

THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

**A Bible Study of
the Gospel according
to John**

LEADER'S EDITION



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Leader's Edition

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Why Study the Bible?

Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The words of God are as essential to our soul as food is to our body. The Bible is the normative and primary way that God speaks to his people and so, if we wish to hear the words of God, we must be reading, studying, applying, and meditating on the Scriptures. It is essential for Christians to be reading the Bible if they wish to grow in their knowledge, love, worship and enjoyment of God.

Because many people, in our post-modern culture, are loathe to take anything on face value, studying the Bible in the form of a question and answer dialogue helps clarify truth conclusions and allows the individual to discover and uncover the truth for themselves.

We encourage you to study the Scriptures deeply in your private devotions and in a Bible study group.

Bible Study Methods

There are many different methods to read the Bible. This study series utilizes the ‘COMA Method’ (ref. 1), outlined on the next page, which we have found to be a very effective method to get the most out of every text. It’s useful to follow the COMA method consciously when we read the Bible because it encourages us to ask good questions of the passage and to understand it clearly and thoroughly. When we’re reading the Bible with someone else, it also very helpfully directs the conversation. You can work through the steps and come to conclusions, rather than bouncing through random thoughts or observations.

We encourage you to study the passage yourself using the COMA method before beginning the Bible study questions.

The COMA Method

1. Read the passage aloud

2. Ask some **C**ontext questions of the passage:
 - What sort of writing is this? (a letter, a poem, a narrative, etc)
 - Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it was written?
 - What has happened so far in this particular book of the Bible?

3. Ask some **O**bservation questions of the passage:
 - Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the passage?
 - What is the main point or points?
 - What surprises are there?
 - What are the key words? What words or ideas are repeated?

4. Ask some **M**eaning questions of the passage:
 - How does this passage relate to other parts of the book?
 - How does the passage relate to Jesus?
 - What does this teach us about God?
 - How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?

5. Ask some **A**pplication questions of the passage:
 - How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
 - Is there some attitude I need to change?
 - How does this passage call on me to change the way I live?

1

Go read:

John 1:1-18

Bible Study 1

C

Context

Handwriting lines for Context

O

Observation

Handwriting lines for Observation

M

Meaning

Handwriting lines for Meaning

A

Application

Handwriting lines for Application



Kicking Off

One day a lady was sitting in the waiting room for her first appointment with a new dentist, and she noticed that his name was the same as a boy she had a secret crush on in high school, 40 years previously. But when she saw him, he was grey, and wrinkly and she thought, 'He's way too old to have been my classmate.' After he examined her teeth, she asked him if he had attended Waseca high school. "Yes, I did'. 'When did you graduate?" she asked. "In 1959. Why do you ask?" "You were in my class!" she said excitedly. He looked at her closely and said, "What subject did you teach?"

Not recognising someone can be embarrassing.

Not recognising someone important can be really embarrassing.

An Irish couple are celebrating their anniversary in a fancy restaurant in Dublin. They look over and recognise Bono, the lead Singer of U2, having dinner with a friend. They were big fans so they talked about going over and saying hello and asking for photos. Bono went to the toilet so they decided to go ask his friend if Bono would be ok with a few photos and his friend said yes. Bono comes back and agrees. The couple stand next to Bono as his friend takes the photos. So they go and finish their meal while Bono and his friend leave. The couple go to pay, but the restaurateur says their meal has been paid for. They ask if Bono had paid for them and the restaurateur says, "No, his friend, Bruce Springsteen has paid for you."

Not recognising someone can be a big deal.

Not recognising someone important can be an even bigger deal.

Not recognising the most important one of all, God, is a really big deal.

2000 y ago God turned up to our world and introduced himself.

His name was Jesus Christ.

But most people didn't recognise him.

God was standing right in front of them but they didn't receive Him, because they didn't expect him to come the way He did. And today there are many people who don't receive Him, but instead reject Him.

Q: How would you recognise God? If God was standing right in front of you, what would make you be able to say, 'Aha, that's God'?

Surely if God came down and stood in front of us we'd know. We'd be left in no doubt, wouldn't we? But how would we recognise God if we saw him? What would be the distinguishing features to look out for?

Would it be his transcendent aura? Would it be his divine light that would blind your eyes if you tried to look at him? Would you recognise him because he sits cross-legged, in the lotus position, burning incense? Would he be wearing a turban? Would he be a her?

This is not just a hypothetical, abstract question because according to John chapter 1, God has come and dwelt amongst us, but not everybody recognised him.



Digging Deeper

Q: 'The Word' is a strange title for someone don't you think? Why is He described in this way?

Q: What do we learn about 'the Word'?

Q: How can the Word be God and with God at the same time (v1-2)?

Q: What is the Word's role in creation (v3)?

The opening verse of the whole Bible is, 'In the beginning... God.' But here John says, 'In the beginning was the Word'. This would have made the ears of everyone in the 1st century prick up. 'The Word' was a term loaded with meaning for both Jews and those with a pagan background.

In the world of pagan philosophy and religion, 'the Word' - or the *'logos'* is what they would have called it in Greek - was the title given to what the philosophers understood as the invisible creative force behind the universe, the intelligent mind of the universe. It was like what is today called 'intelligent design', the notion that there has to be an intelligent designer because we have an intelligent universe, but to them it was some kind of impersonal force like in Star Wars. The philosophers said that truth and wisdom could only be found through an awareness of this 'Word'. John is saying that the creative force behind the universe, the intelligent mind of the universe is a person and his name is Jesus. The Greek philosophers be like 'Whaaaaat!'

To the Jew, the term had even more meaning. In the Old Testament, God's Word goes out from his mouth and does powerful stuff. God said, 'Let there be light and there was light' (Gen.1:3). God said to Moses 'I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, (Exod. 6:6), and the Red sea parts and his people walk through on dry land, but the Egyptians are drowned. The Word of God was the presence and action of God breaking into our world, so for the Jews, God's Word and his actions were one and the same. John is saying to the Jews, that God's powerful 'Word' is Jesus Christ. The Jews be like, 'Whaaaaat!'

So John takes the common ground of both Hebrew theology and Greek philosophy and makes a declaration that both would agree with - that before the creation of the world and before time, 'the Word' existed eternally. He then scandalises both groups by stating that 'the Word' is a person and his name is Jesus. So John takes all Greek philosophy and history and he says 'The answer is Jesus.' He takes all of Jewish theology and says, 'It all points to Jesus.' Everyone listening says, 'Whaaat? You're telling us the Word is Jesus?!'

God's faithfulness, God's truthfulness (Ps. 33:4; Heb 6:18) means that his words are thoroughly reliable and because his words are thoroughly reliable, his words are a perfect expression of him. My words are not a perfect expression of me because I lie, I use words to cover up, to pretend to be what I am not, to make an impression on others, and so my words are unreliable, sometimes they are true and sometimes they are not. But God's word is a true expression of God because God doesn't express himself falsely. We only know God by the words he expresses, but the words he expresses are a true expression of Him, so what you hear God say is what God is like, and what God is like will be spoken in his Word. And so as we deal with his words, as we believe his words or as we disobey his words, so we deal with God, believe God, disobey God. Whatever we do with God's words we do with God. And so as we deal with his Word, Jesus, as we believe Jesus or as we disobey Jesus, so we deal with God, believe God, disobey God. Whatever we do with God's Word, Jesus, we do with God.

In the beginning, at the origin of creation, the Word was already in existence (v1). There was never a time when the Word was not. The Word was with God, so in some way is distinct from God. Being *'with God'* is the idea of being in a relationship with God. This is picked up again in v18 where we read that the only God is *'at the Father's side'* or *'in the bosom of the Father'* or *'is in closest relationship with the Father'*, emphasizing that their relationship is profoundly intimate. And at the same time, the Word was God, he is divine in himself. This is puzzling, isn't it? It's difficult to get our heads around the concept that the Word is both God and with God at the same time. God is not straightforward. He is complex. But why would we expect him to be anything other than complex? Surely the one who created the universe will be bigger than our finite minds can conceive: 'If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not.

We cannot compete, in simplicity, with *people* who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with fact. Of course, anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about' 1.

Anything that is classified '*was made*', was made by the Word (v3). The Word is himself not created. He does not belong to the class of things made any more than God does. He is in fact God's agent of creation, the originator of all things. In the account of creation in the book of Genesis, everything that came into being did so because of God's spoken word. God simply spoke, 'Let there be' and there was. So also in John's account of creation here, God's Word created *everything*.

Did you notice that the *Word* is referred to as '*He*' in v2 and as '*him*' in v3? In v14 '*He*' is given an identity: '*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us*'. This Word who was God, who existed in the very beginning and who created all things and therefore created you and me, took on flesh as the God-man, Jesus Christ (v17). The one who made every cell in your body, who made every cell in the cosmos, implanted himself as a cluster of cells in the womb of Mary. So Mary is pregnant with God and she and Joseph are travelling to Bethlehem and they get to the inn and Joseph asks the inn keeper: 'Do you have a place to stay for my wife and I?' He replies, 'No sorry we're full.' Joseph says, 'But my wife is pregnant.' The inn keeper says '*That's not my fault*.' Joseph says, '*It's not my fault either*.' On his 1st birthday Mary and Joseph look at each other and say '*How many candles do we put on his birthday cake? He is eternal so how many candles is that? The cake is not big enough*.' The author John, was a Jew, and believed in one God. He would have been fully cognizant of the magnitude of what he was saying.

New Testament commentator CK Barrett says, 'John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous' ².



Digging Deeper

Q: The Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus was a god, not actually God. Could this be correct? Why/Why not?

"A" god is an incorrect translation from the original Greek language, (see 'Colwell's rule'). Moreover, the text itself explains why this cannot be right (v3): There was never a time when the Word was not. JWs want to say that the Word was the first thing made, but if all things were created through the Word, and nothing was made without him, then the Word is not a creature, he is not created. The JW position leaves the Word making himself, because anything that is in the category of 'was made' was made by him. No, the Word was God and has been from the beginning, before creation, then took on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Q: Why did his own not receive/recognise him (v11)?

Partly because the world had the wrong expectations. To recognise someone you need to have the right expectations of what they are going to be like. The world had wandered so far off from God, from the Word of God, they couldn't recognise him when he stood in front of them. And they did not receive him because their deeds were evil and they loved the darkness (3:19).



Digging Deeper

Q: Why was John so sure that he has seen God?

Q: What is the Word's 'glory' (v14)?

Q: '*Dwelt amongst us*' literally means '*he pitched his tent amongst us*'. What does this make you think of?

John declares that he knew Jesus was God because of his distinguishing feature, his glory (v14). And so '*The Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us*', or literally, '*he pitched his tent amongst us*'. In their early years, God's people, the Israelites, lived in tents, and God dwelt with his people also in a tent. Moses would go into the tent and meet with God and see his glory. John is saying here that, just as Moses saw God's glory, John has seen in Jesus that same glory. It wasn't that Jesus walked around with a glow that marked him out, or had a permanent halo over his head. No, John saw Jesus' glory in his grace and truth:

Glory is the going public of God's splendour. In Ex. 33:18-34:8 Moses asks God to show him his glory and at first glance it looks as though God is not answering Moses' request, for he replies that he will make his goodness pass before Moses and will proclaim his name and his character. The word 'goodness' or 'good' has lost its meaning over the years, hasn't it? When we use the word good now, like, 'That was a good movie' we mean, 'I liked that movie', or if we say, 'That was not a good movie', we really mean, 'I didn't like that movie.' It's more a word of opinion, rather than having any intrinsic absolute meaning or value. But when God, who is a God of absolutes, described himself as good, he was describing the very nature of what good is, the nature of his own character. He is not like the false Baal gods who were sex driven fertility mad gods, immoral and degenerate. He is not like the false Greek gods who were fickle and indifferent, corrupt and corrupting. God is good, his goodness is his very character, which is his glory.

And the exact nature of this goodness is revealed as the LORD passes before Moses (Ex. 34:6), and proclaims his name - in short, love and faithfulness. The Hebrew word 'love' can be translated as kindness, generosity, grace, forgiveness, mercy. It's giving to a person even though they don't deserve it. Faithfulness means trustworthy, reliable, dependable. God is completely reliable and dependable. The goodness of God is that he is loving and will save people in mercy and compassion and is faithful to his promises. The character of God is the goodness of God, which is his glory, which is also the meaning of his name, because that is what he is about, that is what he is known for. God's name is what he is like. So when God shows his glory, he describes his name, which is his character, his love and faithfulness, his goodness, what he is known for. It's not his power or wealth or armies, though he has these more than any other, it's not the palace he lives in, it's not the motorcade or the jets flying overhead, but his goodness.

And as Israel beheld the glory of the LORD so John has seen that same glory in Jesus' glory. What glory? The unique one is the first aspect of it (v14), the one and only, the one of a kind. He was the Word of God become flesh, the one and only God become man. Secondly, the glory of Jesus is that he is from the Father. The unique Son of the eternal Father. And therefore, his glory is not his glory alone, his glory is not an independent glory, a separate glory, a distinctive glory, his glory is his Father's glory. Therefore, if you see Jesus' glory you should see his Father's glory. His Father's glory is love and faithfulness which are grace and truth (v14). Jesus combined grace and truth in a unparalleled way, loving sinners and lepers, the sick and women and children who were treated as second class citizens, but at the same time Jesus confronted falsehood and hypocrisy and was merciless in his critique of false religion.

John sees Jesus' greatness, when Jesus said to the paralysed man in ch5, 'Get up and walk' and BAM! he picked up his mat and walked home. John sees Jesus' greatness, when Jesus puts his hands on the blind man's eyes in ch 9 and BAM! he could see. John sees Jesus' greatness, when in ch 11 Jesus goes to Lazarus' tomb, where Lazarus had been dead 4 days and Jesus says 'Lazarus come out' and BAM! Lazarus comes back from the dead. Jesus had to say 'Lazarus come out', if he had just said, 'Come Out' the whole cemetery would have come alive and done the whole Michael Jackson Thriller thing. And Jesus' greatness is seen at its brightest when Jesus dies on the cross: so gracious that he lay down his life for the world, and so faithful that he obeyed his Father to the point of death. God is most glorious and God-like when he is hanging from the cross, for on the cross God's grace and truth are seen most clearly.

So have a look out for Jesus' love and faithfulness, grace and truth, as we make our way through the gospel according to John.



Digging Deeper

Q: What does '*grace in place of grace*' mean in v16?

Out of his grace Yahweh gave his people the law covenant in Exodus ch 19. But Jesus comes to bring an even more gracious covenant - full of grace and truth - to replace the old covenant: grace in place of grace.



Reflecting Further

Q: Even though you and I have never seen God, how can we know what God is like?

There were 2 reasons why humans could not see God:

1. God is spirit (4:24). 2. Humans fell into sin and were expelled from his presence. Jesus overcame both obstacles. God the Son becomes a human being so that others could see God in the flesh (v18). And he dies for people so that their sinfulness is no longer a barrier keeping them from God. So Jesus comes to bring revelation and salvation.

2

Go read:

John 1:19-34

Bible Study 2

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: In his first 18 verses, John makes huge claims of who Jesus is. What were those claims?

See last study.

Now in the rest of the gospel, John gives the evidence for these claims.



Digging Deeper

Q: The Jews sent priests and Levites to ask John the Baptist who he was. Why do they ask if he is (i) *'the Christ'*? (ii) *'Elijah'*? (iii) *'the Prophet'*?

Q: John said he was *'the voice'*. What voice does he mean? (Hint: it doesn't mean he won 'The Voice' singing competition.)

The Jews at the time of Jesus were waiting in eager expectation for the coming of 'the Prophet', the coming of 'the Christ' and the coming of Elijah who would precede the Christ. It had been 400 years since anyone had heard a word from God, and now John the Baptist was on the scene baptising, so it was with much anticipation that he was interrogated as to his identity.

(i) Christ is the Greek word for 'anointed one', the Hebrew word is 'Messiah'. In ancient Israel, the Jews appointed their kings, priests and prophets, but classically their kings, by pouring oil over them - anointing them. This 'anointing' symbolised God's authority being bestowed on the individual, the authority to rule over God's special chosen people, the Israelites. So each King of Israel was an anointed one, a Messiah, a Christ.

God had promised that one day the truly anointed one would come and free Israel from its oppressors and to rule the world with God's authority. All of the Kings of Israel had failed to live up to this expectation, even King David, the great anointed King. Still, God promised that one in the line of David would rule forever (2 Sam. 7). Many thought John the Baptist might be this Christ.

(ii) In the last 2 verses of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6, God promises that he is going to send Elijah *'before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes'*, a messenger to herald in the Messianic age. In the gospel of Luke an angel of the Lord declares that John will come in the spirit and power of Elijah (1:17), and Jesus identifies John the Baptist as Elijah (Matt. 17), but here in John the evangelist's gospel, John the Baptist does not openly acknowledge that he is Elijah. It may have been that John did not necessarily realise that he was the coming Elijah for he never professes to be, or that what the Jews meant by Elijah was not acceptable to him, i.e. that he was not a reincarnation of Elijah, not Elijah come back physically. Even though John may not have seen himself as Elijah he does identify himself with the voice predicted back in Is. 40:3, *'the voice of one crying out in the wilderness'*, the one *'preparing the way of the Lord'*, preparing the way for God's arrival, for the age of salvation and mercy and forgiveness. So when you hear the voice what should you do? Look to see who is coming.

(iii) In Deut. 18 Moses prophesies that, *'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers - it is to him that you shall listen'*. Acts ch 3 makes it clear who this is – Jesus Christ.



Digging Deeper

Q: If John was not the Christ/Elijah/the prophet then why was he baptizing?

John the Baptist came testifying about the light (1:7-8) and testifies that Jesus, though he comes after him, was in fact before him (v30), literally '*first in front of me*'. In the other 3 gospels, John baptizes for repentance and the forgiveness of sins, but in John's gospel we read the reason he baptizes is so that Jesus '*might be revealed to Israel*' as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God.

Q: John calls Jesus '*the lamb of God*' in v29 and 36. Why is this? (Look up *Gen. 22; Ex. 12; Lev. 1; Is. 53*)

The lamb of God is such a rich biblical epithet. We are introduced to the importance of the lamb in God's purposes in Gen 22:8 when Abraham prophesies that God will provide the lamb for an offering. This is built on with the Passover lamb of Ex. 12, where the blood of the lamb protects the Israelites from death. Lambs were sacrificed in the tabernacle (fancy word for tent) and the temple in ancient Israel, for the forgiveness of sins. A lamb is led to the slaughter in Is. 53, bearing the iniquity of us all. Which of these John was referring to we can't be sure, but John knows that this lamb will take away the sins of the world.

In John's gospel, Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover at the exact same time lambs were being sacrificed by every household in Israel. All over the city the fathers were gathering their families together and saying, 'God has provided a lamb for us' as they shared the Passover together.

At the temple, two hundred and fifty thousand people brought their lambs to be slaughtered by the priests and the blood of the lambs was sprinkled on the altar. But the true lamb that would take away the sins of the world was hanging on a cross outside the city, on the hill of Calvary, his life-giving blood flowing from his hands and his feet and his side.



Reflecting Further

Q: What is the '*baptism of the Spirit*' John is speaking about (v33)?

'Baptism' just means a washing, or cleansing, or purification. John's baptism with water is an external symbol of repentance, of turning back to God, of cleansing. Baptism with the Spirit is the reality of God actually washing sins away and making an individual clean on the inside. Not only this, but the Spirit will powerfully transform and change people (Ezek. 36:25-27). Don't make the mistake of reading contemporary church phenomenon back into these terms. Baptism by the Holy Spirit is not referring to Christian baptismal practices or to what the Pentecostals call 'the second blessing'.

3

Go read:

John 1:35-51

Bible Study 3

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: Who has the most followers on Instagram? On Twitter?

Q: Why do people follow others on social media?

Q: What does this kind of 'following' involve?

At the time of writing the person with the most followers on Instagram was Cristiano Ronaldo with 152m followers, and on Twitter was Katy Perry with 107m followers. People follow celebrities on social media to get a glimpse into their lives, to see the glamour and glitz. You might follow someone you admire to feel inspired. You might follow someone with lots of followers to increase your chance of being noticed.

In today's study we see that Jesus asks people to follow him.

But following Jesus is very different to the concept of following someone today. All it takes to follow someone on social media is one click and you can unfollow with just a click. No commitment needed. But according to Jesus, you're not really a follower of his unless you make a serious commitment to him. That makes you a genuine disciple.

Q: If someone you didn't know walked up to you and said, 'Drop everything and come and follow me', what would you do? Why?

This is the type of activity of sects and cults and megalomaniacs, but here in chapter 1 is a man who is doing that, believably, and with authority.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why do you think Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter (v42)?

In the Old Testament God changed people's names to signify that they had a new calling (e.g. Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel), and to give them authority (2 King 23:34; 24:17). Cephas is an Aramaic word meaning 'rock'. The change of name anticipates the new man that God will make out of Simon, a man with strength of character, and it anticipates his future role in the church. Jesus again with supernatural knowledge, foresaw what the future held for Peter.

Q: One of the key evangelistic principles of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) is, 'Be an Andrew'. What do you think this means?

Andrew is less well known than some of Jesus' other disciples. He was often referred to as simply, '*Simon Peter's brother*'. He may not have had as high a profile as some of the other disciples, but throughout John's gospel, Andrew is bringing or referring someone to Jesus (see 6:8-9; 12:20-22) and it was Andrew who was the first to bring his brother, the apostle Peter, to Jesus, who went on to have such a significant impact. Jesus invites Andrew to 'Come and see', and Andrew spends the day with Jesus which leads to a deep impression of his person, and the result is that he immediately goes to find his brother in order to introduce him to Jesus. Andrew stands as a model for us 2000y later that everyone can minister as Andrew did through the simple activity of inviting others to come and hear about Jesus. God can use ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

In the early years of the Billy Graham Crusades the number who came forward at the rallies to make a commitment to Jesus was only about 75-100. During the 1954 crusade the team heard of a church that was consistently reaching people for Christ and they discovered that this church had regular 'bring a friend' nights, where the church would specifically pray for a lost person and then build a bridge of friendship to them by inviting them to these special friendship services when the gospel was preached and an invitation was given. Those people befriended by Christians were coming to Christ at a high rate. The BGEA team adopted this concept and in the 1955 Scotland crusade they began a similar practice called 'Operation Andrew'. It made an immediate difference with 3-400 people coming to know Christ each night, then 8-900 during the 1958 San Francisco crusade. The BGEA finds that 80% of those who come forward at one of their evangelistic events do so because someone reached out with friendship, built a relationship and prayed for their soul ³

Q: Why was Nathanael skeptical that the Messiah would come from Nazareth (v46)?

Nazareth was a small town, no larger than 2000 people, an insignificant town politically, socially and economically. It was a long way from the capital Jerusalem where the pure-blood Jews resided, but was in the backwaters of Galilee in the far north, a place where Jews and non-Jews intermixed. In Nathanael's mind it was inconceivable that the mighty Messiah would come from as inconspicuous a place as Nazareth. He would have known that the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be from Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2), but didn't realise that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem, but grew up in Nazareth.

Q: What did Jesus mean that Nathanael *'truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit'* (v47)?

Nathanael was not deceitful like the Jacob of old (Jacob means 'deceiver', his name was later changed to Israel as he was the father of the Israelites) or the hypocritical Pharisees, but was prepared to consider the claims of Jesus. Nathanael asks Jesus how he could know the things about him that he knew. The Jews attributed the mediator of divine revelation to be the hallmark of a prophet. Jesus' displays of supernatural knowledge were not an end in themselves, but a means to reveal himself as the Messiah.

Nathanael calls Jesus *'the Son of God'*.

Q: What did he mean and how did he know (v49)?

In the Old Testament every King of Israel was a 'Son of God', as declared in Psalm 2, the Scripture used at the King's coronation, in which Yahweh says to the King, *'You are my Son'*. So every King of Israel was a Messiah, a Son of God. This appears to be what Nathanael meant by the term. Because of Jesus' supernatural disclosure of his activity under the figtree, Nathanael concludes Jesus is the expected Messiah, the Son of God. He doesn't know at this stage what we the reader know from ch 1:1-18 and what Jesus will later reveal, that he is also 'God the Son', the divine Son of the Father, the second member of the Trinity. So Jesus the 'Son of God' is also God the Son. 'Son of God' is a messianic title, 'God the Son' is a metaphysical one. Like Caiaphas later in ch 11, Nathanael spoke better than he knew.

Q: What are the greater things that Jesus says Nathanael will see? What does this mean (v50-51)?

Jesus says, 'You think it's astonishing to hear that I have supernatural knowledge? You (now plural addressing all of the disciples) haven't seen anything yet, I'm going to show you something far, far greater.'

Heaven is normally hidden from humans, so to see '*heaven open*' like elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 10:11; Rev, 4:1, 19:11;) is for God to remove the veil from heaven for a few moments to reveal its secrets. What Jesus' disciples are going to see is '*heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*' (1:51). This is a reference to Jacob's vision (Gen 28:12) of a ladder '*resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of the God were ascending and descending on it (or him – Jacob)*'. Jacob called the place of his vision 'Bethel' which means house of God.

Jesus himself will now be the place of divine revelation, a place of far greater revelation than had been given to Abraham or Jacob or Moses or anyone before. Jesus is the 'new Bethel' the place where God is fully revealed, where God and humans, heaven and earth meet. Jesus' words also refer to the unprecedented and unimaginable access that Jesus will bring between heaven and earth, God and man.

Q: Why does Jesus refer to himself as the '*Son of Man*' (v51)?

The term can just mean 'human' and so is Jesus' favourite referent for himself, because it is inconspicuous and less laden with political overtones than referents such as King of Israel or Messiah which would have led to expectations of military conquest. Using this name would mean that Jesus could fly under the radar from the religious leaders for longer until his hour had arrived.

But also, cryptically, the term comes from the Old Testament in Daniel 7 where *'one like the Son of Man'*, that is a human, comes in the clouds and receives all authority from the Ancient of Days. And so it speaks of a figure who has a heavenly origin and destination, and one who will be lifted up in the clouds, which we will see later refers to Jesus' crucifixion.



Reflecting Further

Q: Jesus says to us, *'Follow me'* (V43).
What does following Jesus involve?

To follow Jesus means to be his disciple. Jesus' says that a disciple of his makes a commitment to at least 4 things:

1. Radical obedience (14:15)

In Jesus' day, Jewish boys and girls aged 6 would learn to memorize the first 5 books of their Scriptures, the Torah. By aged 10 the good students knew the entire Torah by memory. But only the best male students were allowed to continue their education which meant that most Jewish kids were pretty well finished with school after this. Boys would enter the trade of their parents, and girls would help their mothers at home. The best male students between 10-14yo then study and memorise all of the Hebrew Scriptures. Those who show outstanding aptitude request to study further with a Rabbi, often leaving home to travel with him for a lengthy period of time. If a Rabbi thought highly enough of a student, he would invite them to, "Come follow me", and become his disciple.

It would be like Nic Natanui saying to a high school student, “Hey, I see a lot of potential in you. Come and join the club, move in with me and I will train you.” A disciple means a student or learner, but the ancient understanding of student was very different to ours today. Our idea is that a student goes to school, is a consumer, consuming content. But the ancient idea of a student is that they go and live as a servant with their master, learn their way of life and agree to totally submit to their teaching. A Rabbi asked for nothing less than radical obedience. He had 3 instructions:

1. Be with him 24/7;
2. Do what he does;
3. Become like him in every way.

To be a chosen to be a disciple was an opportunity only the elite could dream of. Then Jesus comes to Andrew and Simon who were fishermen working in their family trade (Philip probably also worked as a fisherman, for they were all together and fishing when Jesus appeared to them in 21:2-8, following his resurrection).

This means they hadn't made the cut at school. Jesus says, “Come follow me”. Immediately they jump at the opportunity. It's not everyday a Rabbi walks up to you and invites you to become a disciple! They didn't want to miss the opportunity of a lifetime, so they dropped what they were doing and followed him. He said to them:

1. Be with him 24/7;
2. Do what he does;
3. Become like him in every way.

He asked for nothing less than radical obedience. Jesus says to you and I, ‘Follow me’ and asks for nothing less than radical obedience. All Christians are supposed to be disciples, but not all who profess to be Christians live as

disciples, because not all Christians obey Jesus with a radical obedience.

