the same day Jesus arose from the tomb. From other scriptures we know that Jesus appeared to Peter sometime earlier that day (See Luke 24:34). He also appeared to two disciples who were returning to Emmaus from Jerusalem that afternoon (Luke 24:13-35); those disciples then returned to Jerusalem and joined the other disciples in the upper room where they were still hiding out from the Jewish authorities, afraid they would be the next ones to be put to death, or at least thrown into prison. Due to what Mary said, what Peter said, and what the two on the road to Emmaus had to say, there had to be a buzz of excitement in the room as they tried to understand these mystifying events that were unfolding. Suddenly, without the door being opened, there was Jesus—standing in the midst of them and giving them the customary greeting, “Peace be with you.” They are dumbstruck. So, he showed them his hands and his side, probably to convince them it was really him. After all, the disciples weren’t expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead, despite Jesus telling them to expect this, and they knew beyond doubt he had been dead. At this point, their joy is overwhelming; they are happy almost beyond belief and probably pinching themselves to confirm Jesus was really alive and standing before them. All of their hopes and dreams have come flooding back over them. They have hope once again.
- E. Once they are convinced it is really Jesus speaking to them, he gives them marching orders, which he will repeat to them several times after this. Remember, throughout his ministry Jesus said he was sent by the Father, and he did only what the Father told him to do. Now he tells them that just as the Father sent him, he was sending them. The torch was being passed, and as he did so, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” whom they will certainly need if they are to carry out their mission. Jesus had promised them in John 16:22 that a time would come when they would experience transforming joy that no one would be able to take away from them. This is that moment! Look what the assignment is: to proclaim God’s forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ death and resurrection has made forgiveness and reconciliation with God possible, and he is now telling his disciples to go offer that forgiveness of sin to everyone. It’s sin that separates people from God, but Jesus has now destroyed the power of sin by his death and resurrection, and he is charging his disciples with the task of offering forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name, which will set people free. He closes with a warning that if they do not proclaim forgiveness—and if they refuse to display Jesus’ forgiveness in their own lives—people will not find forgiveness. We should always remember that Jesus expects all of us to display to the world the forgiveness we have received from him—both by the way we live and by our words. If we do not display his forgiveness, the world will not come to know the joy we have, and they may never enter into Christ’s welcoming arms.

- F. **Read John 20:24-29.** For some reason Thomas wasn't there for Jesus' first post-resurrection meeting with his disciples. You can imagine Thomas' reaction when the other disciples tell him that Jesus is alive, and they have seen and talked to them. It's more than he can wrap his mind around, and he refused to believe what he was being told. For this, Thomas has been dubbed "Doubting Thomas," as though he were the only member of the disciples to have doubts about Jesus. We should remember that doubt is not the opposite of faith; fear is the opposite of faith. We should also remember that in John, chapter 11, it was Thomas who, when Jesus said he was going back to Bethany to heal Lazarus, courageously told the other disciples they should all go back with Jesus—to die with him. So, Thomas is an honest man who is willing to believe upon seeing the evidence, but the other disciples' story is more than he can accept without seeing for himself. As soon as Jesus appears to the group for the second time, Jesus addresses Thomas without being prompted, shows him his hands and his side; Jesus is willing to give him all the evidence he needs, and Thomas' immediate response is, "My Lord and my God." This story has echoes of the story of Nathanael in the first chapter of John when Jesus tells Nathanael he saw him under the olive tree; Jesus knew Nathanael's thoughts before he expressed them to anyone else, and Jesus knew Thomas' doubts as well; he was ready to give Thomas all the proof he needed to fully commit. Note, however, Jesus commends those who are able to believe without actually seeing.
- G. **Read John 20:30-31.** Most biblical scholars say these two verses were the original ending of John's gospel. They believe that chapter 21 was added later, although this cannot be confirmed. What we do know is that John was an eye-witness to chapter 21 as much as he was for all chapters before it.
- H. You will recall that we referenced verse 31 in the very first lesson of our study of John because in this verse he set forth the purpose of writing his gospel. As he says, what he wrote was specifically chosen to enable readers to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and thereby have life in his name. In short, John's gospel—like the other gospels—is not a biography; it is a testimony to who Jesus was and is, and his purpose in coming. A trial lawyer does not solicit testimony from his client about *everything* he knows about the matter. He only solicits testimony that will help convince the judge or jury to rule in favor of his client. Similarly, John has carefully chosen what he has written to fulfill his purpose in writing; and in verse 30 he admits there is much more to tell about Jesus that was not included in this book. If he tried to tell everything about Jesus, it would have been more like a biography and would have run thousands of pages, and even then, would not have been exhaustive.
- I. What John and the other gospel writers wanted us to glean from what they wrote is the fact of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Today, many, perhaps most, people believe that Jesus is just a fairy tale, not a historical person who actually lived, died and was resurrected. Even among those who believe he was a historical figure, many, perhaps most, believe he was a good man, with a good philosophy emphasizing love, but nothing more. And they don't believe he was raised from the dead. John wrote his gospel to put a stake in the heart of any such argument. Let's face it, good men do not go around saying, "The Father and I are one; before Abraham was I am; I will rise from the tomb, and those who believe in me will have eternal life." People that go around saying things like that tend to be put in mental hospitals, or worse. Furthermore, do not listen to those who say that even if Jesus was not raised from dead, it makes no difference to our faith. The entire Christian faith depends