2. Serving rather than being served (13:1-17; see study 23).

3. Dying in order to live (12.24-26, see study 22).

4. Being a disciple making disciple

True disciples are both followers of Jesus and fishers of men (Mark 1:17). The good news is that making disciples is fairly easy. Making disciples is more about intentionality than technique. You simply bring people along in your walk with Jesus. Discipleship means teaching others to read the Bible the way you read it, pray the way you pray, and tell people about Jesus the way you do. If you have Christian habits in your life worth imitating, you can be a disciple-maker. It doesn't require years of training. You just teach others to follow Christ as you follow him.

An incredibly effective disciple maker was asked by a pastor to share his discipleship strategy. The pastor was expecting a fancy curriculum with a silver-bullet technique. Instead, he sent him a list of verse references he had typed out. He explained that he gives this list to the person he's trying to bring to faith and asks them to read the verses and then write out on a sheet of paper what they think each verse means and what God might be saying to them through it. He then meets with them the next week to discuss their answers. After that, he said, he asks them if they want to read a book of the Bible together and do the same thing. That was it. No secret sauce.

Yet just about every time there is a baptism at his church, that discipler has somebody represented in the lineup—either from him directly or through someone he's led to Christ who is now bringing someone else to Christ.

4

Go read:

John 2:1-12

Bible Study 4

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: What sorts of opinions do people have of Jesus?

Jesus is portrayed in paintings and movies as a pretty supermodel, who is so effeminate that you can't tell whether he is a bloke or a girl, with long permed hair, which has been coloured, looking like a cross between Ghandi and the Bee Gees, has soft skin and wears a dress and matching sandals, sometimes with a gold sash which makes him look like a Miss Universe contestant. And he is playing with the rabbits and the squirrels. He is presented as a goody-goody prude who doesn't like to have fun and doesn't want anyone else to have any fun. He looks like he has never done a hard day's work in his life, the kind of guy who gets sand kicked in his face down at the beach and then cries about it and goes home and tells his mum. Who would want to follow someone like that? It's hard to worship a guy that your mum can beat up. There is a website which lets you dress Jesus up in Lady Gaga outfits. You can dress him in her Kermit dress and cigarette glasses while he hangs on the cross. I mean c'mon! Who thought of that?

Some people believe he was just a good moral teacher, a healer, one of the prophets, but not the Son of God.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the social significance of the wedding celebration running out of wine?

Historians tell us that wedding celebrations in the 1st c lasted a week. Many people walked 100km to a wedding, which would take days, and if all they give you when you arrive, is a sausage roll, a cup of tea and say, 'Thanks for coming', you wouldn't be impressed. The hosts have to turn it on for a week. The responsibility for supplying the food and drink lay with the groom's family. So to run out of wine was a terrible embarrassment. 'They couldn't afford to buy enough wine. I'm glad I'm not marrying into that family.' Imagine having to go out to face all the guests and tell them 'For the rest of the week we'll be drinking 'Mount Franklin mineral water 2021'.

Q: What does Jesus mean when he says, 'My hour has not yet come'?

Calling his mum 'woman' sounds rude to our ears. In his culture he's not being rude but he is mildly rebuking his mother, like 'Mu-um my hour has not yet come' (v4). We will find out later in John's biography of Jesus that '*hour*' refers to Jesus' death, the event at which Jesus accomplishes what he has come to do. But his hour had not yet come because at this point Jesus did not want to reveal publically his true identity as the Messiah. He knew that if he did, the revolutionaries would try to make him their leader in order to overthrow the Romans by force (as they try in ch 6), but he knew that that was not his Father's plan. That way would only save one nation for a temporary amount of time. Jesus came to save all nations for all eternity. And that could only be possible by dying on the cross.

But that time had not yet come. It would come at a time that his Father determined.

Q: What is the significance of the ceremonial washing jars (v6)?

Q: Why did Jesus turn the water into wine? Is he telling us that we should drink more wine? Was it just a cool party trick?

Q: We are told this was the first of Jesus' signs. What is a sign? What do Jesus' signs point to?

If you're not from America or you are under 50yo, you probably have no idea what a gallon is, right? Google tells me that 1 gallon is just under 4L, so each jar holds about 100L, and the 6 jars altogether contained about 600L. The water jars were used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, which as their tradition understood it, was required, not to get rid of germs but in order to prevent them becoming unclean before God. So they washed cups and utensils and their hands ritualistically and especially if they touched someone who wasn't Jewish.

Jesus turns the water into 600L of wine – 800 bottles of the very best wine. That is a massive amount of wine. And not the cheap wine named after a bird or a gun but the kind bearing a foreign name most Australians can't pronounce because it is not spelled V-B. Jesus' miracle was a sign. And the important thing about a sign is not the sign itself, but what it points to, what it signifies. Jesus' signs point beyond themselves to deeper realities. When we see the signs of Jesus we shouldn't just say, 'Wow look at that sign', but, 'Wow what does that point to?' The word 'sign' is at times mistranslated 'miraculous sign'. But John doesn't use the word miraculous. It's not the supernatural nature of the sign that is important, but what it is pointing to. Sure, you see the power of God displayed but that is not the point of it, rather the significance of the signs in John as we will

see, is that Jesus is the Son of God who comes to take away the sins of the world and by believing in him you might have life in his name (20:31).

Notice Jesus doesn't say, 'Can I get everyone's attention. They've run out of wine and I'm going to create 600L of the stuff without treading on one grape. Sit back and be amazed.' No, he does it quietly in the background, so even the MC doesn't know about it. Why? Because his time had not yet come to show himself as the Messiah, and because he wants the family to enjoy the wedding. If Jesus had made a fuss the family would have been so embarrassed, the groom would have looked like a schmuck, the bride would have cried, her makeup would have run and the photos would have been terrible. Jesus wants them to enjoy their wedding. It's over the top generosity.

The ceremonial water jars in this story represent the old order of Jewish customs, and the new wine which was superior to anything that had been served before, represents the new age which Jesus is bringing in. Jesus is saying, 'I have come to replace the old with something far better. I have come to bring you into a far closer relationship with God than you currently know. There is no more need for your old customs of washing to make yourself acceptable to God because I have come to make you clean. I have come to bring new life –superior to anything else'.



Digging Deeper

Q: We are told that through this sign Jesus' disciples saw his 'glory'. What glory did they see?

When Jesus turns the water to wine his disciples see his glory, his greatness. Remember in ch 1 we saw that Jesus' glory was his grace and truth. In this particular situation of a wedding where the groom faces the reality of being unable to cater to his guests because the wine has run out, Jesus reveals his glory, his generosity, his grace, his mercy, his kindness, his faithfulness, by providing 600L of wine, superior to any wine that had come before. In Jewish thought, wine is a symbol of joy and celebration. A common Jewish saying was '*There is no rejoicing without wine*' (Pesah 109a). In the Old Testament the prophets spoke of a coming heaven when wine would flow liberally: "*The days are coming,*" declares the LORD, "*when ... New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills*" (Amos 9:13). In the Old Testament the pictures of the future heaven are really earthy: it's food and wine and celebration and it's all laid on.



Reflecting Further

A guy called Reg Mombasa is the artist for the Mambo clothing line. One of his paintings is called 'Pies and Beer Jesus', a parody of Jesus feeding the 5000.

VIEW THIS LINK:

<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/99712579226660136/?autologin=true>

I reckon many Australians would warm to 'Pie and Beer' Jesus. Not just because he hands out free pies and beer - it's what they symbolise: a God who knows what's best for us and wants what's best for us and gives it to us. Imagine a god who knows what's best for you and wants to give you that and wants you to taste his generosity. That's a God worth listening to. That's the God of the Bible, seen most clearly in Jesus.

Q: Jesus is much closer to the pies and beer Australian Jesus than to the Jesus a lot of institutional religion often shows us. Discuss.

Mombasa taps into our Aussie culture which values spirituality but rejects religion. Aussies generally have no time for religious rituals or strange buildings doing strange things that don't engage at all. For many Australians Jesus is a distant, irrelevant figure. Mombasa is saying that Pies and Beer Jesus is the kind of Jesus that Australians would warm to.

The real Jesus is much more like pies and beer Jesus than the picture you'll often get from institutional religion where you come away thinking that Jesus has come to suck the joy out of life. The opposite is true.

5

Go read:

John 2:13-25

Bible Study 5

C

Context

O

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Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: When Christianity first arose in the world it was not called a religion and the first Christians were called 'athiests'. Why do you think that was?

Believe it or not when Christianity first arose it was not called a religion. Imagine the neighbours of early Christians asking them about their faith: 'Where's your temple?' The Christians reply: 'We don't have a temple'. 'But how can that be? Where do your priest's do their work?' 'We don't have priests.' 'But where are the sacrifices made to please your gods?' 'We don't make sacrifices. Jesus himself was the temple to end all temples, the priests to end all priests and the sacrifice to ends all sacrifices'. No one had ever heard anything like this, so the Romans called them 'athiests', because what they were saying about spiritual reality was unique and could not be classified with other religions of the world.

This irony should not be lost on us. To most people in our society Christianity is all about religion and rituals and rules and regulations. But from the beginning it was not so. Christianity was recognised as something else entirely.



Digging Deeper

Q: What was the significance of the temple in the Jewish religion?

The temple was the emblem of Jewish identity, both national and religious. The original temple built by King Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians and then rebuilt by Zerubbabel. Herod completed a renovation project on it not long before Jesus' coming. The inner part of the temple was called the sanctuary and consisted of three courts: the court of women, the court of Israelites and the Great Court which housed the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies where sacrifices to Yahweh were made for the remission of sins. Yahweh's presence actually resided in the Holy of Holies, the one place on the planet where God 'met' with his people – that is He met with the High Priest on behalf of the people. The sanctuary was surrounded by a marble wall which separated it from the Gentile court which was an open-air quadrangle open to Gentiles so they could come and pray in the temple- in the outermost furthest court of the temple, but in the temple. No Gentile was allowed inside the wall. By each gate there were inscriptions which read: 'No foreigner may enter within the railing and enclosure that surround the Temple. Anyone apprehended shall have only himself to blame for his consequent death.' Friendly church -not!

Q: What was the Jewish Passover (v13)?

Q: Jesus enters the temple and he's not happy with what he sees (v14-16). Why?



Digging Deeper

Q: Why does Jesus act the way he does?

Jesus enters the temple and he's incensed by what he sees. The temple had been turned into a Bali market. 'I give you good price. Special price, morning price'. The temple was full of moneychangers and merchants selling animals. They had set up shop there so they could do business with the thousands and thousands of pilgrims who came to make sacrifices in the temple at Passover. Passover commemorated God's great rescue of his people Israel from the hand of Pharaoh 1500y previously when Yahweh's angel of death passed over all the houses of Israel that had the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, but killed the first born in the Egyptian houses that did not (see Ex. 11-12). The Passover was one of 3 Jewish feasts that all Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem to celebrate, so large numbers of worshippers from outlying areas filled the capital. The selling of these sacrifices in the temple provided a convenient service for the Jews coming from far away as they were able to buy their sacrifices on site rather than leading them or carrying them all the way from home. Imagine carrying a bull on your back all the way from Galilee! So the market was set up.

Those exchanging money were also providing a service. When pilgrims got to the temple they had to pay the temple tax. But you had to pay the tax in temple currency, the shekel, which meant everyone had to change their money, and so there were money changers charging outrageous exchange rates. The temple had had rules that prohibited trading within its walls and until AD 30 this business had been solely located some distance from the temple on the Mount of Olives.

But Caiaphas the High Priest had recently permitted these traders access to the Gentile court, and so the whole money making enterprise would be under his control and he and the temple leaders would get a nice cut of the takings. Temple sacrifice was big business. e.g. the year the temple was completed 255,600 lambs were sacrificed for Passover. That's a massive money spinner. So the court of the Gentiles had become a Bali market, animals everywhere, pooping in the Gentile court, money changers ripping people off. The temple's purpose was for prayer and reverence and instead of this there is the baaing of sheep and the bellowing of cattle. They were putting money and business before piety and contrition. By setting up in the court of Gentiles they have excluded Gentiles who might have come wanting to pray in the only place open to them. The Jewish religious leaders were robbing the Gentiles of their worship of God, which is insensitive at best and religious arrogance at worst. Jesus sees what is going on and so responds forcefully.

Q: In this event Jesus is fulfilling a whole lot of Old Testament Scriptures. What are they and what is the significance of the event?

Jesus is here fulfilling a whole lot of OT Scriptures:
Zech 14.21: 'And on that day there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the LORD Almighty'. Malachi 3¹ '...suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; ...² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap'.

When Jesus drove the animals out and stopped the exchange of money he was making it impossible for the sacrifices to continue. It was a sign that he is the long awaited Messiah, and that he has authority over the temple and over the religious leaders. It was a sign that the old way of being reconciled to God and worshipping him was coming to an end - no holy man and no holy place would be needed. The disciples were confused but they understood Jesus' actions from the Old Testament (v17). The Old Testament interpreted Jesus' actions to them.



Digging Deeper

Q: Historians record that 18000 people were employed to build the temple and it took almost 50y to build. How is Jesus going to get an army of workmen and all the materials required and raise it in 3 days (v19)?

Q: What does Jesus mean that he will raise the temple in 3 days?

The temple authorities had every right to question Jesus' credentials for taking such drastic actions (v18). Only someone with divine authority could do what he did. They were asking for some sort of miraculous display as proof that he indeed had this divine authority. ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*" Historians record that 18000 people were employed to build the temple and it took half a century to build. How is Jesus going to get an army of workmen, all the materials required and rebuild it in 3 days? Impossible!!

Anyone who could restore the temple in 3 days after its destruction must be one with the power and authority to say what can and can't occur in the temple.

Jesus will be the temple replacement. Clearly they didn't understand him and his disciples didn't understand until after the resurrection either, (v21-22).

It was Jesus' body, God in the flesh, which was the living abode of God on the earth, and the centre of all true worship. The temple pointed forward to a better and final meeting point between God and human beings. Jesus replaces the temple, fulfilling its purposes. In this temple the ultimate Passover sacrifice would be given and within 3 days the true temple would rise from the dead.

Q: Why would Jesus not entrust himself to the people who saw his signs and believed in him (v23-25)?

Even though it is through Jesus' signs that Jesus reveals his glory, to believe in Jesus just because of miracles is precarious. That kind of faith is spurious and Jesus knew it. While Jesus' disciples see in his signs a reflection of God's glory, the very same signs reveal the hardening of the Jewish leaders in their rejection of Israel's Messiah. According to the Old Testament, God knows people's hearts and motivations, so Jesus here is held up as someone with divine power who knows the hearts of people. He did not entrust himself to these spurious converts. He will entrust himself to those who truly believe in him, not those who are just impressed with the miracles.



Reflecting Further

Q: What do the 2 events in chapter 2 share in common?

The 2 events in chapter 2 share in common the replacement of the old way of worshipping God – ceremonial washing, temple worship and sacrifice - with a new way, through the Messiah Jesus Christ.

6

Go read:

John 3:1-15

Bible Study 6

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

A Christian woman named Jan was relaxing in a hotel spa when 2 teenagers got in. One of the teens started telling her friend about a Wicca gathering she was planning to go to (Wiccans believe in many gods and a mother goddess. Their religion includes the use of herbal magic and witchcraft.) Jan said to the teen, 'Wow, you really sound excited about this!' This was all the encouragement the teen needed and she launched into a 5 minute explanation of why she was so attracted to Wiccan pagan rituals. The bottom line was that she'd had a really traumatic time in high school and the Wiccans accepted her. She said, "I've gone through so much stuff just trying to make it through high school that I'll probably be in therapy for the rest of my life!" Jan said, "It sounds like it's hard for you to even imagine a future where you'd be free from all of the pain you've gone through". What came next completely floored Jan. With a film of tears starting to form in her eyes and with complete sincerity in her voice, the teenage girl said, "Sometimes I wish I could be born all over again. I'd really like to start over from scratch."

**Q: What do you think of the teenage girl's wish?
Is this possible? How?**

It was Jesus who first said, "*You must be born again*", but the phrase has been hijacked by people who use it in a way that Jesus never meant, so it has been emptied of its meaning. Let's find out what Jesus means.



Digging Deeper

**Q: Nicodemus who came to see Jesus was a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish ruling council (v1).
Who were the Pharisees and what did they believe?**

The ruling council was Israel's Parliament, Supreme Court and Vatican all rolled into one. Israel was under Roman military occupation but Rome permitted the Jews to worship their God according to their tradition, and permitted the ruling council to govern their promised land, as long as everyone kept the peace and paid their taxes, and so the ruling council closely guarded their position of authority. The Pharisees were highly respected law experts. They were very moral, very devout. They made a solemn vow that they would devote every moment of their entire lives to obeying the laws of Moses – all 613. And they believed if they did they would receive eternal life. As if 613 were not enough, they created additional lists of rituals to observe and behaviors to avoid, to ensure they didn't break any of the laws accidentally. And Nick was one of the leaders. He was the equivalent of a judge on the supreme court. He was at the top of the tree. He was the type of person you'd want your daughter to marry. If there were a category of "good citizen" he was certainly in it.

Q: What is the significance of Nicodemus coming to see Jesus at night (v2)?

We are not told why he went at night, but since John includes this detail it is safe to assume it had a purpose. He went at night, so he wouldn't be seen. Why? News had been trickling into Jerusalem from the rural backwater of Galilee about a remarkable new rabbi. His teaching style was enthralling. He spoke with authority: *'You've heard it said, but I say to you.'* He turned water to wine! But there were disturbing reports as well: He had created a massive stir in the temple during the Passover feast. He upended the moneychangers' tables, and he made a whip and drove out the merchants selling Passover sacrifices, both of whom were operating under the authority of the High Priest.

He challenged the very fabric of the Jewish religion and society saying he could forgive people their sins without the need for the customary Jewish sacrifices. The crowds of people following Jesus were growing and growing in number and some had uttered the M word: Messiah. Anyone claiming to be the Messiah became a person of interest to the ruling council. Like every faithful Jew, Nic lived with the hope that God's Messiah would appear in his lifetime. He had grown up with stories of a warrior king who would be like a 1st c Arnold Schwarzenegger and lead the Jews to blow away the Romans and regain their position as a military and economic power house. But Jesus didn't fit that mold. So then how could he do the things he was doing? The people were looking to the leaders for direction: 'Is he or isn't he?' Whether Nicodemus acted on his own or on behalf of the ruling council, we can't know for certain. But he goes to see Jesus at night, in secret, not wanting to be seen associating with the one who had vandalised the temple.

Nic is maybe not unlike many of us. We are impressed by Jesus, by His miracles: walking on water, turning water to wine. But we are unsure of what others might think of us if we are interested in this Jesus stuff.

In 1:4-5 John wrote of Jesus, *'In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.'* Nicodemus comes at night, in the darkness and is about to discover that there is much that he didn't understand.



Digging Deeper

Q: Jesus says, “*I tell you the truth*” (v3). Why does he say this?

Because our world is full of lies, and it’s hard to know what the truth is. But Jesus always tells the truth. Jesus is saying, ‘You may not understand everything I say, you may not yet see things the way God does. But trust me. This is the truth.’

Q: What did Nicodemus understand Jesus meant when he said, ‘You must be born again’ (v3,7)?

Q: What did Jesus mean?

Jesus says, “*Nic, the fundamental reality of life is this - listen very carefully: “no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” This is not optional. This is essential.*” The word translated “again” is from a Greek word that can also be translated “from above”. ‘*You must be born from above*’, in other words from heaven.’ Born again, born from above— either way, Jesus was suggesting a second birth of some sort.

Nic is thrown by Jesus’ answer. You can see Nick now, stepping back, confused. Light was shining in the darkness. And it was blinding. Puzzling. Unsettling. Nothing Jesus was saying fitted into Nic’s worldview. If Jesus had stopped after the word ‘born’ everything would have made sense. Nic had been taught from a young age that Jews and Jews alone were born into God’s kingdom. Citizenship in the Kingdom of God was the birthright of every descendant of Abraham. For anyone else to join, they had to convert to Judaism. This involved a process of schooling in the Hebrew Scriptures, an acceptance of the commandments and a washing of purification. For men it also required you to drop your pants and go under the knife and be circumcised without an anaesthetic! That was the tough one. Only then could a Gentile become a citizen of God’s kingdom.

But “Born again”? This was new. Nic is like, “*You know, I don’t think my mum is going to go for that. My mum would be like, ‘I worked so hard to get you out the first time, you’re not climbing back in’*”. I can’t remember being born the 1st time, but seeing my kids born I don’t think it would be much fun the 2nd time around: 9 months locked up in the dark, drinking your own wee-wee doesn’t sound like much fun. And there would be no room for an X-Box. And your head comes out all funny at the end. What a animal would cause the most uncomfortable 2nd birth for their mother? How about a rhinoceros being born again? Or a porcupine? I reckon Jesus smiled at Nic’s question. But Jesus was saying “Nic, your religious beliefs are not enough. They cannot bring you any closer to Heaven! Nic, being a descendant of Abraham is not enough. It cannot bring you any closer to Heaven! Nic, your morality is not enough. It cannot bring you any closer to Heaven!’ This wasn’t just different; this smacked of blasphemy. Nicodemus didn’t understand.



Digging Deeper

Q: Is being born again something we do or something done to us? Discuss.

Q: Why does Jesus use the analogy of the wind to explain being ‘born again’?

Some people say, 'I'm a Christian, but I'm not one of those "Born agains'. There is no such thing as a Christian who is not born again! Being born again means being spiritually reborn. It is a spiritual birth from above, from God. Nic asks 'What do I need to do to enter the Kingdom of God? Do I need to be more devout? Do I need to be more moral?' Jesus says, 'No, its not what you do, it's what God's Spirit does'. We didn't contribute to our physical birth and we don't contribute to our spiritual birth. It's the work of God's Spirit.

Being born again is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in which he gives spiritual birth to us so that we are new creations. Being born again occurs before our conversion, and causes us to respond to God in faith and repentance. Being born again and conversion come so close together that it seems to us that they are happening at the same time, but we need to be born again before we can believe and enter the kingdom. Elsewhere in the New Testament being born again is also called 'regeneration' (e.g. Titus 3:5). Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious, like the wind (v8). One moment we were spiritually dead, then the next moment we have new spiritual life from the Holy Spirit. It's an instantaneous change but we don't always know exactly when it occurs. For children growing up in a Christian home there may not be a dramatic moment of change but there is a miraculous change nonetheless and the changes become evident over time in desires and behaviors that are pleasing to God. In other cases regeneration takes place at a clearly recognizable time. It's like a switch gets flipped - your attitude to God changes overnight.

Before I was born again Jesus was pretty much a swear word and if anyone talked about him I was like, 'Ahh no thanks' and I would walk away. But suddenly after I was born again if someone was talking about Jesus I was like, 'Tell me more. I want to hear more about him.' And if anyone used Jesus' name as a swear word I'm like, 'Ahh No thanks'. Before I was born again I would avoid hanging out with Christians because I thought they were weird. A good time for them was getting up early on a Sunday morning to read a 4000yo ancient document. But then I became a Christian and I'm like, 'That sounds like a cool way to spend a weekend!' I joined every Bible Study I could go to at my church: Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night Thursday night, Sunday after church. They were like 'not you again.' I don't know exactly what happened but one moment I did not trust in Christ for salvation and I was still wondering and questioning in my mind. But the next moment I realized that I did trust in Christ. Something happened in my heart. I was born again.



Digging Deeper

Q: Jesus says that Nicodemus should have understood this. Why (v10)?

Q: What does it mean to be '*born of water and the spirit*' (v5)?

With all his education, with all his knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, Nic didn't get it. Jesus tells Nic, "*It's in the Scriptures. But you missed it.*" What is Jesus talking about? In Ezekiel 36:25 the prophets speak of being born again: "²⁵ *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.* ²⁶ *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*" 700y before Jesus, the prophet speaks of being born of the Spirit but Nic didn't understand what it meant.

To be "*born of water*" refers to our first birth, our physical birth. A baby is surrounded by a sac of water (we now call this sac of water amniotic fluid) and this water 'breaks' when the baby is born. Jesus is saying that if a person wants to enter the kingdom of God, they need a spiritual birth subsequent to their physical birth. The Jews believed that their birth into the line of Abraham – their Jewish pedigree - was what qualified them for the kingdom of God. Jesus says, 'No. Everyone must be born a second time, have a spiritual birth, in order to enter the kingdom of God.'

Q: What is Jesus implying when he says that.

"¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven— the Son of Man?"

Now things are getting completely out of control. Jesus is claiming to have come from heaven. Nicodemus accepted that Jesus was sent by God, came from God, but literally came from heaven? This claim was out of control. The English Standard Version translates the verse as, "*No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.*" No-one can ascend to heaven, that is no-one can earn their way there. God has given us his Son from heaven, to bring us to heaven.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of Moses lifting the snake in the wilderness in relation to believing in Jesus?

Jesus turns to an Old Testament story he knew Nic would also know: ¹⁴*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert...* Every Jew knew this story, God rescues the Israelites from Pharaoh and the Egyptian army by mightily parting the Red Sea, but the Israelites sin against God and so they have to wander in the desert for 40y. While they are in the desert they sin against God again and ⁶*the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.* ⁷*The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.* ⁸*The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."* ⁹*So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived." (Num. 21:6-9).*

That is one of the more unusual stories in the Old Testament but Jesus says, "That's what it's like with me." ¹⁴*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,* ¹⁵*that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life".* This was more than Nic had bargained for. Nic is like: *"I must have misunderstood. Everyone knows that God gives good things to good people. Eternal life is a good thing. God must grant eternal life to people who are good and keep the Torah. That's the way it's always been."* *There's no mention of the Law, the temple, or offering a sacrifice. "Could I have been wrong my entire life? Surely he doesn't mean 'everyone who believes'. Surely he means those who have been born into the line of Abraham?"*

As foreign as this may have been for Nic, there had to have been something liberating about it as well. For Nic knew as hard as he tried to keep God's law perfectly, he failed. If eternal life was reserved for the truly good, even a man as devout as him may not make the cut.

Now Nic couldn't possibly foresee at this stage that when Jesus said he must be lifted up he was talking about being lifted up on a cross and being crucified. He couldn't possibly foresee that it was necessary for the Messiah to die to bring the eternal life he promised. But after Jesus' death and resurrection, in an instant, those parts of the sacred Scriptures that had confused Nicodemus and other Hebrew scholars for generations became penetratingly clear, as did Jesus' words. Eternal life isn't a reward for good people, it's God's gift to forgiven people when they look to Christ. This was the light: "*Look to Christ for eternal life*". And the light accentuated the darkness of the graceless religion of Nic and his fellow Jews⁴.



Reflecting Further

Before he was a Christian, arguably the greatest English speaking preacher of all time Charles Spurgeon, was caught in a snowstorm when he was out walking one Sunday morning, and took refuge in a Methodist Chapel. The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed in. Instead one of the church members, a shoemaker, got up to preach a sermon that changed Spurgeon's life. The text that morning was,—*"Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth"* (Is. 45:22). The shoemaker said: "My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look'. Now looking don't take a deal of pains. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' A man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. Look unto Christ. Many of you are looking to yourselves, but it's no use looking there. Jesus says: *'Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood.*

Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross.

Look unto Me; I am dead and buried.

Look unto Me; I rise again.

Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven.

Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand.

O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!

Look to Jesus Christ. You have nothing else to do but to look and live." Spurgeon said, "I saw at once the way of salvation. Like when the bronze serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. When I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, 'Trust Christ, and you shall be saved.' " ⁵

**Q: Have you been born again? Have you looked to Christ?
Discuss.**

7

Go read:

John 3:16-36

Bible Study 7

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: What beliefs/ideas do people have about what happens after we die?

E.g. Reincarnation is a Hindu-Tibetan belief in the transmigration of the soul of a person after death to another bodily existence. Rebirth is the Buddhist belief that the subconscious mind is reborn into an endless cycle of new existence after death, determined by one's actions in life (karma). Materialists believe all that exists is matter, so after you die you just become fertilizer.



Digging Deeper

Q: How would you explain the gospel to someone who didn't know anything about Jesus?

Q: John 3:16 has been described as the gospel 'in a nutshell'. Why do you think this is?

A large group of Christians were asked, "How would you explain the good news to someone who didn't know anything about Jesus? You have 2 minutes:'

The following elements were included in their explanations:

God (80% of people included this in their explanation);
sin (87%);
Jesus (93%);
death on the cross for sin (65%);
repentance (18%);
belief (16%);
forgiveness (32%);
eternal life (27%);
death/judgment (36%);
hell (0%).

As you can see the respondents were good on 'God', 'sin', 'Jesus' and 'death on the cross for sins'. The group was fairly weak on the required response to the gospel—'repentance' and 'belief'. And they were weak on the consequences of that response - 'forgiveness', 'eternal life' and 'death/judgement'. No-one included 'hell'.

The gospel has 3 important elements:

- i) good news of something that has been done for us
- ii) a summons that requires a response and
- iii) it has consequences.

John 3:16 tells the good news: God loves, God gave,

It informs us a response is required: we must believe.

And it tells us the consequences: we live and don't perish.

God loves, God gives, we believe, we live.

It's the gospel in 1 verse, 26 words. Short enough to write on a napkin, profound enough to turn lives upside down.⁶

The love of God in John 3:16 is 'so astounding that it should literally compel every believer to do at least two things: (1) to fall down and worship God for loving someone as undeserving as he, and (2) to get back up and tell everyone that he can about God's amazing love for a world that deserves only his condemnation'⁷.

Q: John uses the term the 'world' often in his gospel. What is he referring to?

In John's gospel the 'world' is quite a theme. The 'world' can just mean creation, *the whole world*, (21:25), i.e. completely neutral, with no moral overtones. But more commonly the world means the hostile world order, the created order in rebellion against its creator, (1:10, 29). The world is in opposition to God because of its sinfulness and therefore in opposition to Jesus.

'The world' hates Jesus because he testifies that its works are evil (7:7; 15:18). The world is the very home of sin, it deserves condemnation, it needs saving. That's why John 3:16 is such an extraordinary verse. God so loves the world in all its rebelliousness that he sent his only Son to die for the world. '...world in John does not so much refer to bigness as to badness... God's love in sending the Lord Jesus is to be admired not because it is extended to so big a thing as the world, but to so bad a thing; not to so many people, as to such a wicked people'.⁸



Digging Deeper

Q: What does it mean to 'perish' (v16)?

To perish means to die, but more than that it refers to what happens after you die - eternal destruction, to be separated from God's love in Hell. It's antithesis is 'eternal life', in the same verse.

Q: What is eternal life (v16)?

It is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (17:3). Not to know about him, but to know him. It is to be in a relationship whereby he knows you and you know him. Eternal life in the Scriptures is not so much everlastingness, the emphasis is not so much on the everness of it, although it is forever, eternal life is knowing the everlasting one. It's being in a relationship with the God who lasts forever, a relationship that will never be taken away from you.

Q: Why do people hate the light and love the darkness (v19-20)?

People want to do evil and do not want their deeds to be exposed.

Q: Who are those who come into the light (v21)?

Those who love the truth.

Q: Why do those who reject Jesus not see life, but stand condemned (v18)?

Jesus is the one way to salvation, the rescue boat that God has sent for us. Those who reject the rescue boat, reject the only means of salvation and so face the condemnation that their sins deserve and that Jesus came to save them from.



Reflecting Further

Q: What do you think of the claim: '*Know Christ, Know Life. No Christ, No Life*' (v36)?

Q: Which do you think is more divisive in the above claim: the positive statement or the negative statement?

Know Christ, Know Life is incredibly divisive. It presents to us what Jesus is actually claiming, that if you know him you will know life itself. The pun is when you put it the other way **No Christ, No life**, and when read this way, people really get offended, for it is saying if you do not have Christ you do not have life. Death is what you are now living, not life. Jesus is profoundly divisive. The very nature of the claims he is making, give you very little option apart from accepting him and giving your life wholeheartedly to him or rejecting him and living at enmity with him. The claims force us to judge him.

8

Go read:

John 4:1-42

Bible Study 8

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: People are often misled about their expectations of things in life, for example, that winning lotto will make you happy. When have your expectations turned out to be false expectations?

People are often misled about their expectations of Jesus. We saw this in ch 3 with Nicodemus and we see it again in ch 4. The characters we are introduced to have certain expectations and things turn out quite differently. John has given us the readers the right set of expectations in the prologue in ch 1:1-18, which the characters in the gospel were not privy to. So John's gospel is written for us at two levels: 1. It is written at the level of what actually happened, but what actually happened was a group of people not understanding what was happening and 2. the gospel writer is writing it in such a way that we the readers, we can understand what was happening, even though the original participants don't understand. We will rightly understand because we see people misunderstand.



Digging Deeper

Q: Who were the Samaritans?

Q: Why did Jesus have to go through Samaria (v4)?

Jesus you will notice in v4, '*had*' to go via Samaria. In one sense, he didn't have to go that way, he could have gone via Perea, it was a way you could go, in fact such was the dislike between Judeans and Samaritans, many Judeans did take that route and cross the Jordan twice to avoid going through Samaria.

But for some reason, we are not told exactly why, Jesus had to go through Samaria. We know by the end of the chapter that it was because of the Samaritan harvest that was coming in. Who are the Samaritans? To answer that we need to look back at the history of Israel: King David ruled all of Jerusalem and all of Israel. King Solomon, his son, ruled after him. When King Solomon died, he left his throne to King Rehoboam. Rehoboam greedily and defiantly raised taxes and caused a great revolt in the land, and the land was split between the 10 Northern tribes who went off with a man called Jeroboam, and the 2 Southern tribes who stayed loyal. You then go through a time of a couple of hundred years when there are 2 nations, Israel in the North and Judah in the South. In 721 B.C. the Assyrians come and destroy the North and in 586 B.C. the Babylonians come and destroy the South. However, the Babylonians and the Assyrians had 2 different methods of conquest. The Babylonians kept people together, and so they took the Jews into captivity in Babylon. When the Babylonians were subsequently defeated by the Persians, the Israelites were sent back by the Persians to recreate Judah. But the Assyrians had a different method of conquest: they divided everybody up and scattered them. So they scattered Israel all over the Assyrian empire including back into Israel. And so, in this Northern part, which included Galilee and Samaria, but particularly Samaria, there were people from all over the Assyrian empire, who intermarried with the Israelites - so they were disparagingly known as half-castes. The Samaritans continued as worshippers of Yahweh, but only acknowledged the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures and built a temple at Mt. Gerazim which they believed was the original Holy Place of Israel, the chosen place to worship God, from the time that Joshua conquered Canaan.

The Jews of Judah, the Judeans, saw themselves as superior, as the true blue Jews, the pure people in the capital with the true temple at Mount Moriah, the centre of Judaism and the guardians of what was authentic. They hated the Samaritans, hated them because they were half-castes, hated them because of their false worship, hated them because they didn't acknowledge the prophets. And so in 128 B.C. the Jews went up to Mt. Gerazim and burnt the temple down. The Samaritans avenged, by offering up some pigs - which were unclean and defiling in Jewish understanding - in the temple in Jerusalem and so there was bad blood between the Jews and Samaritans for hundreds of years. The Samaritans are still alive today, there are about 800 of them at last count. Because of their inbreeding and small gene pool there has been a history of genetic disorders within the group.



Digging Deeper

Q: What did the woman of Samaria misunderstand about the '*living water*' that Jesus speaks of (v11)?

Jesus breaks out of expectations, because as he travels through Samaria, he sits with the woman and starts talking to her. She is surprised he talks with her, because Jews do not associate with Samaritans, and his disciples are surprised (v27). But here in this dialogue with this woman is a whole series of examples of her misunderstanding the situation she is in. Here is a thirsty man who has no water to give, and yet he offers her water. Here is man who claims to be a descendent of Jacob as she is a descendent of Jacob, and she is at Jacob's well, and he claims to have more water than Jacob provided from his well, even though he is thirsty.

The water he offers is living water, she would like some of this living water, but notice why (v15). Her private life she considered to be private, but in fact Jesus knows all about it. She sees that he is a prophet and thinks he might be able to solve the age-old dispute as to whether the temple should be on Mt. Gerazim or on Mt. Jerusalem. She thinks the time of the Messiah is in the future, though in fact the Messiah is standing right in front of her. We know who Jesus really is, she doesn't, she just meets this Jew who is thirsty, who is out of place, who is talking to a woman he shouldn't be talking to. She doesn't see that this is the Messiah, she doesn't see that this is the prophet, the one who has come to give living water, the one that will feed her eternal life, she doesn't understand any of those things, so all she does is open her mouth to change feet. Jesus gently leads her to the living water he has to offer, new life, eternal life, being born again.

Q: In his gospel, John uses the character's misunderstandings and understandings to reveal to us the truth.

What do we learn about:

- i) The place of the temple in Christian worship?**
- ii) Who Jesus is?**
- iii) God's timetable for his Messiah to be revealed?**
- iv) The nature of belief?**

1. Today around the world, people try and worship God, externally in ritualistic, cultic, symbolic fashion, but God is to be worshipped in Spirit. The temple of God is the Christian person in whom the Spirit of God dwells. The rain shelters you put your body in, the sunshades in which you sit in order that you are able to concentrate on the sermon, have got nothing to do with being the house of God. The house of God is the person of God, is the people of God in whom the Spirit of God lives.

2. Who is Jesus? He is revealed to us as the prophet (v19, v44); as the Christ (v25, 26, 29), as the saviour of the world (v42). He is never off the stage, he dominates the gospel and the question you are confronted with is, who do you think Jesus is? Are you foolish like the Galileans, are you foolish like the Judeans, or are you wise like the Samaritans, of all people. Who do you think Jesus is?

3. There is a timetable that is operating. Jesus says in 1:51, '*You will see the Son of Man*', and in 2:4 '*My hour has not yet come*'. In 2:19 he says the temple will be raised up. In 3:14 he says that the Son of Man must be lifted up in the future. Now in Ch 4 he '*had*' to go through Samaria. In v21-24 he talks about a time that is coming, a time that is right upon them, a time when a new age of spiritual worship will replace the physical worship of the old age. God is working his purposes out to his timetable.

4. We are told right back in the prologue (v12), that to believe is the right way to respond. But belief is not a simple thing. There is true belief and false belief. And believing in the signs is frequently false belief, at least inadequate belief. Nathanael believed because he discovered that Jesus knew he was under the fig tree. Jesus said, '*You are impressed by that? You haven't seen anything yet*'. Many in Jerusalem and Galilee believe because they see miracles, but they are not true believers. Real belief comes from the Word of God. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God, hearing and understanding who Jesus is.

Why do the Samaritans believe? Not because they saw his miracles, but because they believed his word. In the first place they came because of the woman's testimony, but they stayed and believed because they heard his word (v41). And what did they believe? They believed he was the saviour of the world. He was the Messiah, not just for the Jews, he was the Messiah for the Samaritans as well. The Judeans and the Galileans were not getting the point, but the Samaritans, the ancient enemies of the Jews, they saw his glory, they acknowledged who he was.



Digging Deeper

Q: What did Jesus mean when he said, *'the hour is coming, and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth'* (v24)?

In 4:21-24 Jesus talks of a time that is coming, a time that is right upon them, a time when a new age of spiritual worship will replace the physical worship of the old age. We the readers know that what Jesus said in ch 2 has come true. The temple, which is his body, has been destroyed and raised again on the third day so that he has made the temple building unnecessary. Yet around the world today, people try and worship God externally in cultic, ritualistic fashion, in a holy place led by a holy man, but God is not to be worshipped that way, God is to be worshipped in Spirit, for God himself is spirit. True believers are to worship with sincerity of heart, but it can't only be with sincerity because people can be sincerely wrong, so it also needs to be 'in truth'. The temple of God now is the believer in whom the Spirit of God dwells.



Digging Deeper

Q: What did the disciples misunderstand about the food that Jesus is to eat (v33)?

Q: What is the '*harvest*' Jesus speaks of (v35)?

Jesus' own disciples don't understand either, they're confused about Jesus' unwillingness to eat. He says, '*I have food that you know nothing about.*' (v32). And they're trying to think it through just like the woman is trying to think it through. We the readers have been through the conversation with the woman already, so we get that 'here we go again' feeling. They think he is talking about human food (v33), but he is talking about divine food (v34), the work the Father has given him.

What would the disciples have thought Jesus meant by the '*harvest*'? Perhaps, 'We know the harvest will arrive in a few months, we can't see any harvest now, all we can see are the Samaritans'. But the Samaritans are the harvest, they are the harvest of God.

For 7-800 years, the Samaritans, who were once the people of God, had been living outside God and his Kingdom, and now at last they are coming in huge numbers. Jesus sees the harvest, the disciples just see a bunch of Samaritans. The irony explains to us who Jesus is, what he is on about. He is not on about bread, Jesus' bread is the work of the harvest that is right there amongst them.



Reflecting Further

Q: Do you worship God in '*spirit and in truth*'? What does that look like in your life?

Q: Do you have the living water that Jesus spoke of?

9

Go read:

John 4:43-5:30

Bible Study 9

C

Context

Handwriting lines for Context

O

Observation

Handwriting lines for Observation

M

Meaning

Handwriting lines for Meaning

A

Application

Handwriting lines for Application



Kicking Off

Q: What would the media response be to someone who could heal people today like Jesus did 2000y ago?



Digging Deeper

Q: Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own hometown (v44), however when he arrives in Galilee his hometown, he is welcomed. What do you make of this?

Q: Who are the 'true believers' in Ch 4 and who are the 'false believers'?

Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own hometown. Therefore, what are we expecting when he arrives in Galilee? We are expecting that Jesus will be rejected. So what happens? *'They welcomed him'* (v45). It should have been that Galilee didn't welcome him. Now, you have a couple of options here: Jesus was a false prophet, they would always accept a false prophet. Or the Galilee welcome is not a true welcome. What had he done at the Passover feast? He had cleansed the temple and then done some miracles, and notice what was said back in 2:23-24? We have been warned by John, that people who believe because of miracles are not people that Jesus trusts.

And now we are meeting up with a whole bunch of Galileans who are welcoming their 'homeboy' as a true prophet. And why do they think he is a true prophet? Because they have seen the miracles. If they believed because of miracles their belief is not trustworthy. The word miracles does not occur in the book of John, it is put there by modern translators, but there is one place where the word miracles or something like it occurs and it is here in v48, with that little word 'wonders'. 'You people are wonder worshippers, you are wonder desirers, you are wonder believers, you are miracle believers. That's why you are accepting me as the true prophet'. And you can rest assured, that in the coming pages in the gospel, Jesus is going to be rejected in Galilee, because a true prophet has no honour in his own hometown. And so we know it is going to come, that although they are flocking to him at the moment because of the miracles, in due time they will turn their backs on him. The only reason they believe in him is because of miracles. So we see Jesus doing miracles, knowing that the participants misunderstand, because they do not look for the miracles' significance, but just look at the externals. They are missing the point of what the miracles are about, because they're missing the point of who Jesus is and what he is about.

The Royal official (v47) heard about Jesus and he was desperate because his little child was sick. He was so desperate that he really wasn't paying attention to what Jesus was saying (v48). Jesus is entering into a theological discussion with him about belief and the official says, 'Just come down before my child dies, I can't take in what you are saying, come and save my child.' And so Jesus sends him on his way. And the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him. This is true belief. This man believes, not because he saw a miracle, the miracle hasn't happened yet, this man believes because of the word.

When you believe the word you are a true believer, when you believe the miracle you may or may not be a true believer. And then when he goes home he hears when the miracle took place. When did the miracle take place? When the word was spoken. His belief is a belief in the word.



Digging Deeper

Q: These miracles performed by Jesus are jaw-dropping. What is the historical evidence they actually happened?

It was common in the 19thc in the academic world to ridicule the Bible, to say it's just a myth, a legend, all made up. Most scholars dismissed this event in John 5 as an unhistorical literary creation because there was no pool that had ever been excavated with five covered colonnades (v2) —a feature suggesting a 5 sided pool. But in the late 19thc an excavation site near the temple found the remains of a double pool separated by a gangway, and covered colonnades ran around the 4 edges of the pool and over the gangway in the middle, making 5 covered colonnades. Over and over again people have disparaged the historical reliability of the Bible only to find in subsequent archaeological discoveries that the Bible is consistent with what is found.

Q: What were the sick hoping for by lying next to the pool (v3)?

There was a superstitious belief that this pool had healing properties. The water occasionally bubbled up, perhaps from an under-ground spring, and people superstitiously believed it was an angel stirring up the waters and that the 1st person to enter the pool after the disturbance would be healed.

Q: What does Jesus' miracle tell us (v5-9)?

This is a jaw-dropping miracle. Doctors today cannot fix a spinal cord. Once it's broke it can't be fixed. But 'Bam!' Jesus says a few words and the man is healed. He walks and carries his mat after 38y of paralysis. Now a man who has lied around for 38y, his muscles would be so wasted, even if he could get up to walk it would take months and months of rehab to move properly. But he is healed with no rehab, no physio. This is unheard of. The miracles of Jesus are a foretaste of heaven, when there will be no more sickness, pain or death. They demonstrate that he is who he says he is. Jesus' miracles are the trailer to the movie. But unlike movie trailers where they put all the best parts in and you get to the movie and you're like, 'I could have just watched the trailer', when we get to heaven it will be even better than the trailer!!!!

Q: Why were the religious leaders so aghast that Jesus healed on the Sabbath (v9-10)?

Q: What is the significance of Jesus healing on the Sabbath?

The Jewish people were different from the cultures around them in 2 important ways: they believed that there was one God only, and secondly, they kept the Torah, the law, which said that the 7th day of the week was the Sabbath, a day when you rested from work and you remembered and celebrated God. And here was a Jew healing on the Sabbath claiming to be God (v9-10)! When the Torah forbids work on the Sabbath the assumption seems to be that 'work' refers to what a person is employed to do for the 6 other days of the week. So if you're a baker, on the Sabbath don't work as a baker, instead take time to remember the Lord. However, the Jewish rabbinic tradition, which was an add-on to the Bible, had become obsessed with the meaning of 'don't work' and the day had lost its original purpose. The Rabbis defined 39 different categories of work so everyone would be clear what work was and wasn't: e.g. they said *'If you carry something inside your house that is acceptable, but if you carry something outside the house that is work. If you carry something above shoulder height inside the house that is not acceptable because the load must be heavy if it means you have to haul it above your shoulders and that is work'*. This man was carrying his mat home, so outside his house, which is deemed working on the Sabbath and perhaps also he had rolled up his mat and carried it on his shoulders and so the religious leaders complain: *'Hey you shouldn't carry that mat, wrong day of the week buddy. You should lie there another 24hr and then get up and carry it home.'* Ridiculous. For 38y the man has laid there and they want to quibble with him what day of the week he is to carry his bed home. Their rules had lost all perspective so that they miss the eternal life giver when he is standing right in front of them.

Q: What is the *'something worse'* that Jesus refers to (v14)?

The *'something worse'* Jesus speaks about I think refers to eternal judgment. Remember none of the miracles of Jesus were an end in themselves. They all point to a deeper meaning. He's saying 'I've sought you out to tell you the point of what I did to you. I healed you so would live a holy life. Being holy is more important than being healthy.'

***'Being holy is more important than being healthy.'* Discuss.**

Q: What does Jesus mean by, *'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working'* (v17)?

Q: In what ways was Jesus *'making himself equal with God'* (v18)?

Jesus is not claiming to be another God, but the Son of God, not polytheism but a unique Christian form of monotheism. Discuss.

The Father and The Son are equal but different. Discuss.

The Jewish scholars debated the question, *'Does God work on the Sabbath?'* Some said *'No he can't or he would be a law breaker.'* Others said, *'But if he rests on the 7th day who keeps the universe running while he rests? It would fall apart.'* Their conclusion was that God does keep working on the Sabbath but he cannot be charged with violating the Sabbath law, since 1. the entire universe is his domain and so he never carries anything outside it; 2. his stature is so great he cannot lift anything to a height greater than himself. In his defence to their questioning his right to work on the Sabbath Jesus says, *'If it's ok for God to work on the Sabbath, then I can too because I am his Son.'*

To the Jew the world was viewed like this: there is God and there are humans and there is a very clear mark between the two. God is not created, He is eternal. Humans are created and are mortal. God is all powerful, humans are under his power. And there are angels and spirits, who are above and beyond this world and so are like God and yet they are also created so you couldn't put them above the line, they are part of the created world and have to be under the line where humans are, and in some parts of the Bible they are seen to be servants come to serve humans and really should be below humans. Now Jesus comes along and is placing himself above the line of humanity, making himself equal with God. Breaking the Sabbath law was one thing but claiming to be equal to God was quite another. That's idolatry, that's blasphemy. It's this claim that really leads to his execution down the track.

Jesus accepts the charge that he is making himself equal with God, but he is not claiming to be another God, but the Son of God. Not polytheism but a unique Christian form of monotheism. Jesus says, *'I am God. I'm equal with my Father, but I subordinate myself to Him. I obey him as a Son. I do nothing independently from Him.'*

E.g. In the 1st century most sons grew up in the trade or profession of their fathers. A son who was an apprentice in his father's trade did what he saw his father doing and the father showed him all that he did. In the same way Jesus comes to do whatever the heavenly Father shows him and the Father shows him all He does. The love of God the Father for the Son is displayed in disclosing all he does to the Son. And the love of the Son for the Father is displayed in the perfect obedience to his Father, even to the point of death. Jesus' willingness to die for us is first and foremost because of the Father's love for the Son, and the Son's love for the Father. It's an intra-trinitarian love that fuels Jesus' mission.

Jesus' unqualified commitment to not please himself but the one who sent him, guarantees that all he does is completely in accord with the Father's will. If the Father shows the Son all he does, and if the Son does whatever the Father shows him then the Son will act in a way that will perfectly reveal the Father. Jesus, through his words and works perfectly reveals what the Father is like. But the relationship between the Father and the Son is not reciprocal. It is not right to say the Father does only what he sees the Son doing. The Father initiates, the Son responds. The Father sends, the Son goes. The Father commands, the Son obeys. The Father gives authority, the Son receives authority. But the Son who can do what the Father does must be as divine as the Father. That's Jesus' defense.

The Old Testament states that only God can raise the dead, so no-one believed that even the Messiah would be able to raise the dead, and here is Jesus claiming that he can give life to whoever he pleases (v20-21). The Scriptures are clear that God only has the authority to judge. And the Father has determined that it will not be him directly who will judge, but he has entrusted all judgement to the Son (v22). This does not mean the Son will judge independently of the Father for even his judgement is a reflection of his consistent determination to please his Father. E.g. When Henry Ford snr shows Henry Ford jnr everything that goes into making a car, eventually Henry Ford snr says *'Ok from now on you make the engine, from now on that's your baby.'* So Henry Ford snr no longer does the engine, Henry Ford jnr does the engine. Because Henry Ford jnr is following the wishes of Henry Ford snr and does all he wants, it is still Henry Ford snr doing it through his son. In the same way the Father judges no one, but entrusts this task to the Son. But the Son only does what he hears, so when he does the judging he does it entirely in line with the Father's will.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why does dishonouring the Son dishonour the Father (v23)?

Some people think they can honour God while disowning Jesus. But they are deluded. If you withhold the honour due the Son it dishonours the Father. Muslims honour Jesus as a prophet but not as God, which means they dishonour him. Bahais honour Jesus as one of God's messengers but not as God, which means they dishonour him. Agnostics and atheists honour Jesus as a great teacher but not as God, which means they dishonour him. Calling Jesus just one among many prophets, or just one among many messengers of God or just a great teacher is to dishonour him, by calling him a liar. Those who downgrade Jesus to something less than divine are rejecting God himself.

To speak of a spirituality, a connection with God that is divorced from Jesus Christ is totally false. E.g. If you travel overseas you know how annoying it is to get to your hotel room and not be able to connect your phone or laptop to the socket because your plug is incompatible with overseas sockets. What do you need? An adaptor. Some hotels don't give them out because people (like me) forget to give them back so you have to remember to take one with you or buy one at the airport. Without an adaptor there is no way you can plug into the power source. In the same way you have to go through Jesus to plug into God, to know God. Many people of different religions think they know God, they think they are plugged into God, but if they don't plug into Jesus, they can't plug into God. No Jesus no life. Know Jesus know life.

Q: When can we experience resurrection life (v29)?

For you and I the word resurrection means coming back to life from the dead, like Jesus' resurrection, that is he came out of the tomb, back to life again. But in the Bible the word resurrection basically means the judgment at the end of the world, where all people come back to life again for judgment. Some will come to life in order to be banished off into eternal death, and some will come to life in order to live on into eternity. But in the last day, all will be raised.

If you belong to God you'll believe what Jesus says, and you don't need to wait for the future to experience resurrection life as the Jews believed, but you cross over from death to life the moment you believe in the Son (v24). This is because Jesus can generate life by his words because like the Father he has life in himself. Everything owes its life and existence to God but God doesn't owe his existence to anyone. He is self-existent. In eternity past the Father granted the Son to have life. If you ask, *'So if the Son didn't have life in himself to start off with then maybe he's not completely equal with the Father'*, then you are introducing time and this was outside time, an eternal grant, a dynamic within the mysterious relationship between the godhead themselves. All the dead who have ever lived will be raised from the dead by Jesus. Millions of Australians and Malaysians and Singaporeans and Koreans and Chinese and people from every nation. He will raise Adolph Hitler from the dead, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him, and Buddha and the prophet Mohammed and Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein and Attila the Hun. He will raise them, and they will stand before him. And you and I as well. All these people and billions more—all people, without exception, will be raised from the dead by Jesus.

He lets no one go out of existence—right now he holds them in an intermediate state and will give life to their buried bones and scattered ashes. Jesus raises them all. Stand in awe of Jesus! When he spoke in creation nothingness obeyed. And when he speaks as judge, decomposed matter will obey.

That is what the final resurrection will be like. Your decomposed body will obey the voice of the Son of God, and you will rise from the dead and face him. And *'those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned'* (v29), because what we do in life is the evidence of whether our belief is genuine or counterfeit. Those who know Jesus will do good and will rise to life.



Digging Deeper

Q: What more have we learnt about Jesus' designation for himself, the *'Son of Man'* (v27)?

Daniel 7 tells us that the judgement to come is to be made by someone who *'was one like a son of man'*, in other words human, who receives all authority from the Ancient of Days. Jesus is this Son of Man (v27) and is also the Son of God. Jesus clearly places himself above the line of humanity where God the Father is. But he is also a son of man, human, who is going to rise up above the line. We don't know in ch 5 how this going to happen. But we eventually find out that it comes as a result of his death and resurrection.



Reflecting Further

To those outside the Christian faith, the Trinity sounds absurd: How can God be 1 God but 3 persons? Peter Fitzsimmons an author and vocal atheist who likes to wear bandanas says Jesus Christ is, *"a cosmic Jewish zombie who is his own father"*. Another critic says *'Christ is just as old as his father, and the father is just as young as his son. According to the celestial multiplication table, three time one is one. The addition is equally peculiar: if we add two to one we have but one. Each one equal to himself and to the other two. Nothing ever was, nothing ever can be more perfectly idiotic and absurd than the dogma of the Trinity'*.⁹ Muslims believe the Trinity means that God copulated with Mary to have a son, so the holy Trinity is Father, Mary and Jesus and they think it's grotesque, and it is grotesque, but it's not correct.

Q: What can you say to these critics from what you have learnt in this study?

10

Go read:

John 5:31-47

Bible Study 10

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Islam rests on the testimony of one person only – Muhammed. Muhammed claims that the verses of the Quran were revealed to him by God through the archangel Gabriel. No one else heard or saw the revelation and so his testimony cannot be corroborated.

Q: How valid is a singular testimony to the truth?



Digging Deeper

Q: Who bears witness that Jesus is who he says he is?

Q: Are these testimonies valid?

In the Hebrew Scriptures and in later Jewish law, if evidence was to be accepted in a legal matter it was necessary to have at least 2 male witnesses. So if the only evidence to support Jesus' claims is his own testimony, even though it is the truth, what he says must be confirmed by other witnesses for it to be valid in the eyes of the Jewish leaders. So Jesus presents 5 key witnesses who testify to the truthfulness of his claims:

First, John the Baptist was accepted by the people as the great prophet of his time, sent by God (v33). And John bore testimony to Jesus (1:27-29). John's testimony was not for Jesus' sake (v34), Jesus didn't need John to tell him his identity, Jesus had his Father telling him - how could the witness of John the Baptist add to that? John's testimony was for the people listening in and for us today so we would believe in Christ.

2ndly, Jesus says he has a testimony that is weightier than John the Baptist's. These are the works that the Father has given him to do (v36) - his signs, his miracles, his teaching, his death and resurrection. These testify that the Father has sent him. Since Jesus says and does only what the Father shows him, his testimony is not simply his own testimony it is indirectly the testimony of his Father as well. The whole Old Testament tells us what God is like, and what He was coming to do. Now Jesus comes and does those things. If you have your Old Testament glasses on you will look at the activities of Jesus and say '*I can see the Father's hand in what Jesus does and I can hear the Father's voice in Jesus' words.*' Jesus does not ask people to believe in him by some blind leap of faith but on the evidence of what he does and says.