upon Jesus being crucified, dead and raised from the dead. Indeed, Paul sets forth in I Cor. Chapter 15 how essential to our faith it is that Jesus was raised from the dead. All arguments that have been raised to attempt to disprove that Jesus was raised from the dead have been thoroughly rebutted. Moreover, it is important to remember that all of the disciples except John were eventually martyred for their faith. None of the disciples ever renounced their faith or the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

- J. We must remember the charge Jesus gave to his disciples in verse 23 to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. We have the authority and power to do that precisely because Jesus died, proved himself alive to his followers and delegated this power and authority to his followers. It is both our privilege and our duty to carry out his charge to us.
- K. Next week we wrap up our study of the gospel of John with chapter 21.

## **XXII. Lesson XXII/Chapter 21**

- A. **Read John 21:1-14.** According to most biblical scholars this chapter was not part of the original gospel of John but was added following his death. The vocabulary, phrases and writing style—all written in Greek—are different from the earlier part of the book. Despite it being appended to his gospel after John's death, we can safely say that he was still the source of what is written here. John is the eyewitness.
- B. To me, this is perhaps the most intimate meeting Jesus has with his disciples after his resurrection. Some 7 of the disciples have returned to Galilee, and Peter decides he is going fishing; the others join him. This story reminds us of the one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry—as recorded in Luke, chapter 5. In Luke, Peter had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus instructs him to cast their net on the other side of the boat and they catch an immense number of fish. The same thing happens here; they have fished all night without result. About daybreak, Jesus—although they didn't know it was him—calls out from shore and tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, and they catch so many fish they can't haul them in. Perhaps John picks up on the similarity to the earlier catch, and tells Peter it's the Lord, whereupon Peter jumps in the lake and swims to shore to greet Jesus. Jesus has a charcoal fire going and instructs them to bring some fish so he can fix them breakfast. So, there on the beach by the lake, Jesus and the disciples eat breakfast together. Jesus is showing the disciples again that he is not a ghost or only a spirit; he is flesh and blood, raised from the dead by the power of God, eating breakfast with his closest friends. There still seems to be some hesitancy or doubt about Jesus by some, although John says they knew it was the Lord. Perhaps his appearance was somewhat different.
- C. **Read John 21:15-23.** After breakfast, Jesus has a conversation directly with Peter. Remember, Jesus appeared to Peter on Easter morning, as mentioned in Matthew's gospel, although we do not have an account of that meeting; we only know that they met. It's likely Peter repented of his denial of Jesus during that earlier meeting, although we cannot be sure. It seems that the purpose of this conversation is for Jesus to re-establish Peter as the leader among the disciples. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, and three times Peter says he does. Jesus' response in order is: feed my lambs; shepherd my sheep; feed my sheep. Clearly, Jesus is telling Peter that he expects Peter to be the leader among the disciples, just as a shepherd leads his flock. This is a high honor for Peter, but Jesus also lets

him know the price he will ultimately pay for leading the flock. Jesus tells him that when he grows old he would “stretch out his hands,” which meant crucifixion. The shepherd appointed by the Good Shepherd would die in the same manner as his master did. That came to pass in Rome some 20-25 years later.

- D. Peter then sees John and asks Jesus, “What about him.” Some have interpreted this as showing jealousy between Peter and John, but remember that John, Peter’s cousin, is much younger than Peter, with Peter acting much like an older brother or mentor. Peter and John appear together frequently throughout the book of Acts, with Peter always doing the talking. I believe Peter was expressing concern about what may happen to John—especially after Jesus has just told Peter what a horrible death he will die. Jesus’ response, like many of his statements, was mis-interpreted. Jesus said, “If I want him to remain until I return, what difference does that make to you? You follow me.” Some interpreted that to mean John wouldn’t die until Jesus returned, but that isn’t what Jesus said. Apparently the rumor had circulated, however, that John wouldn’t die until Jesus returned; this chapter was added, in part, to clear up that rumor.
- E. **Read John 21:24-25.** In these verses, John (and those who wrote the last chapter) confirm once more that this is an eye-witness account, and the account is true. The last verse is one of the more frustrating verses in the New Testament. As at the end of chapter 20, we find the statement that Jesus did many other things that did not get included in John’s gospel. Some of the other things are included in the other gospels, but much of Jesus’ ministry has gone unrecorded, and we would love to know all of the unwritten details. We can be confident, however, that what we have is all we need to know to come to believe Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and through faith in him we have eternal life.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What have you learned during our study that has had the biggest impact on you? What has surprised you the most?
2. Has your view or understanding of Jesus changed during our study? How so? How about the disciples?
3. Has our study raised questions in your mind or caused you to think differently about your relationship with God?