3rdly I think in v37 Jesus is referring to the Father's voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism (see Mark 1:10-11). Jesus does what he sees his Father doing so when Jesus does miracles the Father is testifying to Jesus indirectly, but the Father's voice from heaven testifies to Jesus directly as does the Holy Spirit's presence.

4thly in v37-39 Jesus moves from defence to prosecution. He puts his opponents in the dock. He says '*If you reject me, the evidence of the Scriptures convicts you.*' Even though the Jewish leaders of the day were diligent students of the Scriptures, their study of Scripture had become a means of self-advancement. The more they knew, the higher they could climb the ladder of power, which clouded their understanding, so that they were oblivious to the Scriptures' true purpose. What's the point studying the Scriptures if you fail to discern their true goal? Scripture points to Jesus. In its entirety. It **predicts** the coming of Christ and **prepares** us for the coming of Christ.

There are over 300 predictions in the Bible about Jesus' birth, life and death, made 500 years before he was born and they all came true: where he would be born - he didn't have much control over that one – Mary is pregnant with Jesus and Jesus is like *'As soon as mum visits Bethlehem I'm pushing myself out of here to fulfill prophecy'*; that he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver; that he would die with his hands and his feet pierced, before crucifixion was even invented (Ps. 22:16). The Old Testament prepares us for Christ by demonstrating our need for Him. We see this through the rescue of the Passover, the giving of the law which no-one could keep and the offering of animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of them. If people refuse to come to Jesus for life it shows that they do not read the Scriptures in the manner in which they are meant to be read.

Jesus' statement in v45 would have shocked Jesus' opponents. Moses was their hero. Moses was the one who gave them the law, which the Jews believed was able to give them salvation if they kept it. Moses was seen as a heavenly intercessor between the people and God. But ironically Moses their hero is the one who accuses them. For Moses wrote of Jesus and they completely missed it. Moses is Jesus' 5th witness. Where did Moses write of Christ (v46)? Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible, the Torah. The Torah prepares us for our need of Christ and also predicts the coming of Christ: e.g. Deut. 18:15; 34:10. Like Moses, Jesus spoke with God face to face, but in an even more personal way. Like Moses Jesus performed miracles and signs and wonders, and even brought people back from the dead!!! Just as Moses supplied bread from heaven in the desert for God's people so Jesus supplied bread for the 5000 and then the 4000 in the desert. Just as Moses controlled the waters and walked through the Red Sea, so Jesus controlled the stormy waters and walked on the sea.

The Jews have the testimony of Moses but they won't come to the one that Moses points to (v47). To believe Jesus is to believe Moses and to reject Jesus is to reject Moses. The Jews claim to be followers of Moses but if they reject Jesus they are not true followers of Moses.

So Jesus doesn't just have his own testimony. He doesn't just have the legally required 2 witnesses. He has 5 key witnesses: John the Baptist, his works, his Father's testimony, the Scriptures and Moses.



Digging Deeper

Q: How does the verifiability of Christianity compare to the other belief systems around the world?

Islam rests on the testimony of one person only – Muhammed, a 6thc nobleman from Arabia. Muhammed claims that the verses of the Quran were revealed to him by God through the archangel Gabriel. No one else heard or saw the revelation and so his testimony cannot be corroborated. His testimony stands alone. We have to take his sole word for it. It can't be tested one way or another. It is unverifiable.

Buddhism in the same way rests entirely on the insights of Siddhartha Gautama, the 6thc BC Indian Prince who became known as Buddha. Buddha means '*enlightened one*', because after 7y of contemplation and denying himself comforts, he received enlightenment while meditating under a tree.

His testimony stands alone. Neither the fact nor the content of that enlightenment can be tested.

Let's take Mormonism: Joseph Smith grew up in New York and in 1827 when he was 22 he claimed that an angelic being had led him to golden plates. On these plates he says were inscribed a history of the American Indians who were descendants of the Hebrews in the Bible and had emigrated from Palestine to North America centuries before Christ. Smith translated the plates with the aid of special reading glasses made of diamond. He published the translation under the title 'The Book of Mormon' named after the ancient prophet who was said to have originally inscribed the plates. No-one else met this angelic being and only Smith had the ability to translate these plates which he said were written in a dialect of Egyptian. However, not one other example of this Egyptian dialect has been uncovered by any archaeologist anywhere in the world. The cities, tribes and events written about find no support in the archaeological data relating to the history of North America. The claim that native Americans descend from Israelites has been found to be completely falsified by anthropological studies.

The claims of Jesus are not based on the testimony of one. Jesus' claims belong to a different category entirely from that of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, Bahai and Mormonsim. Jesus' claims are more than just spiritual platitudes but actual events of history corroborated by witnesses. As John Dickson says, *'...Christianity deliberately places its neck on the proverbial chopping block of public scrutiny and invites anyone who wishes to take a swing. And swing they do. Scientists analyse the ancient papyri documents of Jesus' biographies to assess their age and reliability; archaeologists dig up sections of Galilee to see if Jesus' stomping ground has been accurately described by the New Testament writers; historians pore over the literary and inscriptional evidence from non-Christin sources to see if place names,*

personal titles and architectural details can be confirmed... it is also telling that throughout all these controversies large numbers of first rate scholars from all of the relevant disciplines - history, archaeology, science, literary criticism, as well as from theology – have professed faith in the ‘daringly verifiable’ claims about Jesus.’¹⁰

Unlike Islam and Buddhism and Mormonism and Hinduism and Sikhism which have no corroborating witnesses, Jesus does. He has 5 key witnesses: John the Baptist, his miracles, his Father, the Scriptures and Moses.



Digging Deeper

The religions of the world are just artistic expressions of our spiritual hunches, but God has left a tangible photo of himself on the world stage which means the other religions of the world are merely creative guesses.¹¹

Discuss.

Q: Why, according to Jesus, can't the Jews that he is talking to, believe?

The Jewish leaders were so intent on receiving honour from one another and looking good in front of one another, they were ignoring the evidence (v41-44). The love of human praise was the root of their unbelief. If you are more interested in what others think of you, you will not follow Jesus. We need to be able to say, *‘I want whatever God wants, over and above what my family says, my peers, my best friend, my society.’* Only then will we accept the Son.



Reflecting Further

Q: Is anything stopping you from believing Jesus is who he says he is? Why/why not?

11

Go read:

John 6:1-21

Bible Study 11

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: If someone walked up to you at a party and said, *'I am the bread of life, feed on me and live'*, how might you respond?

Q: What would you think of the person who said that to you?



Digging Deeper

Q: Why does Jesus perform miracles?

Q: What was it about Jesus that made him recognisable as the *'Prophet'* that was to come into the world (v14)?

Why does Jesus perform miracles? Does he do them to show off, or to prove the existence of God? No, he does them to signify something, and to fulfill Old Testament Scripture. For who do we associate with feeding the multitudes in the wilderness? And who is it that crosses the sea? Why it's God through Moses. And Moses promises a greater prophet than him will be coming (Deut.18). And so Jesus goes out to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, into the wilderness again so to speak, and feeds the multitudes with bread just as Moses did out in the wilderness (Ex 16). And then he leads his disciples safely across the sea as did Moses. Jesus is deliberately portraying himself as that prophet. Now in one sense the crowds saw it (v14), but they misunderstood him (v15). And they grumble about him (v41). Their grumbling is typical of the people of Israel out in the wilderness who grumbled about manna and Moses all the way.

Now something greater than manna, someone greater than Moses has been given to them, and they are still grumbling. On the other hand the disciples are thinking, *'He really is the one. I don't see how life can ever be the same after this.'*

Q: Why are we told the Jewish Passover was near (v4)?

This is the 2nd of the 3 Passovers referred to in the gospel, and the reason it is highlighted is not for chronological reasons but for theological ones. Jesus' reference to his death in ch 2 (the temple that would be destroyed) coincided with the first Passover, the third is at the time of his death (ch 18-19) and this second one frames and therefore gives context to Jesus' feeding of the 5000 and declaration that his flesh is the true bread which will be given for the life of the world (6:51).

Q: Why did the crowd want to make Jesus king by force (v15)?

The crowds see the sign but misunderstood what the prophet came to do, and how he was going to do it. They figure, *'If the first prophet Moses led our forefathers out of slavery in Egypt, surely this second prophet will help us overthrow the Romans. And if he doesn't want to be our leader then we will make him our leader.'* Jesus knows that the way his kingdom will come will not be by a crown of power and by throwing the spear, but by a crown of thorns and by being pierced by a spear.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of Jesus walking on the water?

Q: Would him flying over the water have had the same significance? (See also Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:47-51).

The boat the disciples are in is being tormented by the waves. The wind is roaring and beating about their ears, the waves are crashing onto the boat, threatening them on every side, tossing the boat around like a cork in the ocean. The disciples don't have a GPS to tell them where to head out of the storm. They don't have a mobile phone to ring 000 for the rescue helicopter to come. They don't have a lifeboat - their boat is the size of a lifeboat - they don't have life jackets and they can't swim. Even Ian Thorpe couldn't survive swimming in this storm. Out of nowhere a silhouette appears walking towards them. As it gets closer it becomes apparent it is a figure of a human being walking on the water. I did physics at school, I wasn't very good at it mind you, and I didn't even bother turning up to my year 12 final exam, but I learnt that certain things float, other things don't. Humans can float when horizontal on the water, but we can't stand up on water and walk. The disciples knew that too, so what else could it be? A ghost maybe? Back then a ghost was believed to be a sign of impending death. They are terrified. These are grown men. They scream in outright panic like a bunch of teenagers watching 'The Exorcist' movie. Some people try and argue this event away and say, '*It must have just looked like Jesus walked on the water. The storm must have been inhibiting the disciples' vision and they were closer to the shore than they thought and Jesus was actually walking on large rocks, just below the water, or on a sandbar.*' According to Florida State University Professor of Oceanography, Doron Nof, Jesus walked on floating ice!¹¹ But that doesn't explain why the storm suddenly went calm once Jesus boarded the boat.

Some people say: *'What's more likely? That the disciples were mistaken or that Jesus really walked on water?'* (E.g. this was the argument of the philosopher David Hume). But the disciples weren't stupid. They could tell the difference between walking on rocks and walking on the water. That's why they are terrified when they see him on the water. When was the last time you cried out in fear when you saw someone walking on some rocks?

Matthew tells us that, *'Shortly before dawn'*, literally during the 4th watch of the night – between 3:00am and 6:00am - *'Jesus went out to them'* (Matt. 14:25). That means they had been struggling out there and straining at their oars for 9 hours and still hadn't made it across to the other side. They were totally exhausted, cold, desperate. Could Jesus have come to them earlier? Yep. Jesus waited until the boat was as far from land as possible, when all their hope was gone. Because he wants to teach them something. The Lord may not come at the time we think He should come to intervene in our problems, but He knows the right time. It might look like God is late but He is always right on time. That's the way God works.

Their boat is 5 km from the shore, in a storm where you can't see your hands in front of your face, and Jesus just walks straight to them. On the water! He doesn't need a GPS, he knows exactly where they are, he knows precisely where they are because he always knows where his own are so he can come to them in their time of desperation. He knows exactly when to arrive and he gets to them at just the right time.

When Jesus says *'It is I, don't be afraid'* he literally says, *'Don't be afraid I am.'* *'I am'* is the name of God in the Old Testament - *'I am who I am'*. Jesus is saying, *'Take courage, I am God. And I am with you. Do not be afraid. Of course I can walk on the water. I could go to the moon and do the literal moon walk if I wanted to.'*

In Mark's gospel we are told, '*... he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them...*' (Mark 6:48). It sounds like he saw they were in trouble, he could do something about it, but he was going to pass them by. The words '*pass by*' are used in the Bible when God appears. God passed by Moses in the cleft in the rock and showed him his glory. God passed by Elijah on the mountain and revealed his presence and power. Now God is passing by on the water. '*After all the things you have seen me do, do you not yet know who I am? If you did you would not be afraid. You would trust me. I don't need a GPS. I don't need a Rescue Helicopter. I don't need a lifeboat. You don't need a life-jacket when I am with you. I am powerful and I am good. I am.*'

All of a sudden, the wind, which had been roaring and beating about their ears ceases, and there was absolute stillness. And the waves, which had been crashing onto the boat, tormenting the boat, were suddenly stilled. There was a great calm, all the way across the lake to the other side, Jesus doesn't even need to say anything, his presence is all that is needed for the storm to stop.



Reflecting Further

Q: Are the storms in your life too big for Jesus to deal with?
Discuss.

12

Go read:

John 6:22-71

Bible Study 12

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Immediately after World War II the allied armies gathered up many hungry, homeless children and placed them in large camps. There the children were abundantly fed and cared for. However, at night they did not sleep well. They seemed restless and afraid. Finally, a psychologist hit on a solution. After the children were put to bed, they each received a slice of bread to hold. If they wanted more to eat, more was provided, but this particular slice was not to be eaten—it was just to hold. The slice of bread produced marvelous results.

Q: Why do you think receiving a slice of bread to hold, was so effective?

The child would go to sleep subconsciously feeling it would have something to eat tomorrow. That assurance gave the child a calm and peaceful rest.¹³



Digging Deeper

Q: What were the different responses, amongst those in the crowd, to Jesus' feeding of the 5000?

In the crowd were materialists, legalists and sensationalists. The materialists were not really interested in the deeper significance of the signs but in filling their bellies (v25-26). The legalists turn an invitation into a demand (v28). Then the sensationalists chime in and ask for a sign. This is true to form because Jews always ask for signs. Jesus has just fed a multitude of 5000, just walked on water and what do they want? They want to see a miracle!

Q: What did Jesus mean when he said, 'I am the bread of life' (v35)?

What is the staple diet of Australians? It depends, because we have so many different immigrant groups. And we have enough prosperity to choose what we eat. But in many parts of the world the answer is one word: rice. In 1st c Palestine the answer was bread. If you didn't have bread you didn't live. No bread no life. What happens to our food if there is a drought or flood? We'll get food here in Australia, it will come in by boat or plane, it will get sorted out, you will just pay more money for it that's all. But if you lived in the 1st century before infrastructure enabled rapid transport, then you needed to have the crops come in or there would be starvation and death. We need to think in 1st c terms to see what Jesus is getting at.

When Jesus says, *'I am the bread'*, we get that he is not saying he is in fact bread. He is using a metaphor as we commonly do in our everyday communication, and we especially use many eating or gustatory metaphors. E.g. we swallow stories, we devour a book, we chew over matters, ruminate on ideas, eat our words etc. Jesus uses metaphorical language often in the gospel of John, e.g. *'I am the door, I am the true vine, I am the good shepherd, I am living water.'* So what does it mean when Jesus says, *'I am the bread of life'*? It means you must have him or you die. He is saying *'I am your necessity. I am your staple. I am the one who provides eternal life, without me you are dead. Either I live and you die or I die and become your bread and you live.'*

If you asked any 5yo child in Australia *'Where does food come from?'* what will they say? *'The Supermarket.'* But if you ask someone raised on a farm they will say *'From cows and chickens and pigs.'* They know that animals must die so that we can live. Jesus dies so that you and I live. It's his life or your life. He gives his life for us. Without Jesus the bread of life, there is no eternal life.

None. You remain damned and dead.

When you go to a restaurant the waiter will likely ask you, 'Would you like some bread with your meal?' But when Jesus says 'I am the bread of life' he is not saying 'Have a bit of religion on the side'. He is saying 'I am to your soul what bread is to a starving stomach.' Jesus is the ultimate manna from heaven.



Digging Deeper

- Q: What does Jesus mean when he says, 'You have to eat my flesh, you have to drink my blood'?
- Q: Why were the Jews so shocked by this?
- Q: Is he advocating cannibalism?

Jesus' says, 'This bread is my flesh' (v51), which was incomprehensible at best, blatantly offensive at worst. But with his next claim, 'You have to eat my flesh, you have to drink my blood', Jesus goes too far. It was forbidden by the Law of Moses to drink blood and even the eating of meat with the blood still in it. What Jesus was suggesting was abhorrent. How do you eat Jesus' flesh and not be a cannibal? What does it mean this eating flesh, this drinking blood? Jesus says unless you do, you cannot have eternal life, and if you do you will have eternal life. Is Jesus going to pass himself around and we're all going to take a bite? What if you are a vegetarian, where does that leave you?

Q: How do you 'eat of Jesus' or 'feed on Jesus'?

Q: How do you do the '*work of God*' (v29)?

Q: Look up Deut 8:3. How does this verse relate to this chapter in John?

Q: How do we receive eternal life, and who is Jesus going to raise up?

In v54 Jesus says eternal life is for those who are eating his flesh and drinking his blood, but if you turn back to v40, exactly the same things are promised to those who look to him and believe in him. Or again you are told you will never hunger and never thirst because in v55 the real food and the real drink is his flesh and his blood, but also you'll never hunger or thirst if you come to him and believe in him in v35. We all have to eat and drink to live in this world, Jesus is saying we all have to eat and drink of him to live eternally, which is what Deut. 8:3 is also saying. So Jesus intermixes synonyms and metaphors to describe the way by which you receive Jesus, which is you have to literally believe in him, come to him, look to him. In fact, Jesus warns in v63 that words are what he is on about, not flesh. The important things are the words. He has the words of eternal life (v68), and indeed his very words are life (v63). We do not feed on him with our teeth, but with our hearts, by faith. Eating and drinking are a very graphic way of saying that we must take Christ into our innermost being. The work of God, the way to gain eternal life is to believe in Jesus (v29). That is how you eat him, that is how you feed upon him, that is how you come to him, and if you believe on him, you believe on what he taught (v68).



Digging Deeper

Q: Unless God draws us, we cannot come to Jesus (v44) but it's our work to believe in him whom he has sent (v29). Don't these two statements contradict each other? Why/Why not?

This section of Ch 6 touches on what's called the doctrine (teaching) of predestination, that God chooses who will respond to him. God is sovereign, that is, God is in control of everything that happens in all creation. This is a truth that the Bible upholds and Jesus speaks about here. However, at the same time, Jesus and the whole of the Bible make it clear that we as individuals are responsible for our decisions, including our decision to accept or reject Jesus. These are two truths that stand side by side and appear to contradict each other. Our finite minds find it hard to gel the two truths together, but we must be careful to uphold both of these Biblical truths, so we cannot say, *'Look I've got no responsibility, its all determined'*. No you have responsibility. If you believe, if you do the work, then you will have eternal life. Nor should you say, *'All credit goes to me, I'm the one who does the believing.'* No, it's God that was at work in you. So how do you integrate these two truths? Well v35-37 comes as close to the integration as you will find in the Scriptures. God's drawing precedes our response and therefore is no basis for pride. We decide to follow him, but only because he decided that we would first. And human rejection is not sovereign over God's will (v64-65). God's will is in control of all things, but in such a way as to not interfere with our will, for he allows our wills to remain intact.

Q: Why do you think '*many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him*' (v66)?

When do the disciples leave? After Jesus feeds the 5000 from a cut lunch? No. After Jesus walks on the water? No, the disciples leave after Jesus' words. They leave him in droves. From 2:23 we have been warned that those who believe because of miracles are not true believers, that Jesus does not trust them. Jesus has just fed a multitude of 5000, just walked on water and what do they want? They want to see a miracle! It is hearing the Word of God and believing the Word of God that is the sign of a true believer. The work of the Holy Spirit is in the hearts and minds of true believers giving them confidence in the word of God that the Holy Spirit himself has inspired. People who look for the work of the Holy Spirit in miracles missed the point in Jesus day, and miss the point in our day, for the miracle is not as important as the word of God. If you believe in the miracle more than the word of God then your belief will become unbelief. But if your belief in the word of God is more than your belief in the miracles then your belief will continue in the Father and in the Son and in the words of the Father and the Son. We are used to images of Jesus being surrounded by crowds and crowds of disciples, but yet rather than acting to draw disciples to himself, he so acted and taught in a way that discouraged people from being his disciples. You see it in each of the gospels and you see it here in John's gospel. Discipleship is about being genuine, and who Jesus is alienating are those who are not genuine disciples at all.



Digging Deeper

Q: *'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing' (6:63).*
What does this mean?



Reflecting Further

'Jesus to your soul is like bread to a starving stomach'. Discuss.

13

Go read:

John 7:1-36

Bible Study 13

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: Have you ever judged anyone hastily and realised later that your judgement was wrong? What happened?



Digging Deeper

Q: According to Jesus, how do we know whether his teaching is from God (v17)?

Jesus says that if our will is to do God's will, then we will know whether Jesus' teaching comes from God (v17-18). But if you do not want to do God's will, you will not want what Jesus is teaching, you will reject the teaching of Jesus, or try and distort the teaching of Jesus. The choice of the heart is critical in our judgements of the truth. The view of the modern person (since the Enlightenment) is that our intellects are independent of our morality. However, we see so often that the moral choices people make precede and determine all other choices and that their intellectual choices merely clothe their moral choices. Jesus is saying that we do not reject God or Jesus because of intellectual reasons, after a careful assessment of the available evidence, so that we can make a non-biased, prejudice free judgement, but that we reject God because of our choice of immorality, our choice of not wanting to do God's will in our lives.

Q: Whose glory does Jesus seek? Does this make his testimony more or less trustworthy (v18)?

Jesus doesn't come to bring glory to himself, he comes to bring glory to his Father. If he came to bring glory to himself he may not be teaching the truth that he has been sent to deliver. But because he is seeking glory and honour for the one who has sent him, then he will faithfully teach what he himself has been taught. So he is not working for his own honour but for God's honour. The purpose of his mission is to bring honour to his Father.

Q: According to this passage, how do we judge Jesus with 'right judgement' (v24)?

Q: In other words, what is the right way to judge Jesus?

Jesus tells us the true way to judge:

1. Not by mere appearances (v24), but look at the heart of the matter, that is, listen to what Jesus is actually teaching. Watch what he is actually doing. Think deeply about God and his purposes, his intentions, his plans as have been revealed in the Bible (v51).

2. Not by miracles: His miracles lead some people to believe in him (e.g. v31). This is a 'hands in pockets/shrug shoulders' type of belief, '*Could the Christ possibly do more signs than we have seen from this man?*' Even one miracle is enough to make people astonished (v21). In v3-5 the brothers advocated that Jesus be known openly, that Jesus show himself to the world by performing miracles, but that is because they didn't believe in him. Throughout John's gospel there is a theme running that believing because of miracles is not true belief.

3. Not by public acceptance. Too many base their opinions on the 'majority consensus'. *'Not many people believe that Jesus stuff, so it can't be true.'* In v25-26, the crowd were being swayed by other people's opinions rather than investigating for themselves.

4. Not from pre-conceived ideas. If we believe just what we are raised to believe, then what we believe has nothing to do with beliefs it has to do with different cultures we are raised in. In v42 some of the people knew that the Scriptures prophesied that the Christ would come from the offspring of David (2 Sam. 7) and that he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The trouble is they didn't check up on Jesus' genealogy or where he was born, because he was in the line of David and was born in Bethlehem, though he grew up in Galilee. Today people say similar things: *'Don't bother me with the facts,'* or *'I don't understand what you said, I'm not going to listen to you.'* Or people make claims like, *'Christianity is just a Western Religion'* which is just not true. It was a Semitic religion in its origin and there are more African Christians than there are European Christians today. And anyway even if it was a Western religion, that wouldn't make it right and it wouldn't make it wrong.

Nicodemus, whom we met in Ch 3 addresses the other Jewish leaders and insists that they are not judging Jesus with right judgement (v51). They know the way they should judge a man, their own law upholds it, that a man should not be judged before first giving him a hearing, and yet they continue to judge Jesus by appearances, and with pre-conceived ideas. And therefore, they could not judge him accurately and truthfully.

The judgement we make of Jesus reveals much more about us than about him. For the judgement we make about Jesus is the judgement we make about our judge. And therefore, it has something to do with the judgement the judge will make about you. For we reveal in our acceptance or rejection of Jesus, a desire to do the will of God, or not to do the will of God. The desire to maintain the status quo in Western society means many people make no judgement. They go with the flow, they drift with the current of what is happening. But this really leaves you no option but to make a bad judgement because your judgements are made from pre-conceived ideas. We need to make sure the judgements we make are with right judgement.



Reflecting Further

Q: What judgements have you made about Jesus?

Q: How can you be confident that they are the right judgements?

14

Go read:

John 7:37-53

Bible Study 14

C

Context

Handwriting lines for Context

O

Observation

Handwriting lines for Observation

M

Meaning

Handwriting lines for Meaning

A

Application

Handwriting lines for Application



Kicking Off

Q: Some drinks quench your thirst momentarily, then leave you thirstier than you were before. Give examples. Why do they do this?

Coffee, tea, coke, alcohol, sugary drinks.

Some things in life quench your spiritual thirst momentarily, then leave you thirstier than you were before. Discuss.

A shipwrecked sailor can be adrift in an ocean filled with trillions of litres of water but never have his thirst quenched because the water is saltwater. Likewise, the pleasures of the world that surround us, many of them good things, can never ultimately satisfy us. Jesus says that our spiritual satisfaction will only be found in the true and living water that God gives.¹⁴ In the same way you and I chase things in life that we think will quench our thirst. They promise pleasure. They promise to fill the voids in our hearts and soothe our aching souls. But they can't deliver. They can never ultimately satisfy us. We drink them, but our thirst remains unquenched. In fact, we are left thirstier.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of these events occurring at the Feast of Tabernacles (v2)?

Q: Why are the Jews looking for Jesus (v11)?

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (tents) was one of the biggest events in the Jewish year. At the end of the harvest, Jews from all around the country would gather together in Jerusalem for a week-long festivity and live in tents, to celebrate and thank God for his provision for them when they were in the wilderness and did actually live in tents. It was a weeklong feast, and there were two key ceremonies observed in and around the temple at the time of the Feast. The first ceremony was called the 'Outpouring of the Water' (we will see the 2nd ceremony in ch 8). Every day for seven days, the priests marched down the steep hill from the Temple compound to the bottom of the City of David. When they reached the Pool of Siloam, they filled jugs and pitchers with water and returned to the outer court of the temple through the Water Gate. To enter the inner Court the priests ascended 15 steps. The priests would sing Psalms 120 – 134 as they ascended the steps from the Outer to the Inner Court. That is the reason these Psalms are called, '*A Song (or Psalm) of Ascents*'. Upon entering the Inner Court, they poured out the water at the base of the altar, accompanied by great celebration. According to rabbinic interpretation, this symbolised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel in the last days. From Zechariah ch14, the expectation was that this feast was to be fulfilled by the messianic kingdom, which is why they were now looking for Jesus. If he was the Messiah perhaps he might set up that kingdom.¹⁵

On the final day of the feast - the climax of the week - Jesus speaks. In this context Jesus points to himself as the source of true and living water (v37,38). In the Old Testament it was God who satisfied thirst (e.g. Is 55). But Jesus doesn't say, 'Come to God', he says, 'Come to me and you will be satisfied. You will be so full and satisfied you will never thirst again. More than that you will become wells, you will become springs, water will flow from you and so you will satisfy the thirst of other people as well'. Jesus too identifies the outpouring of the water with the Holy Spirit, however he applies it individually rather than nationalistically. Those who accept his Messiahship will be indwelled by the Holy Spirit, and rivers of living water will flow from within. But the Holy Spirit is not given until Jesus is glorified.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the thirst that Jesus came to quench?

Q: How does Jesus quench this thirst?

Q: What is the result of believing in Jesus?

Every soul thirsts. It may not be felt every moment, but to some degree every soul thirsts. But we do not all thirst in the same way. In his book, *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* Don Whitney describes 3 types of thirst:

1. The thirst of the empty soul: God has made us to know him and be in relationship with him. The unbeliever's soul is empty because he does not know God and is constantly looking for something, anything, to fill the void where God should be, but is unable to fill this emptiness. The Bible tells us that the unbeliever is so lost that they do not seek to fill the emptiness with God. The empty soul is unable to see its real thirst. And so the empty soul seeks satisfaction in all the world offers, in the gifts of God but not in the giver of the gifts. Until the Holy Spirit enables that soul to understand the source of his thirst and enables him to see the one who can satisfy, he will continue to look in vain. *“Just because a man longs for something that can be found in God alone doesn't mean he's looking for God... Many who claim they are questing for God are not thirsting for God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, but only for God as they want Him to be, or a God who will give them what they want.”*¹⁶

2. The Thirst of the Dry Soul: This is a thirst that is felt by believers who are in a dry place spiritually and whose soul is crying out for refreshment. Why does the believer find themselves in a dry place? Perhaps the believer has been drinking too deeply from the fountains of the world with its temptations and vices and dead-end enticements, and too little from the river of God. Perhaps they have been overcome by the cares and concerns of the world. Perhaps they are fatigued, mentally or physically. Perhaps they have been focusing excessively on themselves, turning their thoughts from God. There is never a time where God withdraws from us, even though it may seem as though he has. He promises that when we seek him we will find him.

3. The Thirst of the Satisfied Soul: The satisfied soul desires God precisely because he is satisfied in Him and so thirsts for more of that which satisfies. The love and affection we have tasted from God and in God stimulates our desire to taste even more. Thomas Shepard wrote, *“There is in true grace an infinite circle; a man by thirsting receives, and receiving thirsts for more.”*¹⁷



Digging Deeper

Q: Where does Jesus say true satisfaction comes from?

Jesus as the Messiah comes to offer true satisfaction. He is the one who has come to offer water that will never dry up, bread that will never fail but will always satisfy, worship that is spiritual and true, life that is full and eternal. Jesus offers you real water, the water of life, he offers you life itself, life that goes on into eternity. It is a different plane that he is speaking about. But if you are not willing to move your mind into that other plane, then you will never understand Jesus.



Reflecting Further

Consider this prayer of A.W. Tozer: "O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made thirsty still."¹⁸

Q: What do you think of this prayer?
Do you pray like this to God?

Q: Have you found true satisfaction? Discuss.

15

Go read:

John 8:1-11

Bible Study 15

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: Have you ever been caught red-handed doing something you shouldn't have been doing? What happened? How did it make you feel?



Digging Deeper

Q: The religious leaders should have tried this woman's case in private, but instead they drag the woman before the crowd and publically humiliate her. Why?

In order to trap Jesus (v6). There is very little evidence that the capital punishment for adultery prescribed in the Old Testament (Deut. 22:23-24) was ever carried out in 1st c Palestine, so the religious leaders were not asking this question out of a sincere desire for justice to be done or out of a desire to hear a modern day interpretation of the ancient commandment. One big clue it's a trap is that something is missing in their story. Where is the guy? A woman can't commit adultery on her own. Adultery by definition is not a sin you can commit on your own. Why didn't they bring the guy as well? Either he was a quicker runner than them and got away and is hiding behind a tree somewhere looking for some clothes, or it's a set up and the guy has conspired with the religious leaders. The religious leaders are willing to use this woman to get Jesus. They could have deliberated over this case in private, but instead they drag the woman before the crowd and publically humiliate her. She is just a mere pawn in their devious plan.

Q: We are told that the religious leaders were using the question as a trap (v6). Why do you think they did that?

The Jewish leaders want to trap Jesus because they are jealous of his popularity. The crowds believe Jesus is the Messiah, and they are listening to him more than they are listening to the Jewish leaders. So the Jewish leaders hatch a plan to catch Jesus out and get rid of him:

‘This Jesus shows compassion towards sinners as we know. Let’s present him with a dilemma so that his compassion will lead him to say something against the law. He will only be able to give 2 answers. If he says “Have compassion on her, let her go” we can say, “People of Israel, you heard with your own ears, this man said the law of Moses doesn’t matter, he can’t be the Messiah”. Or if he says “The law says she must be stoned”, we can say, “People of Israel, you heard with your own ears, this man has no compassion on poor sinners.” Either way he will lose his popularity and his following.’ It’s a cunning plan to trap Jesus.

Q: What is the significance of Jesus writing on the ground (v6,8)?

What he is writing we’re not told. Many people have put forward suggestions such as Jesus was writing the 10 commandments, but we just don’t know. And in the end it’s not important. His body language though, as he doodles in the sand, is saying *‘I refuse to debate this issue on your terms.’* But they continue to badger him for an answer.



Digging Deeper

Q: Jesus replies with possibly the best one-liner in all of history (v7). Why did his reply silence them?

Jesus knows it's a trap. The religious leaders have tried to trap him on other occasions. Jesus replies with maybe the best one-liner in all of history (v7) – the competition for this title being another belonging to Jesus in Matthew 22:21 and Luke 20:35. Jesus is not saying that every judge must be sinless before he can pass judgement on someone else, or there could never be a workable justice system. He is saying, *'Go ahead, do what the law says. Deuteronomy 17:7 says that the witness of a crime must be the first to throw the stone. But he who is not guilty of the same sin as this woman throw the first stone.'* The Jewish leaders are now trapped. They are standing there holding big stones in their hands, arms cocked, ready to throw. They look around and presumably see people who know that they are guilty of the same sin as this woman. They can't weasel out of the situation. Or perhaps their consciences are pricked independently of the others around them. They lower their arms. They drop their stones. They walk away. One after the other. Jesus' words cut through their veneer of respectability and call out their double standards.

Jesus came not to condemn but to save. Discuss

Q: Jesus is confident the woman will leave her life of sin, why (v11)?

Jesus speaks some of the most beautiful words in the Bible in v10-11. Jesus came not to condemn but to save. Jesus speaks to the woman with respect and love and grace. This may have been the first occasion in a very long time that a man has spoken to her in love and treated her with dignity and without trying to use her. This is how Jesus relates to sinners. He does not condemn them, he forgives them.

In Luke 7 we read about a sinful woman (tradition says she was a prostitute) who had an encounter with Jesus. She turns up at a party looking for Jesus. All the men of the town use her and all the women of the town abuse her. Day in day out she stands on the street corner. Men would buy her and then throw her away. But then one day she met Jesus, and he said to her, *'I want to buy you back. You are accepted, your sins are forgiven, come to me.'* And so she is coming to the party to find Jesus and show her gratitude for his forgiveness, for not condemning her. But as she approaches Jesus to anoint him with perfume something happens that she doesn't anticipate. She is overcome with emotion. She starts weeping uncontrollably. These tears come right out of her heart. *'Thank you Jesus. Thank you for what you have done for me'*. Her tears flow onto Jesus' feet and she undoes her hair, and she wipes the tears away. Then she kisses his feet and anoints them with perfume, People around her say, *'Does Jesus know that this woman is a sinner?'* But Jesus says to her, *'I do not condemn you.'*

Jesus came not to condemn but to forgive. Jesus never said to anybody, *'Clean up your act and then I'll save you. Get yourself in a better shape and then I'll forgive your sins.'* No! Jesus says, *'Come as you are. You who are full of shame, I will wash you clean. You who are full of guilt I pardon you. You who are rejected, I accept you.'*

Jesus is confident that this woman will now leave her life of sin because of her encounter with grace. Jesus' mercy is so overwhelming that it compels us to do what pleases Him. God's grace makes me burn with love for Him so that I want to turn from the sin that offends the one I love. When we sin, in that moment we love the sin more than we love our saviour. What will drive love for sin from our hearts? A surpassing love. Grace creates in us a love for Jesus that surpasses our love for sin.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why did Jesus not condemn the woman even though she was guilty?

Jesus does not condemn, but he also does not condone sin. In God's eyes adultery is a grievous sin. This woman is not an innocent victim. She is a morally loose, promiscuous woman. Her sin has likely destroyed marriages, likely devastated homes. Why does Jesus not condemn her even though she is guilty? Jesus is not sweeping her sin under the carpet by letting her go. But the capital punishment for adultery prescribed in the Old Testament was rarely carried out in 1st c Palestine, and there were no witnesses to her alleged crime left to testify, so there is no case for the woman to answer in the human courts. However, her sin remains before God. Jesus is already on the way to the cross to bear the penalty for her sin. Her sin will be punished with death, but not her death. Jesus will be punished in her place.

He will soon pay for her sin with his own body and blood because of his grace. Because of his love. With his arms stretched out on the cross he had this woman in mind: *'I love you this much!'* He stretched out his arms with you and me in mind and said *'I love you this much!'* It wasn't nails that kept Jesus on the cross it was his love for you!¹⁹

At the cross this woman's shame and guilt is dealt with, so there is no longer any condemnation, and Jesus makes her as clean as he is, so that God looks upon her with the same love and affection as he looks upon his Son. Because of the cross God looks upon you and me with the same love and affection as he looks upon his Son Jesus.



Reflecting Further

He who has been forgiven little, loves little. He who has been forgiven much, loves much. Discuss.

We will love God to the extent we believe we have been forgiven. If we don't think we have been forgiven much we won't love him much. The one who knows the profound debt that Jesus has paid is the one who will love him much and go and leave their life of sin.

Q: Do you frequently experience God's satisfying acceptance? Why?/why not?

Q: Do you experience the deep satisfying joy of knowing that you are deeply loved? That is what he offers. Discuss.

16

Go read:

John 8:12-30

Bible Study 16

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Some people make outrageous claims. According to official records in Pyongyang, which are taught in all the schools in North Korea, Kim Jong-il the former leader of North Korea started walking when he was 3 weeks old and could talk at 8 weeks. His birth is said to have been prophesied by a swallow, and was signalled by a double rainbow over the mountain and a new star in the sky. He may have only played golf once but he was said to have shot 38 under par which is 25 shots better than the world record including an astonishing 11 holes-in-one. His son Kim Jong Un claims he completed a Rubik's cube in 3 seconds when he was 2yo and drove a car at 3yo. His latest claim is that he can control the weather.

Q: What are the most outrageous claims you have heard people make?

Q: How can we know if people's claims about themselves are true?

Jesus doesn't just have his own testimony. He doesn't just have the legally required 2 witnesses. He has 5 key witnesses: John the Baptist, his miracles, his Father and the Scriptures, with Moses in particular (see ch 5:1-30).



Digging Deeper

Q: What are the claims Jesus makes about himself in this chapter and what are the claims he makes about us?

Jesus makes extraordinary claims. He claims to give us freedom, he claims to give us life itself. And he invites us to come to him to receive both life and freedom here in ch 8. But Jesus' teaching goes beyond claims about himself. In his claims Jesus makes assessments about us, and so the two issues that Jesus continually raises are not only, *'Who do you think I am?'* but also *'Who do you think you are?'* Jesus raises not only our perception of him but also our perception of ourselves. These are still the challenges of today: *'Who was Jesus?'* and *'Who are we?'* He claims to give life and liberty, which are extraordinary claims, but he claims to give us life and liberty. So what is he saying about us in relation to our life and our liberty? Is he saying that we are dead and slaves and what is the evidence for that?

Q: In what sense is Jesus the *'light of world'*?

Q: Light and darkness are major themes in John's gospel. What does John mean by these themes?

Jesus' claim, *'I am the light of the world'* is the second of his seven, *'I Am'* statements recorded in the Gospel of John (v12). This is Jesus' response to the second key ceremony in the Feast of Tabernacles. This ceremony is called *'The Kindling of the Lampstands'*. At the conclusion of the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests descended to the Court of Women. The court of women would be illuminated by 4 huge golden candle sticks with 4 golden bowls on the top of each of them.

According to the Talmud, (the Talmud is the oral rabbinic interpretations, the Written Law, traditions, discussions, comments, and rulings of the Jewish religious leaders) 4 priests would climb ladders 25m high up to the bowls and fill them with oil. All night long the light shone their brilliance, so that *'There was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illumined by light from the candlesticks'*.²⁰

According to the rabbis, the kindling of the lampstands represented God's Shechinah glory, the visible manifestation of God's presence, and reminded the people of the pillar of fire that had guided Israel in their wilderness journey. In addition, the rabbis saw a strong connection between the kindling ceremony and the Messiah. This idea was probably derived from Zechariah 14:16-21, which prophesied that the feast will be fulfilled by the messianic kingdom.²¹ It is against this backdrop that Jesus claims to be *'the light of the world'*.

Darkness and light are common religious symbols of ignorance and knowledge. But John uses darkness as a symbol of death, and light as a symbol of life (v12). Darkness is lostness, where we hide from the truth and hide from the life, where we rebel, it is evil, and it is death. Light is openness, is frankness, is relationship. The darkness can never extinguish the light, the light will always shine (1:5). A relationship with Jesus will cause a fundamental change in your relationship with life and death. If you are one who follows Jesus, death will have no sway over you, for you have moved from death to life (5:24). This is why Jesus is not to be ignored. For death is what really makes all of life's achievements, all of life's relationships meaningless. Death destroys everything that I have, death destroys everything that I am, death destroys me.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why is Jesus' testimony valid?

Because he knows his heavenly origin and destiny (v14). He is not speaking independently, for he has another witness – his Father (16,18),

Q: Why were Jesus' enemies not able to seize Jesus (v20)?

No one seized him, because his hour had not yet come (v20). His hour would come at a time that his Father determined. Until that time Jesus would be protected supernaturally (see also Luke 4:30).

Q: Why does Jesus say that his enemies are '*from below*' (v23)?

Jesus is from '*above*', the realm of God, heaven. However, the Jewish leaders are from '*below*' – not hell or the underworld in this instance, but from the fallen world (see ch 3), in rebellion against its creator. That's why they cannot recognise him or understand his teaching. The huge gulf that separates them can only be overcome by the Father drawing them (6:44), by them being born again (3:3)



Digging Deeper

Q: When will they know that Jesus is 'I Am (he)' (v28)?

It is when the Son of Man is lifted up (v28), lifted up on the cross, lifted up in the clouds (Dan. 7) that they will see the truth of who Jesus is. Muslims deny that Jesus died on the cross, Jews deny that Jesus rose from the dead, but it's in his very death and resurrection that you will see the truth of who he really is.



Reflecting Further

Q: Jesus says 'May .. the world .. believe that you have sent me' (17:21). And we are told "*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent*"(3:16; 6.29).

It appears faith is both a 'believing that' and a 'believing in'. What is the difference and why do we need both?

Faith is both a 'believing that' and a 'believing in'. It is both a response to propositional truth and facts about Jesus but also an engagement with the person Jesus. Jesus is the truth our minds seek and the person our hearts long for.

17

Go read:

John 8:31-59

Bible Study 17

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Kicking Off

Q: Have you even been addicted to something? What was it? (include coffee in this discussion!!)

Q: Was it hard to break this addiction? Discuss.

Q: If you told your non-Christian family and friends that their father was really the Devil, how do you think they might respond?



Digging Deeper

Q: Jesus tells the Jews that they are not free, but enslaved (v32,34). Enslaved to what? What does this mean?

'We've never been slaves to anyone', say the Jews, which is a load of nonsense, because they have been slaves in Egypt, they were slaves in Babylon, they were slaves to the Greeks, to the Tolomes, the Seleucids and now the Romans. They were always slaves, at the very time they were uttering these words the Roman flags were fluttering in the breeze over Jerusalem. But Jesus says, 'Anyone who sins is a slave to sin.' That's the kind of slavery he is talking about. Being a slave is being controlled. The good things we want to do we keep failing to do, the bad things we don't want to do we keep doing. Jesus says that 'unless you believe that I am he (v24), you will die in your sins.' Not just that you are going to die, they all know that they are going to die, but that they are going to die in their sins, that is, die because of their sins, or die as a result of their sins.

Q: Who are those that are truly Jesus disciples?

Those who abide in his word, those who continue in his word (v31).

Q: What will set them free?

The truth. It is only those who hold to Jesus' teachings (v31, 51), who keep his teachings, who will be free (v32). Later Jesus says that it the Son who sets people free (v36).

Q: Who does Jesus say their Father is? Why does he say this (v41-46)?

Sonship is seen in family likeness: The Jewish leaders are not like Abraham or they would be doing what Abraham did: Abraham *'believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness'* (Gen 15:6). However, they do not believe the Lord. If God were their Father they would love Jesus (v42), they would rejoice to see Jesus, God's Son come. But they are like their father the Devil, and their will is to do their father's desires (v44). Their father is a killer and liar and therefore they will believe lies and kill Jesus.

People prefer lies to truth and if you prefer lies to truth it is because of who your father is, the Devil. God is truth, the Devil is lies. It is as simple as that. If you like lying, and you do lie and you like believing lies, you know who your father is. If you love the truth, why that is because God is at work. Truth is what sets us free from the Devil's power, because the Devil's power resides in lies. We look free, we feel free, but we are actually in bondage, all of us, to sin and to Satan, without Jesus.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is Jesus claiming when he says, '*Before Abraham was born, I Am*' (V58)?

Many people want to say, '*Jesus didn't claim to be God,*' because they haven't found in their Bibles a verse where Jesus says, '*I am God*'. But references to God are hidden (if you are not familiar with the Old Testament) in the phrase, '*I Am*' in v58. Back in Ex. 3 when Moses meets God, Moses says '*Who will I say is sending me?*' and God said, '*I Am*' is sending you, '*I Am who I Am*'.

And so the very words '*I Am*' are in the Old Testament in certain places, references to the absolutism of God, '*I Am who I Am*'. In Isaiah, Yahweh declares that '*I Am*' or sometimes '*I Am He*'. This is the name that Yahweh is to be known by, the one '*who is*'. Jesus is clearly alluding to that in v58. The Jews understood what Jesus was saying for they picked up stones to kill him. So to say, '*Before Abraham was, I Am*,' is saying in modern English, '*I am God*', not only '*I am God*', but '*I am Yahweh*', '*I Am Who I Am*', '*I am the one who revealed himself to Moses*.' The Jews of Jesus day were under no misapprehension that Jesus was claiming to be more than a man.

Q: Which claims of Jesus in this chapter have relevance for us today?

Jesus makes claims that go beyond 1st century history into today and into eternity. His claims are to be God, his claims are to give life, his claims are to give freedom. And his claims about us are that we are slaves to sin, captive not free, that we are children of the Devil, lovers of lies and killers, that we are going to die in our sins if we don't follow him. These are not just claims for those living in the 1st century, these are the claims for every person on the planet.



Reflecting Further

Q: Are you held captive by the power of temptation and sin?
What can be done about them?

Do you feel sin like is controlling you? What are you going to do? *'I'm going to beat it.'* No, you won't. You are no match for the powers of hell and the urges of sin. You will not overcome it and you will just be another statistic. There is no answer within yourself. Your own discipline, your own devotion, your own morals will not save you. Turn to Christ. Today.

18

Go read:

John 9

Bible Study 18

C

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Kicking Off

Q: Imagine what it would like to be blind.
How hard would life be?

Q: What would you miss most if you went blind?

Q: What are some things that blind people can't do?

Q: If you lost your sight but then had it restored through an operation, how would you feel? How would life change?



Digging Deeper

Q: What worldview does the disciples' question in v2 expose?

Q: How does Jesus answer?

The context in chapter 9 is the final Sabbath of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, making it an especially holy or high Sabbath. The Pharisaic Judaism in which the disciples were raised, held that a child born with a birth defect resulted from divine judgement on sin committed either by the parents - the Mosaic Law states that God ‘...does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation” (Exod. 34:7). This was construed to view birth defects as such a punishment - or the baby itself. Consequently, Jews born blind were not allowed to recite the Sh'ma. The rabbis believed those born blind would never be able to see until the Messiah came.

Jesus rejected simplistic cause-and-effect explanations for sin and sickness (v3), (and the rest of Scripture tells us the connection e.g. Gen. 3) but his comments seem to imply that at least sometimes a person's sin will result in sickness (v14). The man's blindness was ultimately so that God could be glorified as Jesus displays his grace and truth (1:14) and power and compassion when he heals him. This doesn't mean that every sickness has this purpose, but it was the purpose for this man, on this particular occasion.

Q: What do people mean when they use the term Karma?

Q: How is grace different from Karma?

Karma means you get what you deserve. Your intent and actions (cause) influence your future (effect). Good intent and good deeds contribute to good karma and future happiness, while bad intent and bad deeds contribute to bad karma and future suffering. God's grace on the other hand means He gives you what you don't deserve! Love, forgiveness, eternal life, and in this incident, healing.

Q: What is the significance of Jesus healing the man born blind?

Q: What is the significance of the mud and spit (v6)?

Q: What is the significance of the pool of Siloam (v7)?

By healing the man on the Sabbath, Jesus broke the rabbinical interpretation of the Sabbath law on a number of levels. By spitting on the mud he made clay, which constituted working. The rabbinic teachings (the Talmud) prohibited the application of saliva to the eyes on the Sabbath, as it was evidently intended as a remedy and healing on the Sabbath was prohibited unless a life was at stake. Perhaps Jesus' manner of healing was a direct provocation to Pharisaic Judaism. It was also believed that contact with human excreta - including saliva - made a Jew ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 15:8). But interestingly, in the hands of authorised people it was believed to become an instrument of blessing. Perhaps Jesus is here making a claim to having such spiritual authority.

The pool of Siloam was a rock-cut pool located southwest of the city of David. It was not an easy walk to reach it, even for a man who could see. Why did Jesus send him to this pool and not another? Jesus is drawing attention to his identity. The pool's water was 'sent' - hence its name - via Hezekiah's tunnel from the Gihon spring in the Kidron valley. Just as the pool was called 'sent' so Jesus was the one sent (v4) by the Father. The sent one from the Father, who is the light of the world, sends the one in darkness to a pool named sent to heal his darkness.

The water for the pouring rites of the Feast of Tabernacles (which we saw in ch 7) was drawn from the pool of Siloam. The feast was the context when Jesus pointed to himself as the source of true and living water.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why were the Jews divided? (v16)

Q: What does it mean to be *'put out of the synagogue'* (v22)?

To be *'put out of the synagogue'* meant to be ex-communicated from the Jewish community, to be considered 'dead'. No communication of any kind was permitted with the ex-communicant. The man's parents feared this discipline for themselves, so they are reluctant to answer the Pharisees.

Q: Who claims to be able to see?

Q: What can't they see?

Q: Why are the Pharisees guilty?

According to rabbinic teaching, only the Messiah could heal someone born blind. So according to the Pharisees' own beliefs, Jesus performed a unique messianic miracle. But instead of declaring him the Messiah, they label him a sinner. Jesus did not fit the expectations of who they thought the Messiah would be, and he did not keep their Sabbath laws, and so they try to discredit his miraculous healing. The healed man reminded them of their own teachings (v31-32). The blind man can see that Jesus is who he claims to be, but the Pharisees, who are the teachers of Israel, cannot see. By asking Jesus, *'Are we also blind?'* the Pharisees are claiming that they are not blind. But by not seeing who Jesus really is and therefore not believing in him, they prove their blindness. It is only through trusting in Jesus that sins can be forgiven.



Digging Deeper

Q: The Pharisees were the leaders/shepherds of Israel. What would their report card look like if scored against God's measure of a shepherd? Read Ezekiel 34 to help you answer.

Q: Who does God promise to send to look after his people?

Ezek. 34 describes the shepherds or leaders of Israel failing dismally in their responsibilities. They do not care for the flock, they do not protect them but use them and oppress them. So there is promise of a new day when God, instead of the evil shepherds, will shepherd his flock (v23), and in that day the Messiah instead of the evil shepherds will shepherd the flock. The LORD is the promised shepherd and the LORD's servant David is the promised shepherd, but there will be one shepherd and one flock. This is anticipatory of Jesus' revelation in this gospel that *'I and the Father are one.'* So the Old Testament prophecy is looking forward to a time when the false leaders of Israel will be replaced by God through his Messiah.

Q: What are the roles and responsibilities of a shepherd?

Q: God often refers to his people as 'sheep'. Why do you think that is?

Q: What kind of shepherd is God? (read Ps. 23 to help you answer).

'The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing'.

God uses the picture of Him being a shepherd and his people being his sheep, time and time again in the Scriptures. Did you know that He refers to his people as sheep nearly 200 times? But sheep are dumb, defenceless and directionless! i) Sheep are dumb: Shepherds from a village in Eastern Turkey neglected their flock of sheep while eating breakfast, leaving the sheep to roam free. One sheep wandered off a cliff and plunged to its death. And then one after the other, 1500 sheep followed the first one, walking off the cliff. The first 400 sheep fell 15 metres to their deaths. But the next 1100 sheep survived because the first 400 sheep were piled so high that when the last 1100 fell it was as if they landed on a big soft pillow.

ii) Sheep are defenceless: Sheep are weak, don't hear or see well, and are not fast. Sheep often roll over on their backs and then can't get back up again. This is called a 'cast' sheep. When this happens the sheep is just stuck there on its back, its feet flaying frantically in the air. They are easy pickings for predators.

iii) Sheep are directionless: They are prone to stray away from the shepherd, and if they get lost they cannot find their way back because they have a very poor sense of direction. Sheep are dumb, defenceless and directionless. And God calls us sheep. That's not all that flattering.

The bottom line is that sheep need a shepherd. Without a shepherd, sheep will die from wolves or winter or wandering away. The shepherd guides, provides and protects. The shepherd gets up early and goes out first thing to look over his flock. He looks to see whether they are ill or require some special attention. Throughout the day he looks over them to make sure they don't stray. He feeds them, he waters them. At night he sleeps with "one eye and both ears open" ready at the least sign of trouble to get up and protect his sheep. We are like sheep. We need a shepherd. We've been created that way. The good news is that the LORD is our shepherd.

The LORD never sleeps, he is always looking out for us. He looks to see whether we require special attention. Throughout the day he looks over us to make sure we don't stray. He guides, provides and protects us, so we lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures'

It's not easy to get a sheep to lie down. They will refuse to lie down unless they are free from fear, free from flies and free from hunger. But when the shepherd is with them the sheep know that they will be safe and well fed and they lie down content. The LORD is always with us. He will do the right thing for us at the right time in the right way. We can trust Him and lie down content.

...he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ He refreshes my soul.

If a shepherd finds a sheep on its back, cast down, lying helpless, he rolls it over and lifts it to its feet. He rubs its legs to restore the circulation, while talking to it gently. The sheep will first stumble and stagger, and then eventually will recover. When we are 'cast down': depressed, discouraged, sick, sad, lost our joy, as we come close to our shepherd through His Word and prayer He will restore our souls and refresh us.

³... He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake'.

Even when the path is perfectly clear ahead of them, sheep will still stray off course, but the shepherd guides them back where they should go. We know the right path we should take but we go astray again and again. In his grace our good shepherd brings us back to the right path again and again.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

To find food, a shepherd at times has to lead his sheep through valleys and ravines which are covered in darkness. Predators wait in ambush for some fresh lamb chops.

But the shepherd is always there to protect them. Today's shepherds carry rifles, in David's day shepherds carried a rod and staff. A rod is kind of like a club, used to drive off predators like wolves, or lions, or to beat away snakes. But it was also used for discipline. If a sheep wandered away or approached poisonous weeds, the shepherd threw the rod at the sheep to send it back to the flock. The staff, on the other hand, was a long, slender stick, often with a crook or hook on one end. The shepherd used it to guide sheep along a path by nudging them along. At times, the staff was used to pull it out of the water or to free it from thorns. In the same way God is always with us protecting us with his rod and guiding us with his staff through the valley of the shadow of death.

There are going to be valleys in life for all of us. Some of us have many valleys, some few. Some of us have deep valleys, some not so deep. But somewhere in our journey, we must pass through the valley of the shadow of death. We have nothing to fear because even in the darkest valleys of life God never leaves us. Our security lies not in our circumstances but in our shepherd.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever'.

God has given every Christian 2 bodyguards: Goodness and mercy. Even though you can't see them they are right there next to you. They never leave your side. They follow you wherever you go. If you go right you have goodness, If you go left you have mercy. If you go right there is goodness, If you go wrong there is mercy. They are for you and will never leave you. Wherever you go they will go. Our bodyguards, goodness and mercy, will never leave our side, even when we die. Dead people don't bother having bodyguards. But our bodyguards of goodness and mercy never leave us, even when we die. They will guide us home to the house of the LORD for all eternity.



Reflecting Further

Q: The Pharisees are so committed to their worldview they fail to see the truth of Jesus right in front of them. What worldviews do modern people have that blind them to the truth today?

19

Go read:

John 10

Bible Study 19

C

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Kicking Off

As we saw in Study 3, at the time of writing the person with the most followers on Instagram was Cristiano Ronaldo with 152m followers, and on Twitter it was Katy Perry with 107m followers.

Q: Do you think Cristiano Ronaldo and Katy Perry know all their followers by name? Why/why not?

Q: Do you think that they would lay down their life for their followers? Why/why not?

Q: How is Jesus' relationship with his followers different to the relationship between Cristiano Ronaldo and Katy Perry and their followers?



Digging Deeper

Q: What did Jesus mean when he said, '*I am the gate*' (v7), and '*I am the Good Shepherd*' (v14)?

Q: How do the false shepherds and the hired hands differ from the '*good shepherd*'?

Q: How does knowing that Jesus is the '*good shepherd*' effect your relationship with God?

There is no division between Ch 9 and 10 in the original, it was added centuries later. It makes it look like Jesus has changed the subject and we are into a new day on a different occasion. v22 is a new day and a different occasion, but look at v21 and you will see we are still dealing with the same subject and event. We are still in one dialogue that is taking place. And Jesus is speaking against these Jewish leaders, these false shepherds of Israel who like the false shepherds of Ezekiel's day were hindering rather than helping the people of God. They were more interested in fleecing the sheep than in guiding them, nurturing them and guarding them. And it's about them that he sets up the contrast about the shepherd, the gate and the thieves (v1-10).

Jesus says, *'I am the gate'*. Sheep in Jesus' day would be kept in a sheep pen. The gate was the sole entry point for the sheep to enter the safety of the fold or the luxury of the pasture. At night the shepherd would lie down in front of the gate, so nothing would get into the sheep fold except through the shepherd and the sheep would not come and go except by the will of the shepherd. Those who were authorised to enter would do so through the gate. He who was not authorised would have to come in by climbing in over the wall, with the intent to steal and brutalize the sheep. Jesus is the gate, He is the sole entry point for the sheep to enter the safety of the fold or the luxury of the pasture, but the false shepherds, those who do not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climb in by another way, are thieves and robbers (v1). And the purpose by which they enter is different: they may come offering freedom and life, but they really come only to kill and steal and destroy (v10). Jesus comes as the true shepherd who gives life and gives it abundantly. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, because he actually owns the sheep (v12), and cares for the sheep in a way a hire-ling cares for his wages (v13). He therefore knows the sheep and that's why they will listen to him (v14). And notice how this work of the shepherd is the work of the Father.

The good shepherd who owns the sheep, is not like the hired hands, he is like the son of the household doing his father's will, his father's command. He as the heir, owns the sheep with his Father, the Father who is the shepherd (v15-18).

What did it say in Ezek. 34? God will be the shepherd of his people and the Son of God will be appointed to shepherd his people. God will shepherd his people through the shepherd he appoints, the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God.



Digging Deeper

Q: How do the sheep know who to follow?

Over time, sheep come to associate the sound of their shepherd's voice or whistle, with particular rewards: food, water, protection, care. And so sheep learn to distinguish their keeper's voice from others. Jesus uses this image for his relationship with his people. His sheep know their shepherd's voice (v3-5). They hear his voice, they recognise his voice, they follow his voice. It is listening to the voice of God, in the word of God, that enables us to discriminate the good shepherd from false shepherds.

Q: When the Jews demanded that Jesus tell them if he was the Christ (v24), Jesus replies that he already had. When was this?

Q: Why don't the Jewish leaders believe what Jesus says (v26)?

3:14; 5:17; 5:25; 5:33; 8:42; 8:58.

The Jews were again divided (v19). They ask him the question his claims imply, '*Are you claiming to be the shepherd that Ezekiel 34 said was coming, are you the Messiah, are you the Christ, tell us plainly.*' Jesus' response is clear. '*I have said it, I have done it and you do not believe because you are not my sheep*'. Because they were not his sheep they were not listening to his voice. He came amongst the fold, he called out his sheep by name and the other sheep said, '*You are not the shepherd.*'

In the 2nd half of this chapter are 2 startling claims. The first is '*I and the Father are one*' (v30) and the second is '*you are gods*' (v34).

Q: Why are these texts startling?

No text is in itself startling or extraordinary, it is only startling for those who do not think as the Bible thinks. '*I and the Father are one*' and '*you are gods*,' are not astonishing texts for Jesus, but they were for his contemporaries and they are for our contemporaries. Why? Because the Bible teaches monotheism. The Bible teaches that there is but one God, and Yahweh is God and there is no other. Deut. 6:4-5 emphasises the oneness of God. But now, a man claims to be one with the Father and then claims that other humans are gods, not on his own authority but on the authority of the Word of God itself, which cannot be broken (v35). Well as always, we have to go back to the context to see how the rest of the passage illuminates these two texts, and in the process how these two texts illuminate the rest of the passage.



Digging Deeper

Q: In what way is Jesus one with his Father?

Is he one in mind and one in purpose, or is he one in mission and in goal, or is he one in being and in substance? What is the meaning of, *'I and the Father are one'*? The Jewish response to that claim is to pick up stones to stone him as a blasphemer for saying such a thing. Jesus' sheep are his Father's sheep. And Jesus' shepherding is his Father's shepherding and no one snatches his sheep from his hand. But notice who the 'his' is in that phrase (v28). No one snatches the sheep of God out of the Messiah's hand, and in no-one snatching them out of the Messiah's hand, no one is snatching them out of God's hand, because the Father and the Son are the shepherd of Israel. There is one shepherd and one flock, but that one shepherd is both the Father and the Son. Ezekiel promised that God was going to be the shepherd and Ezekiel promised that the Messiah was going to be the shepherd. This is true because the Son and the Father are one, one in purpose and one in entity. And so comes the great verse, *'I and the Father are one'* (v30). He was not a man claiming to be God like a Greek god - a man making himself God, he was God having been made a man. He was not a second God, for notice that he says, *'I and the Father are one'*. The 'are' is plural in the Greek. He is not saying, 'I and the Father 'am' one', but 'we' plural 'are' one. He is not saying, 'I am the Father', he is making a clear distinction between himself and the Father, while at the same time claiming a unity with the Father that is unique. He has the same oneness with the Father as an obedient son to a father who owns the flock in common. If you deal with the Son you deal with the Father, if you deal with the Father you deal with the Son. Because this flock is owned by Father and Son. They are one.

Q: How does Jesus defend the charge of blasphemy against him?

Jesus answers the charge of blasphemy - a mere man claiming to be God (v33) - by quoting from Psalm 82:6. For there, in the authoritative Word of God, humans – in particular the false shepherds of Israel - are called gods by God because they fulfill the role and function of ruler over the people. Man is a kind of god, not in the sense that he is parallel to the Almighty creator of heaven and earth, God, but in the sense that he does rule, he has power, he has authority. So there are gods in creation, there are creatures who are gods. If there are creatures who are gods, how can the Jews say that Jesus is saying the wrong thing when he calls himself a god. Surely, God's appointed Son sent into the world as the Christ and true shepherd, should also be able to be called god or the Son of God.

Q: What does it mean that '*Scripture cannot be set aside*' or '*broken*' (v35)?'

Q: How are we to know that Jesus and the Father are one?

Jesus says, '*If you want to judge me, you must judge me by my actions*' (v37). You know God by what He does and what He does is shepherd his people. That is what God is like - He is like what He does. You can see what God does, and He does all kinds of things, He creates, He rules, He governs, He sustains, He upholds, He seeks, He does all kinds of things, but one of the things He does is he shepherds. And so look for the shepherd who is like God, for God promises that when He comes to shepherd his people His Son will shepherd His people.

What is the character of that shepherd? There are lots of shepherds, how will you know the true shepherd when you see him? Well, he will shepherd in the same way that God shepherds. *'So judge by my actions'*, says Jesus. *'Do I rule as the Father would rule? Am I the true shepherd like the Father who shepherds?'* And the answer falls out *'Yes'*, for this shepherd lays down his life as you would expect the Father to care for his sheep. He owns his sheep, and he lays down his life as the shepherd has been instructed to lay down his life. He is not like the false shepherd who uses the sheep for himself, abuses the sheep and carelessly ignores the needs of the sheep. He is like the Father who shepherds, who cares for the sheep, who loves the sheep because the sheep are his own and will sacrifice the loss of all for the welfare of his sheep. He is pointing to the cross, when we will see him as the Father's Son and recognising the family similarity, we will recognise him to be who he says he is.



Reflecting Further

Q: Do you listen to the master's voice? What does this look like in your life?

Q: How does the truth that no-one can snatch you out of the Father's hand and Jesus' hand, make you feel?

20

Go read:

John 11:1-44

Bible Study 20

C

Context

O

Observation

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Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: The death of a loved one is a terribly painful experience. Why does death make us feel like this?



Digging Deeper

Q: What does Jesus say is the reason for Lazarus falling ill (v4)?

Q: What does Jesus mean?

Q: Why, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, did he remain where he was for a further 2 days (v6)?

Q: Jesus said, '*this illness does not lead to death*' (v4), but Lazarus dies. Was Jesus wrong?

Q: Jesus says to his disciples that it was good he was not there when Lazarus died so the disciples would believe (v15). Believe what?

Lazarus died alright, but that was not going to be the end of this story. Lazarus' illness would not ultimately end in death, but would glorify God and glorify God's Son (v4). When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he purposely delays his going to him. It's not until Lazarus is dead that he then goes. Why didn't he go earlier? Because Lazarus had to die in order that the sign could take place for the disciples' sake, so they would believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Q: What is this resurrection on the last day that Martha speaks of (v24)?

Martha's response to Jesus is classic orthodox Judaism, which believes there is going to be a resurrection on the last day. It's not just that each individual will be resurrected, but that there will be a resurrection day, a day when all will be raised up to come before God in judgement, either to live with God or to live in punishment for doing evil. E.g. Ezek. 36-37; Dan. 12. So when Jesus says *'Your brother will rise again'* Martha says, *'Well I know that, there is going to be a resurrection day, and as one of God's people he will rise to be with God. You are not telling me anything Jesus.'* She hasn't understood that Jesus is going to call him from the grave, to raise him in this age and generation, she only hears him talking about the judgement day at the end of the world. Many Christians today have lost the sense of this resurrection as the judgement day at the end of the world. We tend to use resurrection interchangeably with immortality. It's a very different thing. My resurrection is not about my continuation after death, my resurrection is about the day my Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the dead (see also Acts 17:31; 24:15; Heb. 9:27).

Q: In what way is Jesus *'the resurrection and the life'* (v25)?

Jesus doesn't make a habit of going around raising dead people, he didn't walk through the cemeteries of 1st c Palestine and open up graves. That is not what he came to do. There are only 3 occasions in the gospels when such extraordinary things happen and when they do they happen for some other reason than to show that Jesus is powerful, or to prove that God exists.

They have a symbolic importance and we must look to what it was that it was pointing to. Lazarus' resuscitation is unusual, unprecedented in a sense. In the resuscitation of Lazarus Jesus is pointing to the resurrection of the dead. *'I am the resurrection and the life'*, is the claim of Jesus. Not *'I give life'*, but *'I am life'*. Not *'I will rise'*, but *'I am the resurrection'*. Not *'I am the way to life'*, but that *'I am life itself, eternal life, resurrection life, that is me'*. The resurrection was intrinsic to Jesus himself. He was the bringer of the new age. He was the bringer of the judgement of the world, of the new creation, of the kingdom of God. He was the one who came to bring eternal life. If you have met Jesus you have met the judgement of God, you have met the power of life over death. No one comes to life outside of Jesus, and all who believe in him whether they die physically or not, will come to eternal life (v24-26).

Jesus is saying, *'With me the full story is not birth, life, death. It's birth, life, death..... life! Even though your heart will stop beating one day and your lungs will stop breathing, even though you will pass through the door called physical death, you will not die if you trust in me. Even though you will be put 6 foot under the ground one day, you will not just be fertilizer, you will live. You are a billionaire in immortality. A billionaire whose fortune cannot be lost, whose fortune is less perishable than the stars and longer lasting than time. The length of your living cannot be diminished by your dying, for you are without end, you have eternal life before you if you believe in me.'*²²



Digging Deeper

Q: Why do you think *'Jesus wept'* (v35)? After all, he knew he was going to raise Lazarus back to life soon anyway.

Q: What does the Bible say about why death is in our world? Look up Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12 -14; 6:23.

In one sense, *'Jesus wept'* is what the chapter is all about. Death was not part of God's perfect creation. God's design was birth, life. Life with Him forever. What place is death in the purposes of God? For it is the purpose of God that we die. Death is the penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23) though it is not the final penalty for sin (Heb. 9:27) for in death will come the judgement upon sin. Death ends relationships, death means loss, death leaves us to pick up the pieces, we are helpless to reverse it. But the good news is: In Jesus we can have life. For Jesus, the full story is not birth, life, death, its birth, life, death.life!! I have been to some funerals and there is no hope given at all for life after death, the message is only, *'Cherish the memories of the past, that's all you've got.'* But the good news is with Jesus, birth, life, death is not the full story. But it is birth, life, death, life.

Q: What is the significance of Lazarus being dead '4 days' (v39)?

Q: Why did Jesus cry out in 'a loud voice' (v43)?

Jewish belief was that the spirit left the body after 3 days. Lazarus had been dead 4 days so his spirit had left and he was really dead in Jewish thought, making his resurrection all the more significant. Why did Jesus cry out in a loud voice? So Lazarus could hear? No, it doesn't matter how loud you speak to dead people. Jesus could have whispered, *'Lazarus come out'* and Lazarus would have come out. It was so the crowd around him could witness his sign and his authority.



Digging Deeper

Q: In what way do we see the glory of God and the glory of the Son in Lazarus' resurrection?

In Lazarus rising from the dead, we see the glory of God as Jesus brings in a kingdom where mercy is extended and death will not reign. We see God's faithfulness in bringing in a kingdom where the dead will rise as he promised in Ezek. 37 and Dan. 12.



Reflecting Further

Q: Death forces us to question our own mortality. Are you ready for your own death?

Q: What hope can we draw from the resurrection of Jesus and from Jesus' words?

Death makes meaningless all of life. For if death is the last word on us then all life's actions really amount to nothing. If the good and the bad go to the same grave, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish, if death is the only thing that our future holds, then life is meaningless and pointless. Death is offensive to us, because it says *'All that I have done, all that I have achieved, all that I am is of no point, no significance, I am just for the crematorium, I am just for the grave.'* It says that truth and love and beauty and integrity and injustice and freedom are all an irrelevance. However, there is an optimism in the resurrection, because in the resurrection is a judgement: the judgement of God which declares that your life and all that

has happened in it is of meaning, is of significance and will be taken into account. There will be a righting and punishment of the wrongdoing of this world, and a rewarding of righteousness, and God's people will go on living.

Can you be ready for death? Those who have met their maker in their lifetime, who know him who is the resurrection and the life, they are the ones who are prepared for their death.



Reflecting Further

There was a young woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as she was getting her things 'in order,' she met with her pastor to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. Everything was in order and the Pastor was preparing to leave when the young woman turned to him and said:

'There's one more thing,' she said. 'What's that?' came the Pastor's reply. 'This is very important,' the young woman continued. 'I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.' The pastor stood looking at the young woman, not knowing quite what to say. The young woman explained. *'When we were growing up we were very poor but my grandmother used to save up her money and then once a year would take us out for dinner at a fancy restaurant. We would eat beautiful food. When the dishes of the main course were being cleared, she would lean over to me and say, 'Keep your fork. The best is yet to come.' And then they would bring out the desserts, like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie.*



Reflecting Further

So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them: 'Keep your fork ..the best is yet to come.' The pastor's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the young woman good-bye. He knew this may well be the last time he would see her before her death.

But he also knew that she had a better grasp of what heaven would be like than many people twice her age. She KNEW that something better was coming.

At the funeral people were walking by the young woman's casket and they saw the fork placed in her right hand.. Over and over, the pastor heard the question, *'What's with the fork?'* And over and over he smiled. During his message, the pastor told the people of the conversation he had with the young woman shortly before she died. So the next time you reach down for your fork let it remind you, that the best is yet to come.²³

Q: What do you think of this story?

21

Go read: John 11:45-12:19

Bible Study 21

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

People often qualify their reasons not to believe the Bible by saying things like, *'If God would appear to me right now I would believe,'* and, *'If I was back there with Jesus and saw him I would believe. I can't believe unless I see for myself.'*

Q: What do you think about these statements?

Many people say that if God would only show himself to them they would believe. Or if they were there back then and saw Jesus then it would have been easy for them to believe. But would they believe if God appeared to them right now in person? Would they have believed if they were in Israel 2000 years ago and saw Jesus for themselves? They may expect that seeing is believing but that is a mistake. Recognising God all depends on what you are looking for. How would you recognise him if you did see him? Who knows what you are seeing without an interpreter? Who knows what you are seeing without a commentator? It would be like eskimos watching a game of Australian Rules Football. What would they make of it? Jesus coming in on a donkey, crowds cheering, what does it mean? It is the Scriptures that give us that commentary. Seeing who God is and what He is like and thus recognising him comes from looking with biblical glasses. We must allow God to define who He is and how we should come to Him.



Digging Deeper

Q: We have seen many times so far in John's gospel, that what is really critical about a sign is not its miraculous nature, but that it signifies something beyond itself. v47 says that there were signs the Jews failed to see. Can you identify those signs and work out what they signify?

Q: What is the significance of Mary anointing Jesus (12v3)?

Q: Why did the crowd recite Psalm 118 and wave palm branches as Jesus entered Jerusalem (12:12-13)?

Q: Why did Jesus choose to enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (12:14-15)?

Lazarus doesn't go away after he has been raised from the tomb, he is such a celebrity that crowds are travelling to see him. That's not hard to understand. If you'd heard of a man who had been dead 4 days and was now living at the end of your street wouldn't you go for a wander down and take a look? Wouldn't you stand downwind to see if he smells? And many are believing in Jesus because of him. It sounds like they are doing the right thing, but remember why they are putting their faith in Jesus? Because they see Lazarus. Not necessarily because they understand what the raising of Lazarus means and signifies, it's just that they have seen somebody who has raised the dead.

In the 1st c, anointing someone with oil was a Jewish act of hospitality for a guest. It was normally a guest's head that was anointed with oil, which served to refresh them. Anointing a guest's feet was unusual, the feet were normally washed with water by the house servant, so this anointing is an act of beautiful devotion.

Nard, from the nard plant is a perfume and is not what would be normally used – it is too expensive. We're told it cost a year's wages. A woman would save up for it, to use on her wedding night. Mary devotedly lavishes it on Jesus. Mary using her hair rather than a towel to wipe Jesus' feet was sure to raise eyebrows, for it was immodest for a Jewish woman to unbind her hair in public. But Mary is caught up in the emotion of it all, more concerned with her devotion to Jesus than societal conventions. She stands in stark contrast with the religious leaders who were more concerned with the honour of man than the honour of God, and Judas who complains about the expense. Jesus' response to Judas is not what we might expect (v8). It's pretty hard to argue against giving money to the poor, you can't possibly win that argument.

Jesus is not saying we shouldn't give to the poor, more than anyone else in history he tells us to care for the poor and love our neighbour, but there are some occasions which you need to celebrate because it marks something special happening. E.g. Fireworks to celebrate the New Year is an expensive way to celebrate but it lifts the hearts and spirits of the community. The same goes for a ticker tape parade to welcome back sportstars or soldiers. If we never celebrated these things we would live a very barren life, the poor themselves would live a very barren life. There comes a time when you sing happy birthday and you eat food that is unnecessary and unhealthy, but you do it to celebrate.

The Old Testament coronation ceremony for the kings of Israel included oil being placed on the King's forehead as a sign of God's authority, like a crown is placed on the British king or queen. This was called an anointing. And in the ancient world perfumes were used to prepare a dead body for burial. As Mary pours perfume on Jesus - in the gospel of Mathew and Mark we are told that Mary anoints Jesus' head also in the incident- she is anointing Jesus as King and embalming him for the grave. Did she understand the significance of what she was doing? No. Did those around her understand it? No. But Jesus understood what it signified. He will become Messiah in his death, his coronation will be his crucifixion, his anointing was his embalming for his burial. So hang the expense.

The Passover festival was one of the feasts that Jews were required to attend every year, so the population of Jerusalem would swell to 3 or 4 times the normal numbers. A huge crowd comes out to greet Jesus and what they are shouting out is a politically hot Psalm - Psalm 118. It is a nationalistic Psalm that speaks of the Messiah's conquest of Israel's enemies. The crowd is declaring Jesus to be this one who comes in the name of the Lord, and they welcome him as the conquering King. They are waving palm branches, which were not part of Passover celebrations but were a Jewish nationalistic symbol, like wearing a 'Make America Great Again' hat, and signaled hope that the messianic liberator whom generations of Jews had waited for, had finally arrived. The actions of the crowds indicated that they expected that the establishment of the messianic kingdom was imminent.

If at this point Jesus had said to the crowd, *'Ok let's rise up and take Rome'*, every person in the crowd would have gone home and got a sword or spear. Young men would have enlisted in Jesus' army, and been ready to fight. Here is the great moment for Jesus to take his place as King and to lead Israel and defeat their enemies. He could ride into Jerusalem on a warhorse, or in a chariot, and make a big statement that he is the conquering King of Psalm 118. But he does the exact opposite. Jesus rides into Jerusalem intentionally on a donkey. This was not what a conquering King would ride. Imagine the Roman emperor Caesar riding in on a donkey. It would be like Queen Elizabeth coming into town in a beaten up Camry, right? You're like, "Really? A Camry?? That's not what we were expecting. Is she really a queen?" Where is the Rolls Royce? Jesus is riding in on a Camry. It's a statement, it's a sign. Jesus is saying, *'I am not the Messiah you are expecting. I am not the Messiah you want. But I am the Messiah you need.'* The prophet Zechariah saw this day 500y previously (Zech 9:9-11). But no-one will understand until after Jesus' death and resurrection. So here comes Jesus the King of Israel but he is coming on a donkey as the king of peace who will make peace with the nations his way, as the Passover lamb, whose blood of the new covenant will spell release for prisoners. But the disciples, let alone the crowd, didn't understand. This was the day of the month on which the Jewish people set aside the Passover lamb in line with Exodus 12:3-6, assessed it to make sure it was spotless and without blemish, and after 4 days slaughtered it. Jesus, rides into Jerusalem and is set aside as the true Passover lamb of God and in 4 days he will be arrested and sentenced to death.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why was it not until after Jesus was glorified, that the disciples understood the significance of Jesus' entry (12:16)?

It wasn't until Jesus was glorified, until he had died and risen from the dead, and the Spirit of God given to those who believed, that that which was revealed and not seen, was remembered and understood as they reflected upon the Scriptures.

Q: What did the Chief Priests and Pharisees fear (11:48)?

So many are believing in Jesus because of Lazarus, the Jewish leaders plot to knock Lazarus off, because his very existence is walking evidence to the crowds that Jesus is who he says he is. The members of the Jewish ruling council were afraid that the people would proclaim Jesus as their Messiah, their king. As a result, the occupying Romans would see this rival King of Israel as a threat and forcefully subdue this threat by destroying the nation. Consequently, the Jewish leaders would lose their positions of power and privilege. It shows just how evil the leader's hearts are. They are so obsessed with their own position of prestige and power they will get rid of anyone who threatens their hold on it. Jesus is too popular for his own good and their good.



Digging Deeper

Caiaphas spoke more than he knew (11:50). Discuss.

Caiaphas was a man speaking in hostility to God, but speaking the truth of God, speaking in opposition to Jesus but prophesying the truth about Jesus. Never a truer word would be spoken, Jesus would die for the nation. It was truer than poor Caiaphas knew.

Q: How does these chapters develop the disciples' understanding of the way in which Jesus is going to 'give life'?

Lazarus' resurrection was a foretaste of what was going to happen when Jesus' own death would conquer death and Jesus' resurrection would give life.



Reflecting Further

Jesus could have come with a sword and saved a single nation for a few years, but instead he came to die on a cross so he could save the whole world for all eternity. Discuss.

22

Go read:

John 12:20-50

Bible Study 22

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Everyone has heard of the ship the Titanic right? The Titanic is Hollywood's most famous ship movie. I've never seen it though. Everytime I've gone to watch it I think to myself, 'I know the ending, they hit an ice-berg', and I watch something else. Probably the 2nd most famous ship movie is *The Poseidon Adventure*. The ocean liner S.S. Poseidon is caught in a huge storm and a massive 30m tsunami wave hits the ship and flips it over. The ship floats upside down, because of the air trapped inside. But for how long? How long until the boat fills with water and sinks to the bottom of the ocean? A group of passengers decide they are not going to wait to find out and attempt to escape. But their world has been turned upside down. Down is now up and up is down. The bottom of the ship is now the top of the ship and the top of the ship is now the bottom of the ship. They decide to climb up into the bottom of the ship where the air is. They go into the hull of the ship, by going up. When they get to the hull, rescuers hear them banging and cut them free.

Jesus' life and mission could be described as '*Down is the way up*'. Discuss.

When Jesus came to our world he did things that were completely upside down to the way the world worked. What the world thought was impressive, the way the world thought things ought to be done, Jesus says '*No, It's something completely different*'. In the Kingdom of God, down is up and up is down. If you want to gain life, you must first die to yourself. If you want to gain life, you must first lose it.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is Jesus' response after hearing the Greeks were asking to see him (v20-23)?

Q: Why do you think he responds this way?

Q: What does Jesus mean, '*The hour has come*' (v23)?

Q: How did he know the hour had come?

Ch 12:23 is the climax of what we have been looking at so far. It is a major turning point in the gospel of John, and yet a strange one. Up to this point Jesus has been exercising a public ministry amongst the crowds but from this time onwards he is going to be ministering to his disciples only. Just imagine, here is Jesus, two of his disciples come up to him and say, '*There is a group of Greeks who would like to see you.*' Jesus replies, '*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*'. What does the answer have to do with the question? And the Greeks don't get another mention in the chapter. What is it about the Greeks coming that ends his public ministry and turns his face towards his death?

The key to understanding this turning point is the timing:

1. It's the Passover time. It wasn't fitting for him to die outside of Passover time, the Passover time was critical. Jesus goes through several Passovers in John's gospel, but the coming of the Greeks somehow indicated to him that this was the Passover time that his death would take place.

2. The hour. In John's gospel up to this stage, we keep on being told the hour has not yet come. It's not an hour as in 60 minutes, but 'the' hour, this occasion, this moment. Jesus was conscious that there was a timetable operating, God's timetable. He had been seized at the feast but that was not the right time (7:6), some other time would be the right time. The Greeks come along and he says, '*Now is the time*'. Why? What is it about the Greeks coming that makes him sure it is the time?

As the leaders of the Jews fear that the whole world has gone to him (12:19), so the whole world did come to him with the arrival of the Greeks. For the Greeks, the Greek speakers, non-Jews, symbolised to Jesus that his public ministry had reached the stage that all the world has heard of him (V23). Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, he has gone first to the Jews, but now that the Greeks come, the nations start to arrive, Jesus knows it is time. For when the nations come in, now is the time for which he had been sent in the first place. Now the world has turned up at his doorstep, it is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified, it is the hour for the judgment of the world. And when do the nations come to the Son of Man? When the Son of Man rises up in the clouds to the Ancient of Days in the Judgment Day (Daniel 7:11-14). So if the nations are coming to him, the Judgement Day must have started. If the nations are coming to him, it's time to be lifted up in the clouds. And how is he going to be lifted up in the clouds? On a cross in his death. The way in which the Son of Man is going to rule the nations is by his death, so that is why when the Greeks turn up to Jesus, Jesus knows it's time. So he finishes off dealing with the public, and calls his disciples together and explains to them that he is leaving them (ch13-17).

We have been waiting 12 chapters for the hour to come and when it finally arrives Jesus says, *'The hour is my death!'* Jesus will be lifted up on the cross, lifted up in the clouds and all people will come to him: Jews and Greeks, men and women, rich and poor. So that is why when the Greeks turn up Jesus knows it's time. The defeat of Satan, the exaltation of the Son of Man, the drawing of men and women from the ends of the earth were events expected at the end times. With the death of Jesus the end times begin. When Jesus is lifted up on the cross he is enthroned as King, and Satan is dethroned. Satan's tyranny is smashed. That's why Jesus goes on to talk about his death. That is why he recoils from the possibility of it (v27). v27 functions in John's gospel like the garden of Gethsemane in Matthew, Mark and Luke, his moment of facing death.



Digging Deeper

Q: The crowd says, *'We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever'* (v34). Where do you think they got this understanding from?

Q: What evidence is there from this chapter that for Jesus *'down is the way up'*?

It's a reasonable question: *'The Messiah is supposed to rule for ever, but you are talking about dying. So who are you?'* The Jews thought that when the Messiah came his reign would be without end. Such hopes were rooted in Old Testament promises such as when God says: *'I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever'* (2 Sam. 7:13). The Messiah will remain forever but what the Jews did not comprehend was that first he must die on the cross, which doesn't look very messianic. It doesn't look like victory. It doesn't look like triumph. The cross looks like defeat, it looks like failure. But down is the way up.

Remember when Jesus is baptised? The voice of God the Father is heard from heaven. What does he say? *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* (Lk. 3:22) His words are a combination of 2 Old Testament passages: Ps. 2:7, *'The LORD said to me, "You are my Son";* and Is. 42.1 *"Here is my servant ...in whom I am well pleased'*. These 2 passages had never been brought together ever before. Psalm 2 is the Royal psalm, the Psalm which was read at the King of Israel's coronation when he was anointed with oil. Is. 42 refers to an unusual figure in the Old Testament called *'the Suffering Servant'*. This servant was also anointed by God, but he would suffer and die, people would turn their face away from him, and he would some-how take on the iniquity of the world, whatever that meant. No-one had ever put these 2 figures together. Why would they? No-one had ever thought they should be together.

What does a King who will rule the nations have to do with a servant who will suffer and die? God the Father brings these together because Jesus has come to be both King and suffering servant. He will become King by suffering and dying. Down is the way up in the Kingdom of God.



Digging Deeper

Jesus gives an illustration of a kernel of wheat (v24).

Q: How does this help us understand what Jesus came to do?

Q: How does this help us understand what the Christian life is to be like?

Just as a kernel of wheat must fall to the ground and die if it is to bring life, in the same way, Jesus must be buried and die in order to bring forth a rich harvest: the salvation of the world. His death enables the world to live. Death is the necessary condition for the generation of life. It's upside down to the way the world thinks.

And it's the same for you and me. We need to die to ourselves – we must be willing to give up the right to self-determination, the right to call the shots in our lives, the selfish preoccupation with our lives, the idolatrous focus on self - and live for Christ, and in so doing we will paradoxically find life. It's scary to think about this level of sacrifice, right? Jesus says *'That's the cost of following me.'*

**Jesus is the master of the church shrinkage movement.
Discuss.**

Crowds of people are following Jesus and the disciples are like *'Yes, finally we are growing'* and then Jesus says, *'Nothing in your life can have a higher allegiance than me. Everything is to be such a distant second it looks like hate in comparison. I am about to go die and unless you are willing to ditch your life as well, unless you are willing to stop pandering to your own self interest, don't bother following me, you can't be my disciple'*. Jesus is the master of the church shrinkage movement, right? He is not after crowds, he is after genuine disciples.

Q: Why is it that the Jews did not believe in Jesus?

v37-50 is the conclusion to Jesus' public ministry. It is a sad conclusion for the Jews, the people of God, did not believe in him. It was the plan of God that they would reject the Messiah, as prophesied in the words of Isaiah. Because of the hardness of the hearts of his people and their evil and idolatrous ways, the Lord hardened their hearts further in confirming judgement, so that they would continue in their rebellion against God, and when God's servant came they would be in rebellion against God's servant as well. In his great mercy God would save a remnant, whose hearts he would turn to Him.

But it was also because they didn't love the glory of God. They preferred the glory that men give to the glory that God gives. They didn't want to be thrown out of the synagogue, therefore they didn't listen to what Jesus said. If you are more concerned about the honour of man than the honour of God, the praise of man than the praise of God, the glory of man than the glory of God then you will not hear and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you love your life you will lose your life. It is only those who hate their life who will be the true servants of Jesus. And God will honour them (v25-26).



Reflecting Further

A man named James Calvert went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands. The ship captain tried to turn him back saying, *"You'll lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages."* Calvert replied, *"We died before we came here."*

Q: What do you think of Calvert's reply?

The central issue of being a disciple of Jesus is: *'Will I willingly surrender every aspect of my life to Jesus no matter what it costs me?'*

23

Go read:

John 13

Bible Study 23

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: What are some of the most self-sacrificial things you have experienced people do for others?



Digging Deeper

Q: What did Jesus know in v3?

Q: How did Jesus respond to this knowledge?

Q: What do you think of this response?

Q: Why does Peter not allow Jesus to wash his feet (v8)?

Q: Why did Jesus wash his disciples' feet?

Q: Why if Jesus does not wash his disciples, will they have no part with him (v8)?

At a Jewish Passover celebration, four cups of wine are drunk, and after the first cup traditionally there is a handwashing ceremony. Usually the mother or daughter would take on a servant role and wash each person's hands. Jesus adapts this ceremony by doing two things differently. He takes upon himself the servant's role by carrying out the washing, and instead of washing his disciples' hands, he washes their feet.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his control, that he had come from the Father and that he was returning to the Father. What would you expect someone who knew that, to then do? Well, Jesus took a towel and washed his disciples' feet! You would think that knowing his credentials he would dress accordingly in regal garb, he would have a line of servants waiting on him hand and foot. But Jesus, recognising that he was who he was, got dressed as a servant, putting on the slave's apron. Notice v3-4 are connected in such a fashion. What is happening here? Well, in ancient Israel, the way to get from place to place was to walk, and they didn't have the choice of footwear we have today, and they didn't have socks, they walked with open sandals. So you can imagine the state of their feet after a day's walking. The job of washing someone's feet was a dirty, unenviable task and fell to the lowest of the servants. Peer's definitely did not wash one another's feet and the disciples would not have thought of washing each other's feet. In fact, some Jews insisted that it was a job too menial even for Jewish slaves and that it should be kept for the Gentile slaves. It was because he knew he was God that he did this job. It was because he knew that everything had been placed under his feet, and that he was from God and was going to God that he did this task. God shows his greatness and his glory by his goodness, by his grace and truth, by his self-sacrifice and love, by laying down his life. Jesus did the most Godlike thing, he served those in need. As Jesus puts on his towel, you see his glory. Here is God so unlike us. To Jesus' disciples, his actions were astonishing, that the master should do what even a Jewish slave should not do. And so Peter refused to be washed by Jesus. Jesus replies in effect, *'If I am not your servant then I am not your Lord. And if I am not your Lord then I am not your servant.'*

A Christian is someone who accepts the Lordship of Jesus, because a Christian accepts the service of Jesus. We must accept him as Lord and Saviour. The Lord dictates how he comes to his servants, and he comes as their servant. Then Peter says, *'Well then wash my all, my hands my feet my everything'*, and Jesus says, *'If you have accepted me as your foot washer, your servant, you are clean, you don't need anymore washing.'* The symbol points to the reality, the reality is Jesus' cleansing of our sins on the cross and his cleansing is complete. The washing of the disciples' feet is a symbol of the love that his disciples are to have for each other and the washing clean that Jesus will do as their servant on the cross. Peter didn't understand that he had to be served by Jesus, that he cannot have Jesus as his Lord unless he has him as his servant. It is relatively easier for us to understand it, as we live this side of the cross. We know the way he became king was by dying. We know that by his laying down his life for us he become the Lord of our salvation, we can understand that unless you have him as your servant you can't have him as your Lord. But Peter was the other side of the cross and it doesn't make sense that your Lord is going to be your servant.



Digging Deeper

Q: Throughout ch 13 we read *'Jesus knew'*. Chase down these references. What is the significance of Jesus knowing these things?

Jesus knew that the hour had come to leave the world and go to the Father, his disciples didn't (v1); he knew that the Father had put all things under his control, he knew that he had come from the Father, he knew that he was returning to the Father (v3); Jesus knew which of the others would betray him (v11); he knew whom he had chosen (v18); he had told them beforehand so they would eventually know that he was who he was (v19); he knew it was time for Judas to leave and so gave instruction to him (v27); he knew it was time to be glorified (v31); he knew it was time to depart (v33); he knew that Peter would deny him (v38). Jesus is the one who is in control, he knew all that was happening.

Q: Did Judas choose to betray Jesus or was it Satan that had entered into him?

Q: Were these events determined or did the characters have freedom of choice?

There is in the book of John (as we saw in ch 6) a 'dual authorship' at work - 2 authors of the same action. The Devil did it, and Judas did it (v2 notice, the Devil is a real spiritual being, the Bible does not see him as just an evil force). Now we want to say, if the Devil did it, then don't blame Judas, or we want to say Judas did it without the Devil. The Bible gives you both because the one action comes from more than one author. Both are guilty and both are involved. Judas didn't have to do what the Devil prompted him to do, but the Devil did prompt him to do it. It is under the prompting of the Devil that he does that which he wanted to do. Once you move down the track a certain way, why then the Devil enters into you, and he will carry you along (v27).

But you have made the choice. The Bible will not accept freedom of choice and will not accept Determinism, for the Bible accepts both, and therefore neither.

All this betrayal was to fulfill the Scriptures, for all that happened was according to the plan of God and predicted by the prophets (v18). Again we see this dual authorship.

The choices being made are choices being made by Jesus and Judas, but yet God is working all things out according to his plans and purposes, and has already predicted what is going to happen in Psalm 41: That the Messiah's enemies will be even amongst his friends, even the one who shares his bread. And so Jesus fulfills that intentionally by dipping the bread in and sharing it with Judas. Here is something that is predicted by God in the Psalm, which Jesus intentionally fulfills by his actions. But if he hadn't intended to fulfill it, he would have fulfilled it anyway, because God had planned that it would happen. Sometimes God's plans are put into effect at the intentions of humans, sometimes God's plans are put into effect despite the intentions of humans. But our intentions are real intentions that we are responsible for. Jesus told his disciples beforehand, because Jesus wanted them to know who he was (19). If Jesus had not told them, then afterwards they may say, '*He lost control*'. But Jesus never lost control, his life was not taken from him, his life was laid down.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of, '*And it was night*' (v30)?

John uses darkness as a symbol of death, and light as a symbol of life. Darkness is lostness, where we hide from the truth, where we rebel, it is evil, and it is death. Death and judgement are darkness, life is seen as light. '*And it was night*' is an ominous foreboding of the spiritual darkness that was imminently coming to a climax.

Q: How will the world know who are Jesus' true disciples (v35)?

In John's gospel, God the Father has given the Son the role of judge over people. He has given the Holy Spirit the role of convicting people of their sins. He has given us the role of loving others and telling others about Him. Leave the judging and the convicting to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. You do the loving. Discuss.

Jesus doesn't teach his disciples by merely imparting information, rather he enters into such a relationship with them that he shows them how to live, and how to live is how he lived, by laying down his life as a sacrifice for others. True greatness comes in laying down your life for the other person. He sums it up as the great command, that we must love one another (v34-35). Imagine Jesus washing Judas' feet knowing that in a few moments Judas was going to betray him. Imagine Jesus washing Peter's feet knowing before the night is out Peter will deny him 3 times. Jesus shows love to Judas who betrays him by washing his dirty, smelly feet and then by dying on the cross. Jesus shows love to Peter by washing his dirty, smelly feet and then by dying on the cross.

Jesus shows love to you and I who sin against Him by giving up his life. He has shown us love, so now we love in response to his great love. When we love, people will say we are his people. The true sign of a Christian is not a fish, it is not a cross or, a crucifix, anybody can wear them. The sign of a Christian is that we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters as Jesus did. This is the sign that we follow Jesus. In John's gospel, God the Father has given the Son the role of judge over people. He has given the Holy Spirit the role of convicting people of their sins. He has given us the role of loving others and telling others about Him. Leave the judging and the convicting to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. You do the loving.

What would Jesus do? He would lay down his life for the other person. That's what Jesus would do. That is the mark of the Christian, not in theory but in practice. His lordship is seen in his service. You see God in all his Godness when you see true goodness being displayed.



Reflecting Further

Would people be able to know that you are a follower of Jesus by your actions? Discuss.

Q: Does Jesus' love for you compel you to show love to others?

Q: What actions of love could you show to your family, your church and your community, in response to Jesus' love for you?

24

Go read:

John 14:1-11

Bible Study 24

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Is it arrogant/intolerant of Christians to say that Christianity is the truth and all other religions are wrong? Discuss.

There was a report in the news about Christians evangelising Jews, and the report described the practice as abhorrent and anti-Semitic. Why would telling people about Jesus be described in that way? Because when you evangelise people of other religions you are saying that their religion is fundamentally flawed and ultimately invalid. How dare anyone say that! Christians are said to be arrogant because we claim to have the only way to God. This is resented by some sectors of the community. These days you can't say someone else's worldview is wrong, even respectfully, and if you do you are intolerant. To be intolerant is to be un-Australian. And to be un-Australian apparently is the worst sin anyone, anywhere could commit. But tolerance in the true sense of the word means to treat with respect someone with whom you disagree. Ironically, those who champion tolerance are the ones who are truly intolerant, because they disrespectfully silence and 'cancel' anyone who holds to the Christian viewpoint. Christians only say that Jesus is the one way to God because that is what Jesus said himself!



Digging Deeper

In Ch 12 Jesus concluded his public ministry. In ch 13-17 Jesus turns his attention to his disciples, and ch 14-17 are Jesus' final teaching to his disciples, often called the 'Upper room discourse' because they take place in an upstairs guest room (Lk. 22:7-13) in Jerusalem. Jesus knows what his disciples don't know. The following day he will be crucified. In ch 14-17 he prepares them for his departure.

Q: What does it mean that Jesus prepares a place for his disciples? (v3)

Q: What makes it possible for the disciples to go to be with Jesus?

Jesus prepares a room for us by his death and resurrection. God is waiting for believers at the door of his heavenly home with the light on and his arms open wide. In his house are many rooms. Not just a few but many. Which means all are invited. All are welcome. He has prepared a room for all who want to be with Him. That's why Jesus said, *'Do not let your hearts be troubled'*.

Q: What is the way to where he is going? (v6)

Q: Why is this the only way?

Jesus answered, *'I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'* (14:6). This is one of the most objectionable verses in the Bible to our age and our western society in particular. It's politically incorrect to speak in those terms, especially about yourself.

You can say something like, *'I know a way to God. I am one of the ways to life'*, that's all right. But what Jesus said is fairly arrogant. And it's not just that he knows the way to the Father, it's not just that he can show them the way to the Father, he is the way to the Father. And if it's not enough that his claim is arrogant, he also makes it exclusive. Not only is he the way to the Father, but he is also the only way to the Father. When he said he is the way, he did not say he is 'a' way, but that he was the way, the one and only. He meant it with its full exclusive force, for he goes on to say, *'no one comes to the Father except through me'*. He is the only way to the Father for no one else can die for our sins. Buddha didn't, Mohammed couldn't, Confucius didn't, no-one else can pay for our sins. It is offensive because it is saying other religions are wrong and false. It is objectionable to the relativists, who want to say all roads lead to the same truth. But if God has given his one and only Son to die on the cross for the penalty of the sins of the world, why should there be another way? If there was another way, why did God sacrifice his only Son? There could be no other way, for if there was any other conceivable way it would be less expensive to God than that way and he would have opened it up for us. It would have been incredibly cruel of God to send his Son to die if there was another way we could be saved.



Digging Deeper

Q: What are the different ways people respond to the claim that Jesus is the only way to God?

There are 4 main responses to this claim:

The 1st is Atheism which believes that Jesus is not the way to God because there is no God.

The 2nd is pluralism. Pluralism says that there are many roads to God. There is not only one religion which is right. *'Jesus might be true for you because you have encountered God that way, but for me Jesus is meaningless because I encounter God in my own way. There is no absolute truth.'* Most Australians are pluralists.

Ask the average Australian on the street and they will tell you that there are only minor differences between the different religions - if you actually pressed them further they wouldn't be able to actually say what they are, but they are convinced that all religions are saying the same thing but in different ways.

The same sorts of thing is going on in all of them e.g. prayer, devotion, good works. Their objection is that God is much more concerned with morality, than what you believe. A Catholic pluralist John Hick said: *'Such sublime bigotry could only be possible for one who had no real interest in or awareness of the wider religious life of mankind. For it is evident, when one witnesses worship within the great world faiths, including Christianity, that the same sort of thing is going on in each'*.²⁴ Interestingly he wrote this before

9/11. There are at least 2 logical inconsistencies in the pluralist position: 1st they claim that there is no such thing as absolute truth, but the claim itself is stating an absolute truth. They are saying, *'The truth is there is no truth'*. 2^{ndly} not all religions can be true because they contradict each other. The Islamic Quran denies that Jesus died on the cross. Jews say Jesus died on the cross but didn't rise from the dead, and Christians say that Jesus died and also rose.

They can't all be true. They can all be wrong, but they can't all be true. For pluralists to claim that all religions are the same, they have to dilute and distort the different religions to the point that they are no longer recognisable, even to their adherents. To say to a Muslim that his religion is no different to Christianity, would be an anathema for him.

The 3rd response is inclusivism. Inclusivism says, *'Yes, Jesus is the one way to God, but there are the many ways to Jesus. You may be saved and come to Christ even if you have never heard about Christ. You can be saved and come to Jesus without consciously believing in Jesus as long as you respond in faith to the revelation you have received in your religion.'* It is faith in God that counts, so belief directly in Christ is not essential. A man named John Sanders said this: *'Once some friends and I were fishing on a large lake when a storm arose. We headed for shore when we fortunately found an old cabin. Although it was locked up we were able to wait out the storm in the shelter of its porch. The cabin porch served us even though we did not know who built the cabin or who owned it. If the Holy Spirit guides the unevangelised to shelter, they may certainly benefit from it even if they have to remain on the porch.'*²⁵ What he is saying is that god fearing Muslims are on the porch and saved from judgement even if they don't know who is saving them. That Jesus' death covers them even though they have never heard of him. Another inclusivist says, *'You can't tell me that this Anglican whose religious devotion amounts to warming a pew in church for one hour a week is going to heaven and a devout Muslim whose commitment to his god is total and unswerving is going to hell just because he happens to be born in Saudi Arabia and so doesn't hear about Jesus?'*²⁶

Can you hear the objection? It would be immoral for a loving god to punish, let alone punish for eternity, those who through no fault of their own have not heard and not given an opportunity to repent. The appeal of inclusivism is massive. God desires all to be saved, but there are billions of people who don't know Christ. Inclusivism's answer? They are all saved because of Jesus' death even though they don't know it.

For the pluralist there are many roads to God, For the inclusivist there is one road and you can be on the road even though you don't know it. In the end both are salvation by sincerity.

4^{thly}, 'Exclusivism' is the traditional view amongst Christians that believes what Jesus said in 14:6. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom.3:23), all have dishonoured God and deserve punishment for their sins, and are destined to a real hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, but God in his mercy and love sent Jesus to rescue us. All who trust in Jesus' death for their salvation cross over from death to life (5:24). Jesus is the rescue boat sent to a world drowning in its sin. All who jump on board are saved. All who reject the rescue boat will perish (3:16).



Digging Deeper

Q: How do we see the Father in Jesus (v9)?

The troubled hearts of the disciples are still confused. They haven't got it yet. If they've seen the Son in his glory, then they've seen the Father (v9), because Jesus' glory is not something different to the Father's glory it is the '*glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth*' (1:14). But you must see Jesus. Not the physical body, that is not where the grace and truth is seen, but you see it in his crucifixion, in his laying down his life for the sins of the people. You see it in his faithfulness even unto death. You see it in his grace and generosity, by which we are forgiven at the price of his own life. When Jesus acts in grace and truthfulness, he acts according to the very character and nature of his Father.



Digging Deeper

Q: On what account are we to believe that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus (v10-11)?

Q: What are the works of the Father? In what way are the words and works of Jesus the works of God (v10-11)?

We are to believe that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus on account of Jesus' works (v11). The works of God are all that Jesus does, all that Jesus says, his life, his death - they are all an expression of the Father, they are all displaying the Father in his glory. His works include his miracles, but it's not just 'believe in the miracles', because throughout John's gospel people have believed in the miracles and their belief has been false belief.



Reflecting Further

Q: Why do you think 14:1-3 is a popular passage to be read at Christian funerals?

Q: How do you respond to Jesus' exclusive claims?

25

Go read:

John 14:12-14

Bible Study 25

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: Do you want to do something great in your life?

Q: What great thing do you wish you could do?

I hope your answer is 'Yes!', with a fist pump to go with it. What great thing do you wish you could do? Find a cure for cancer? Be a star on Bachelor in Paradise? Both equally great right?!

The Guinness Book of Records is full of amazing achievements, but are they all great achievements? Jim Mouth (yes that's his real name) holds the record for smoking the most cigarettes at the same time. How many did Mouth fit in his mouth? 155! Is this a 'great' achievement? Ashrita Furman, holds more Guinness World Records than anyone, including the record for slicing the most watermelons in $\frac{1}{2}$ on his stomach in 1min. Is this a 'great' feat? Thaneshwar Guragai holds the record for spinning a basketball on a toothbrush while holding the toothbrush in his mouth – 22.41seconds. A 'great' feat?

Q: Jesus said his disciples, including us, are going to do great things. What did he have in mind? Does he want us to cut watermelons on our stomachs or spin basketballs on a toothbrush?



Digging Deeper

Jesus says that whoever believes in him will do the works that he did, not only that, they will do greater works than him (v12).

Q: What does he mean by this?

Q: Is Jesus saying that we will do greater miracles than him?

Q: Does he mean greater in quality or quantity?

Q: How is this possible?

When I read v12-14 I'm like, 'Wow. *Greater things than Jesus? Really? How cool would that be? Bring it.*' Then I'm like, 'Is this true of my experience? When was the last time I turned water into wine? Or fed 5000 people with a McHappy Meal? Or walked into Perth Children's Hospital and healed a child who was really sick with just a word? I don't walk around performing miracles. And I can't say that whatever I ask Jesus to do, he does it. So what do these verses mean?'

Are we really supposed to do miracles more spectacular than those of Jesus? 'Yes' say many of our Pentecostal and Charismatic brothers and sisters. I heard a Pentecostal preacher speak and he said, 'When Jesus told us to pray, "Your kingdom come your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven", he was saying that God's will is that we bring heaven to earth, and that means doing heavenly miracles here on earth, which all Christians should be doing'. He spoke about a trip of his to Guatemala where the bag of food they were using to feed the poor never ran out, it kept on replenishing and never emptied. Just like Jesus' miracle. Amazing!

Pastor John Wimber who founded the Vineyard churches, said it should be the common experience of all Christians to see God work miracles today. He wrote a book called 'Power Evangelism' in which he said *'Jesus always accompanied his kingdom proclamation with a demonstration of its power with signs and wonders like casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, and all Christians should do signs and wonders.'*²⁷

Now if that's what Jesus meant, then I really want to be a part of it. But, Wimber's good friend David Watson, died of cancer in his early 50's despite Wimber praying he would be healed.

Wimber himself then had cancer that wasn't healed with prayer, had cardiac surgery for heart disease and fell at home causing a brain haemorrhage from which he died aged 63.

So what do we make of all this? On the one hand the New Testament never limits the power of God to do what he wills to do, in any age. The New Testament lists the gifts of the Spirit that churches should expect to experience in every age, in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Cor.12:8-10. We have experienced some of these gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues, and we know of others who met a man in Thailand who couldn't walk for ten years, and they prayed for him and he was healed and stood up and ran. On another occasion, a group prayed for a woman who had a tumour on her neck and the tumour vanished. A man went to a town where it hadn't rained for three and a half months and, as they were praying for rain, water began to come down from the sky. Should we all be doing miracles like this?

If you look at the miracles in the Bible, they are clustered around 3 key events: the works of Moses, the works of Elijah and Elisha, and the works of Jesus and his apostles.

These clusters of miracles are called '*signs and wonders*', and they accompany these leaders to authenticate their message as coming from God. Miracles by definition are events that are out of the ordinary, and signs and wonders are miracles that are out of the ordinary compared even to other miracles, in number and magnitude. In between these 3 clusters in the Bible, there are huge gaps of time when we hear very little about the miraculous. They are there, but are few and far between. The signs and wonders in the Bible are spectacular: Moses parts the red sea; Elijah brings fire down from heaven and brings someone back from the dead; Jesus' healed the blind, the paralysed, fed 5000 with a packed lunch, calmed a storm, walked on water, raised 3 people from the dead. Jesus' disciples also performed signs and wonders, which authenticated their authority as his apostles and acted as a catalyst to begin the worldwide church movement. Acts 19:11-12 reports, "*God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.*" Unreal.

But the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are historical narrative – they are descriptions of what happened not *prescriptions* of what the *normal* experience of miracles should be. These signs and wonders accompanied God's leaders to authenticate their message as coming from God and were a foretaste of what the kingdom will be like when it fully arrives. But after the early demonstration of the kingdom by the apostles which kick-started the spread of the gospel, even the miracles they performed began to wane in number and scale.

Later in his ministry, Paul doesn't, or can't, heal people who were sick. E.g. Timothy, his spiritual son, has frequent stomach problems, but Paul doesn't heal him. Instead he advises Timothy, (1 Tim. 5:23) '*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses*'. In his final letter, Paul reports, "*Trophimus I left sick at Miletus*" (2 Tim. 4:20). Why didn't Paul heal him if he was still doing the miraculous works of Jesus?

The author of Hebrews, writing to the 2nd generation of Jewish believers, reminds them how God performed signs and wonders and miracles through the first generation of believers to testify to the truth of the gospel: '*This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*' (Heb. 2:3-4). If those early miracles were still commonplace, the author would have pointed to the very miracles done every day in their midst. The New Testament never has the expectation that the church would do miracles of the same scale or frequency as Jesus or the apostles. In fact, Paul says that the marks of a true apostles are '*signs, wonders and miracles*' (2 Cor. 12:12). That's what sets them apart. It seems it didn't detract from the believability of the message whether subsequent generations of Christians performed signs and wonders.

God does the miraculous today, but as he sees fit, as he determines. E.g. a man came to Australia as a missionary and nothing miraculous happened. He went from there to a little island in the South Pacific and ministered there for 3 years and nothing miraculous happened. He went from there back to Wales and was involved in the Welsh revival and all sorts of miraculous things happened. And then he went to Tasmania to do ministry and nothing miraculous happened. Now, was God different in all of those situations? No. In one instance God chose to work in miraculous ways and in another he didn't.

If God wants to, He will. So it's wrong and unhelpful to say miracles cannot happen today, or the other extreme that they must happen in a Christian's life. They *can* happen, if God wills. What God calls us to do is make the good news of Jesus known, and if he chooses to accompany this with miracles, He will. God *can* heal if he chooses, so we pray, *'If it your will'*, because it may or may not be His will. Some people are healed, some people are not!

This is really important to understand because some leaders use John 14:12-14 to teach people to *"Name it and claim it"*. *'By faith claim that your cancer is healed. By faith claim financial prosperity'*. When it doesn't happen these teachers then tell the disappointed person that the reason they didn't receive what they asked for is because they didn't have enough faith! Talk about getting kicked when you're down. And so people have hung onto v12-14 having expectations of how God will answer prayer and demanding responses to prayers which are beyond what Jesus promises. So when Jesus says we will do *'greater things than him'* it doesn't mean we should expect to do greater miracles than Him, in terms of quality.

So what does it mean? Does "greater" mean greater 'quantity'? Jesus preached for only 3y in a very small geographical area. Christians have preached the kingdom all around the world. We have seen millions and millions of men and women converted, he didn't. Christians have dispensed aid, education, and food to still more millions. The "greater" works may therefore be referring to this. But this explanation sounds like "more" works rather than "greater" works.

Let me suggest what I think Jesus meant by greater works. Consider what Jesus said in Matt 11:11: *'I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he'*. John the Baptist was the greatest prophet of all, before Jesus. He was prophesied in the Old Testament (Mal. 3:1). He prepared thousands for the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom. He baptised Jesus. He fearlessly spoke the Word of God into Herod's life and told him that he shouldn't take his brother's wife in marriage, and it cost him his life. However, despite John's unequalled greatness, he never participated in the kingdom of heaven. He pointed to it, but he came before it. But anyone who participates in the kingdom is greater than John the Baptist. Something similar I believe is in view in Jn 14. Jesus says the greater works will take place *"because I am going to the Father."* After Jesus dies, is raised from the dead and returns to his Father he begins a new phase in the history of redemption: the coming of the kingdom of God. Prior to Jesus going to the Father the kingdom of God had not been established on earth. It was near but not yet here. But once Jesus goes to the Father then we will do what even he was not doing prior to his death – calling on people to repent and believe the good news of his death and resurrection and so enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus in his earthly ministry never did this. His life death and resurrection brought the Kingdom about but then he left and did not himself participate in it. In this respect our works are greater than his. Greater things are happening now that Jesus has returned to the Father– people are coming into the Kingdom as you and I preach the gospel. *"Greater works mean more conversions. There is no greater work possible than the conversion of a soul."*²⁸



Digging Deeper

Q: What does Jesus promise if we pray *'in his name'*? (v13)

Q: What does it mean to pray *'in Jesus' name'*?

Q: In what sense will Jesus do *'anything we ask'* when we pray in his name?

Q: Why will he do this?

Q: What does it mean if Jesus doesn't do what we ask?

Will Jesus really do anything we ask in his name? *'God please make me taller, in Jesus name'*. Did it work? Nope. *'God please give me a Ferrari, in Jesus name'*. I'm going to check the garage. Nope. No Ferrari. Jesus isn't promising that He will do any crazy thing we ask as long as we tack on, *"in Jesus' name"* to our prayer! To think that you can pray, *"God give me a Ferrari, in Jesus name"*, is to completely misapply Jesus' promise. If that assumption were true, it would put deadly power in the hands of the person offering the prayer and tie Jesus' hands so that he could not exercise discretion. That cannot be the intent of this verse.

Jesus' point has to do with praying in accord with his name. To act in another person's name was to use that person's authority as a basis for one's actions. For instance, a king sends emissaries to represent him. A king might give an emissary authority to act in his name, such as spend the king's money, obligate the king to a treaty or exercise the king's power in other ways. However, the emissary would first want to be certain that he understood the king's mind so that he could represent the king faithfully. An emissary who failed to represent the king faithfully would not retain the king's authority for long—and might even suffer dire consequences for unfaithful service.

Praying in Jesus' name is not a matter of whether we include the formula, "*in Jesus' name*" at the end of our prayer. Rather it is a matter of bringing our prayers into congruence with Jesus' will. To pray in Jesus' name, then, requires that we first try to understand Jesus' mind so that our prayers represent his will as closely as possible. But, the difficulty is, how do we determine what God's will is so that we pray in line with it? This requires that we be in a close relationship with him by knowing Him through His Word. "God will either give us what we ask for in prayer or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything He knows."²⁹

God's glory is to be the main objective of our prayers. E.g. Sometimes people will ask me to pray for someone who is in the hospital and I ask, "*What should I pray?*" The person asking will often look at me dumbfounded, thinking, "*Pray that he will be healed, of course!*" But healing may not be God's way of being glorified in every instance. God may be glorified by teaching the sick person to trust Him through weakness. He may be glorified through the person's joy in Christ as they die. Maybe the sickness will be used by God to teach the person the brevity of life so that he will live in light of eternity. Paul prayed for relief from his thorn in the flesh, but God had a higher purpose: to be glorified as Paul depended on Him in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10).



Digging Deeper

Q: Is praying, 'Your will be done', a prayer that lacks real faith? Aren't Christians supposed to pray believing that God will do what we ask? Why/why not?

Even Jesus in the Garden prayed, *'Your will not my will be done.'* (Matt. 26:39). God's will was that Jesus go to the cross so his glory would be manifest - so gracious that he lay down his life for the world, and so faithful that he obeyed his Father to the point of death. Jesus has paid the penalty for sins for us so we are now able to come into the presence of God the Father and ask anything of Him. And he will give it to us so that He will be glorified. The Father will be glorified in giving to us what we ask in his name - in line with his character and purposes. What an encouragement to prayer! For in prayer we bring glory to God the Father through the glorious Son that has died on the cross for us.

Jesus says, *'I will do it'* in verses 13-14. The result of our praying should be that Jesus does it. But I have prayed for the salvation of loved ones, and they have died unbelieving. I have prayed for the healing of Christian marriages, but they have ended in divorce. Many godly parents have prayed for their wayward children to return to Christ for God's glory, but it hasn't happened. Many faithful missionaries have prayed for the gospel to take root among peoples that are still mostly pagan after decades of labour. So, how do we reconcile Jesus' seeming blanket promise to answer prayers in His name for God's glory, with the fact that many such prayers go unanswered? Firstly, the tension we experience stems from the fact that the Scriptures speak about both God's will of desire and his will of decree. God desires that all people would repent of their sins and be saved (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4), but He has not decreed the salvation of all (Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:15-18, 21; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:10). God desires that we all glorify Him by living holy lives, but He also permits sin and will be glorified by His righteous judgment on sinners who do not repent. So we should pray as best we know in line with His revealed will of desire, while at the same time submitting to the fact that we don't know what he will finally decree.

Secondly, Jesus' promise to do whatever we ask does not undermine the many Scriptures that exhort us to 'wait on the Lord'. Jesus doesn't say when he will do what we ask. God may be glorified as we faithfully wait on Him for years for answers to our prayers. He may be glorified by answering at a distant time even beyond our lifetimes for reasons that we cannot fathom at the moment. Ps. 27:14: *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord."* God's purposes will surely be fulfilled, but not necessarily in our timing or in ways that we envision.

Finally, we do not understand all that God is doing, so we may go to our graves not knowing why He seemingly didn't answer our prayers. I wonder whether John ever understood why God spared him but allowed his brother James to be executed. Couldn't James have been used greatly to extend the kingdom if he'd been delivered? Yes, but that wasn't God's will.

There was a businessman who picked up a hitchhiker and drove with him for several hours. The hitchhiker was a Christian and he shared the gospel with the businessman. Before he dropped him off, the driver put his trust in Christ as His Saviour and Lord. He left his business card with the hitchhiker and said, *'If you ever come to Chicago, drop by and see me.'* Several years went by before the hitchhiker was in Chicago. He stopped by the man's office and handed the card to a woman and asked if the man was in. The woman's face froze and she asked, *'Where did you get this card?'* The man told the woman the story of how he had become a Christian that day. She broke down in tears and said, *'He was my husband. I had prayed for years that he would come to Christ. But he never made it home from that trip. He was killed in an accident after he dropped you off. I've been bitter at God all these years because I thought that He didn't answer my prayer.'*

Not all stories end that way, but the point is, we don't have all knowledge about how God may be working in response to our prayers. But if things don't go exactly as you had prayed, trust Him that if not in this life, at least in eternity you will understand how He answered you.



Reflecting Further

Q: Is it wrong to pray for things that you don't necessarily need but that you want, things that would make life more comfortable (bigger house, newer car, etc.)? Why/why not?

Q: Should Christians pray for God to do miracles? Why/why not?

God wants you to do great things in life. Even greater things than Jesus did. Pray that He would do far more through you than you can ask or imagine. Pray for miracles, pray for healing, above all pray that he will use you to share the gospel so that people may enter the kingdom for all eternity. If it is God's will he will do what you ask.

26

Go read:

John 14:15-31

Bible Study 26

C

Context

O

Observation

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Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: Many people say that they have had a 'spiritual experience' of some kind or another. What sorts of things do people mean when they talk like this?



Digging Deeper

Q: What does the Bible say is a true spiritual experience?

The word 'god' and the word 'spirit' are sufficiently ill defined so as to be able to be redefined in any way the world wants, in any kind of spiritual experience they want. But the Bible will not let us do that, as we see here in John 14. People want to go to the Father without the Son, they want God without Jesus. They also want the Spirit without the Son. They want to have a spiritual experience without Jesus. It is the New Age: you can go and find God and have a spiritual experience in any way that suits you. But you will not meet the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ there. It is not the creator of the universe, it is not the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit in all eternity. No, the God that many wish to meet these days, is a counterfeit god of their own concoction.

Q: What will those who love Jesus do?

Q: How does belief in Jesus differ from New Age spirituality?

They will keep his commandments, (v15, 21); they will keep his word, (v23). The indwelling of Jesus is not a private, spiritual, mystical trip. The indwelling of Jesus is a moral, obedient, keeping of his commandments spirituality. There is a profound difference between New Age spirituality and Christian spirituality. For New Age spirituality is the journey inwards, further and further into myself until I finally see myself as the god that I was all along. But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit leads us outwards to the service of one another, as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father.

Q: What will Jesus do for those who love him (v16-17)?

Q: In what way will the Father and the Son '*make their home*' with the disciples?

Q: Is it the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit that dwells in a believer?

Q: Why does Jesus speak of his departure in such a positive way?

The word room occurs only twice in the Bible, and the two times that it occurs, are in John 14. In the last study, we looked at our room in God's house, the room that he is preparing for us so we can be with him forever (14:2). This study we look at the room in our house, in us, that God is coming to dwell in (14:23): "*we will make our home with him*", that is "*we will make our 'room' with him*", "*we will room in the person*". Jesus is reassuring his disciples who are just about to lose their master and teacher. His departure was very troubling to them. They had left their nets, they had left their families, they had left everything to follow his cause. Now he was going to walk out and leave them. And he wasn't just walking out, he was going to die.

And his death looked like all the world to be his defeat. Yet curiously, Jesus speaks of his departure in positive terms. The disciples should rejoice that he is going to the Father (v28). He will return to them, although there will be a delay. In the meantime, he reassures them, God will come to them and ‘*room with them*’. Whoever loves him, Jesus says, the Father will love. Both the Father and the Son will make their home with them, here and now, in the delay time as we wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to take us to our home, to the room that is being prepared for us. The Father and Son dwell in the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit (v26). The Spirit is sent by the Father, in Jesus’ name (v26). It is the person who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them that is truly ‘spiritual’. And this is only possible for those who love God. Not just any god of their choosing, but Jesus. There is no room prepared for us if we have no room in our heart for him.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the ‘*peace*’ that Jesus leaves with the disciples (v27)?

The peace that Jesus gives is different than the peace the world gives. Followers of Jesus are not going to get peace in this world in terms of absence of conflict with the world. The peace that Jesus gives is a product of dealing with our root problem: the enmity between us and God because of our sin, our dishonouring of Him. The peace he gives is the harmonious relationship with God that believers now enjoy, made possible by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Q: Why does Jesus say that the Father will give them '*another*' Helper (v16)?

Q: In what way is he a Helper?

Helper = counsellor = advocate = comforter = strengthener. The Holy Spirit is called '*another*' counsellor because Jesus is already the counsellor. Jesus is going away, and God is going to give another counsellor. The Holy Spirit is the substitute for Jesus in this delay period. He is the vicar of Christ. The word vicar means 'substitute'. He is not a counsellor in the sense of psychologist or psychiatrist. He is a lawyer, a solicitor, a legal counsellor. He comes defending and caring for our interests, protecting, strengthening and teaching his people.

Q: In what way does the Holy Spirit '*teach you all things*' (v26)?

How we know of Jesus with authenticity is because of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit doesn't come with additional information, alternative information, the Spirit of Jesus comes to expound the message of Jesus. It's not that God sent his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross, took him up to heaven, and now sends his Spirit to give us all other kinds of information. The Spirit comes reminding the apostles of what Jesus said, so we get the ministry of the teaching of the Spirit when we read the apostolic word.

Some people want to say ‘*Some teach the Bible, but we are led by the Spirit*’. But the Spirit is the one who leads us through the word of God, the Scriptures. He was given to the apostles to remind them of the things that Jesus said. The apostles didn’t understand in ch 2:22 or 12:16. By Jesus’ death, resurrection and glorification, he poured out his Spirit on the disciples who then understood what he was doing. The message they got when they received the Spirit was the message they had right there in front of them all the time, but they couldn’t see it, because they didn’t have the Spirit of God. But once they received the Spirit of God, they understood the Scriptures, and they understood the events of Jesus. They were able to put the two together and make sense of the whole thing.



Reflecting Further

Q: What does the gospel according to John say about the relationships between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

The Christian understanding of God is that God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God, three persons. The word Trinity doesn’t occur anywhere in the Bible but the Scriptural data demands that God be understood this way and related to in this way. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equally God, but they are different, their roles are not interchangeable. And their relationships with each other are not reciprocal, there is a hierarchy.

For example, the Father is greater than the Son (10:29; 14:28), the Son is never greater than the Father. But, all that the Father has is Jesus' (16:15), and the Father and the Son are one (10:30; 17:11; 17:22). The Father is the God of the Son (20:17), the Son is never the God of the Father. The Father sends the Son (3:17; 4:34; 12:44), the Son obeys the Father (14:31; 15:10). The Son never sends the Father. The Father never obeys the Son. The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing, and whatever the Father does the Son does likewise (5:19). The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (15:26) and is sent by the Father (14:26) and the Son (15:26), in Jesus' name (14:26). He bears witness about Jesus (15:26), he glorifies Jesus (16:14).

In John's gospel we have the humble privilege of looking into the very essence of the make-up of the eternal God.

27

Go read:

John 15

Bible Study 27

C

Context

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Observation

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Meaning

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Application



Kicking Off

Q: Humphrey Bogart's last words were 'I should have never switched from Scotch to Martinis.' What would you like your last words to be? Why?

Chapters 14-17 are Jesus' final words to his disciples before he dies. He is preparing them for his departure.



Digging Deeper

Q: What does the illustration of the vine and its branches tell us about our relationship with Jesus?

I'm not really into gardening. My garden at home is a slab of concrete. It doesn't take long to mow. But I do appreciate Jesus' gardening illustration. The image captures the close-knit relationship between the disciples and Jesus, between us and Jesus, which is a mutual indwelling with him - his life is their life, his life is our life. We draw our spiritual life from him as branches do from a vine, and the vine yields its fruit through the branches.

Q: In previous chapters Jesus has said, '*I am the bread of life*', '*I am the light of the world*,' but in chapter 15 he says '*I am the true vine*', not just '*I am the vine*'. Why do you think this is?

See Ps 80:9; Is 5:1-7; Jer 2.21, Ezek 15. In the Old Testament we are told that Israel is a vine planted by God. However, the theme in these Old Testament passages is about the fruitlessness of the vine, and so God is going to destroy the vine. It's a symbol of the failure of Israel, that Israel the planted vine of God has failed to produce the fruit for which it has been planted. Therefore, it is to be ripped up and destroyed. Jesus comes as the 'true vine' which will produce the fruit that God desires, if the disciples remain in him.

Q: Who are those who the Father cuts off because they bear no fruit? (v2)

Q: Who are those who bear fruit and the Father prunes (v2)?

Jesus' Father is the gardener and he will do 2 things to ensure maximum fruit production from the vine: he will cut off those branches that don't produce fruit and destroy them, while those that are producing fruit he will prune in order that they will produce more fruit. Pruning a vine involves removing the smaller shoots so that the main fruit bearing branches receive adequate nourishment in order to produce maximum fruit. In the same way, the Father prunes and shapes and moulds and disciplines Christians so they will produce maximal spiritual fruit. Every true Christian will bear fruit if they remain in Jesus. Those who have some nominal connection with Christ but don't produce fruit, are not truly joined to Christ. Judas Iscariot is an example of a branch being cut off and the remaining 11 disciples of branches being pruned.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why are the disciples called '*clean*' (v3)?

The word prune and clean are very similar in the original Greek so it is a word play, which is lost in the translation to English. Jesus' words have taken hold in the life of the 11 which have cleaned them and pruned them and made them fruitful. They are ready to produce more fruit because of the word pulsating through their branches.

Q: What does it mean to '*remain*' in Jesus (v4-7)?

Q: How do we remain in him?

Q: What is the result of remaining in Jesus' love? (v9-11)

Q: Why does Jesus call his disciples '*friends*' (v14)?

In ch 14-17 Jesus is saying farewell to his disciples before his death and resurrection. Here in ch 15 Jesus urges his followers to remain connected to him after his departure. To remain in Jesus means to hold fast to his teaching (v7), to have his words remain in them. It's not some sort of mystical relationship we have with Jesus, it is a word relationship with Jesus. It means to remain in his love by obeying his commandments (v10). As we remain in Jesus we will bear fruit. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself apart from the vine, so without Jesus we cannot bear fruit.

How do you love Jesus? Blow kisses to him at night in bed? You can't reach up and hug him. To love him we do what he commands. Love and commandments go together (v9-10). It's the expression of the love of the Father that he gives commandments. It is an expression of the love of the Son to keep the commandments. The Son has obeyed the Father's commands and has therefore remained in his love. Likewise we obey the Son's commands and remain in his love. And what he commands is that we love one another. In our society we think being told what to do is not loving, but experiencing the love of Jesus will compel you to obey Jesus' commands especially the command to love.

Servants obey commandments because they have to, friends obey because they want to. Servants obey but they don't know what the commandments mean. Jesus calls us friends because he has made known to us everything he has learned from his Father. He has drawn us into the circle of friendship.

Q: What is the *'fruit'* that we are to bear (v5)?

Q: How will this show that we are Jesus' disciples?

*'The fruit borne by Jesus' disciples is an all-encompassing reference to the manifold evidences of growth and its results in the lives of believers. This would seem to include love, Christian character and outreach.'*³¹



Digging Deeper

Q: What is one of the key results of remaining in Jesus and obeying him (v11)?

Joy. Christian joy is not the temporal kind that comes and goes with one's circumstances. It is predicated altogether on one's relationship with Jesus and thus is an abiding deeply spiritual quality of life.

Q: Is love a feeling?

Q: What is the greatest love (v13)?

Love is not a feeling, it is seen in action. The greatest act of love is laying down your life for your friends. Love produces feelings.

Q: Why should we expect that the 'world' will hate us if we follow Jesus (v18-20)?

Q: How will Christ help us when we are persecuted?

As we saw in ch 3 the 'world' is the rebellious world order in opposition to God. That's why ch 3:16 is such an amazing verse. God loves the world in opposition to him and demonstrated the greatest act of love, by laying down his life for not only his friends but his enemies.

The world will hate not just Jesus but also his disciples. The world knows of love and it will love things that belong to the world, but because the disciples don't belong to the world, the world hates them. Anyone who stands for the truth and says, '*Jesus is the only way to God*', will be hated. Anyone who stands for the truth and says, 'that behaviour is wrong,' will be hated. The world loves its own, but it won't love like God. The world hates God's disciples because of Jesus. They will hate Jesus' disciples because they hate Jesus, but they hate Jesus because they don't know the Father who sent Jesus. But whoever hates Jesus in effect hates the Father who sent him. Their hate fulfils Scripture (Ps 35:19; 69:4). They hate without reason, meaning they hate without justification, they have no right to hate. They have reason to hate – they want to do evil – but they hate without justification. The world has no excuse. Jesus demonstrated who he was, but the world has refused to believe him, so this has increased the guilt of his hearers. But Christ won't leave his disciples in the world of hatred all alone, he will send his comforter to be with them.



Reflecting Further

Q: Have you experienced the world's hate for you as a follower of Jesus? In what ways? How did you cope?

Q: Jesus has now made 7 'I am' statements in the gospel of John. What are they?

...I AM the bread of life (6:35, 48)

...I AM the light of the world (8:12; 9:5)

...I AM the gate (10:7)

...I AM the good shepherd (10:11,14)

...I AM the resurrection and the life (11:35)

...I AM the way and the truth and the life (14:6)

...I AM the true vine (15:1,5)

He also claimed '...before Abraham was born, I am' (8:58).

28

Go read:

John 16

Bible Study 28

C

Context

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Observation

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Meaning

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Application



Kicking Off

Q: Where do people look for guidance in life?

The list is endless. People look for guidance from horoscopes, fortune tellers, financial advisors, tea leaves, religion, Google, from 'within themselves'.

God's guidance of us is more like a compass than a Sat. Nav. Discuss.

God doesn't give us every detail, for every decision, for every day of the rest of our lives like a Sat. Nav. *'Turn right in 100m, then turn left in 200m'*. Rather, he guides us by His Scriptures like a compass guides. The Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells us the direction God wants us to go. He wants us to be holy, to obey him, to listen to the truth. He gives us everything we absolutely need to know in order to make godly, informed, wise decisions, but gives us freedom to chart one of many courses that head in his desired direction. We are to set our compass for true north, but there are many different ways to reach the destination, depending on our circumstances.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why does Jesus give the disciples warning of the persecution and tribulation to come (v1-4; 33)?

Q: How can the disciples have both tribulation and peace?

Q: Should Christians today expect the same trouble?

Jesus tells his disciples they will have peace (14:27; 16:33), but while they are in the world they are also going to have trouble (16:1-4; 33). Jesus forecasts that the disciples will face persecution, and warns and prepares them for it. Many will persecute them thinking they are doing the right thing, thinking even that they are doing it in the name of God. Persecution does not mean that Jesus has lost control, for he knows about it before it happens, it is part of the plans and purposes of God. But despite the trouble they will face in this world he reassures them that they don't need to be troubled in themselves. They can have peace in him to endure the tribulation, because he has overcome the world.

Trouble is what genuine Christians have got to expect. That's the prescription. If you don't want to be troubled don't be a Christian, if you are a Christian you will be troubled, because you are in this world and this world is trouble for Christians. However, at the same time, we have no need for fear because we have the peace of Christ, which is the knowledge that in his death and resurrection his victory is established. It is not a peace whereby we avoid the troubles of this world, it's the kind of peace which enables us to endure the troubles of this world.

Jesus knows what is going to happen in the future. He doesn't tell the disciples who is going to put them out of which synagogue on which day, so they can avoid going into that synagogue, or in some way change what is going to happen. He just tells them enough to know how to live in this world, when it does happen in the future.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why is it for the disciples' *'good'* that Jesus goes away (v7)?

Q: What will the Helper do when He comes?

Q: Why can't the disciples bear the things that Jesus has to say (v12)?

If Jesus does not depart then the Helper will not come to them. When Jesus departs he will send the Helper to them (v7), who will:

(1) Bring true guidance. The Spirit of truth will guide them into all the truth. What is the truth that he will guide them into? The things that are to come (v13). Without the context, the promise of guiding them into all truth has been fairly heavily misused. What is *'all truth'*? V13-15 are in contrast to v12, so in other words, Jesus cannot tell them all about the mission that the Father gave him to do, because they won't understand it, or bear it. But the Spirit will come and tell them all about it, especially its future, for they will be able to understand and bear it then.

(2) Glorify Jesus, because the Spirit only speaks about what he hears, which is the glory that comes to Jesus.

(3) Convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement. Convict has a judicial character to it, it means to expose, to demonstrate, to bring it out into the open, into the light. The Holy Spirit is going to come like a Royal Commissioner, he is going to come and bring into the open the corruption of the world.

(i) Concerning sin: The Spirit comes and shows the world its sinfulness in its rejection of Jesus, for since Jesus had come and spoken to the world and done among them his works, the world has no excuse for its sin (15:22)

(ii) Concerning righteousness: the Spirit will bring to light God's justice and righteousness in the vindication of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

(iii) Concerning judgement: because the ruler of this world is now judged. Jesus has overcome the world, for in his death and resurrection you know that God wins, you know that God rules, you know that God judges, you know that evil is defeated, that the judgement is coming when the righteous judge will put all things right.

There is little wonder then that when the Spirit prosecutes, the world persecutes. As the Spirit comes and shows the world its sinfulness in the rejection of Jesus, so the world hates the Spirit and the disciples.

Q: Why will the world rejoice, but the disciples weep and mourn (v20)?

Q: How is the disciples' sorrow and joy like that of a woman giving birth (v21-22)?

Jesus' talk of his comings and goings leaves the disciples really mystified. In a little while they will see him no longer, and then after a little while they will see him. With the clarity of 20/20 hindsight, especially when we have had 20 hundred years to gather this hindsight, means we know about his death, we know about his resurrection, but the disciples couldn't conceive of it at all.

His going, he said, would bring grief, but he will return and this will lead to joy (v20). The world will rejoice because it thinks it has won when it crucifies Jesus. But the disciples' resultant grief will turn to joy of a greater extent when he rises from the dead, because the deeper the grief the greater the joy. E.g. the pain of labour is forgotten in the joy of the birth of the child (v22).



Digging Deeper

Q: How will the dynamic of relating to God change for the disciples, when Jesus is no longer with them (v25-28)?

The Jews did not have direct access to God, that was the sole privilege of the high priest in the temple in Jerusalem, and only then after the shedding of blood from animal sacrifices, which required following strict guidelines and ceremonies laid down by God. Jesus tells his disciples that a time is coming soon when the disciples will be able to speak to the Father directly, in Jesus' name. This is a huge deal for the disciples, for God had always been unapproachable. Soon they would be able to ask him for anything, in Jesus' name! The only reason we can pray to the Father is because of Jesus' death and resurrection which has given us free access to him.



Reflecting Further

Q: People say things like, '*I felt the Spirit in church tonight*', or, '*This church is a Spirit-filled church*'. How would you know if the Holy Spirit is active and in your midst?

The overall aim of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus by taking what belongs to him and declaring it to his people and to the world (v14). '*He shall glorify me*' summarises the entire task of the Holy Spirit. He takes what belongs to Christ and discloses it to those who belong to Christ.³² So how do you recognise the Spirit of God? By whether or not Jesus is at the centre of what is done. If he is not at the centre of what is done then it's not the Holy Spirit that's at work.

What does the Holy Spirit do? He points to Jesus. He glorifies Jesus. He is the ultimate other person centred person. He wants to bring no attention to himself, He only wants Jesus to get the attention. How can we tell when the Spirit is present and active? How can we tell in church situations and how can we tell in our own lives? The best way is not to judge it on your feelings. Your own feelings are not a testimony to whether the Spirit is active or not. That's not the Acid test. Nor do you look at how spectacular things are, because demons can do spectacular things. Nor do you look at whether the miraculous is happening or not. Demons can do miracles. No instead, you look for Jesus, for when Jesus is glorified the Holy Spirit is present and active.

The flipside is that it's easy to tell when the HS is not in control. The Holy Spirit is not in control when Jesus is not heard about. If Jesus is not glorified then the Holy Spirit is not the controlling spirit present. If Jesus is present then the Holy Spirit is guaranteed to be present because it's him who causes people to talk about Jesus. Many people measure whether the Holy Spirit is active by whether or not the miraculous, the spectacular, the dramatic, the emotionally charged things are happening. There is nothing wrong with any of those things and I think that they can all exist today and do. I want the miraculous in our churches. I want emotion. I want the spectacular works of God. But these things are not the chief measure of whether God's Spirit is active or not. The chief measure of whether God's Spirit is active or not, is whether Jesus is being proclaimed and glorified. So if a preacher has poor communication skills and is preaching a deadly boring sermon, but the sermon is about Jesus who has made us right with God through his death on the cross, then the Holy Spirit is very much among us no matter how boring the talk is. If the singing is dull and drab but the name of Jesus is being lifted high, then the Holy Spirit is present even if He might be asleep! People talk about the Holy Spirit in all sorts of unhelpful ways. People have a pleasant experience at church and they say, *'The Holy Spirit is here.'* Or they find themselves laughing uncontrollably and say, *'This must be the Spirit at work'.* Or people come to a church which is formal and find there is no spontaneity and say, *'The Holy Spirit is not here'.* Or no-one speaks in tongues and so they say *'The Holy Spirit is not here in this church'*, or they find the music is not uplifting and therefore they say, *'The Holy Spirit can't possibly be there'.* There are lots of claims being made about the Holy Spirit. And much of it is ill informed and unbiblical.

29

Go read:

John 17

Bible Study 29

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you pray for today?



Digging Deeper

Q: Ch 17 is Jesus' final prayer with his disciples. What does he pray for?

Ch 17 is the prayer that Jesus prays in the presence of his disciples on the night of his betrayal in the upper room. We often read in Scripture that Jesus prayed, but this is the longest and most detailed prayer of Jesus that is recorded for us. The prayer we call 'The Lord's prayer' is something of a misnomer, because it was the disciples' prayer, for that is the prayer that he taught them to be praying. This is a prayer he prays for them, this really is the Lord's prayer.

On a general level, the prayer is fairly simple, having three sections: Jesus prays for glory (v1-5); the disciples in the world (v6-19); and the believers in the future (v20-26).

Q: Why has the 'hour' now come? (v1)

The hour has been a theme that has run all the way through John's gospel. Jesus knows the hour has come. He knew it when the Greeks came in ch 12 which is why he finished dealing with the public, called his disciples together in the upper room and explained to them that he would soon be leaving them. And now that he has reassured them, the moment has come, this is the hour, this is the occasion for which he came - his death on the cross.

Q: Is Jesus' request for God to glorify him selfish? Why does Jesus ask to be glorified (v1)?

Jesus prays, '*Glorify me*'. Why? '*That I may glorify you*'. His concern is the glory of his Father. The glory that comes to the Son will come to the Father, and if the Father is glorified it is because he has glorified the Son. They are not in opposition with each other, they are working in unity and harmony with each other. Ch 12 has told us about this mutual glorification (v27-28). It is by the Son's conquest in his death that he will demonstrate and exhibit the glory of the Father.

Q: How does the Father glorify the Son, and how does the Son glorify the Father?

It's at the cross that Jesus is to be glorified (12:23). It's a strange place to expect to see the glory of God. More likely people would see in the death of Jesus, his shame and ignominy, his weakness and his failure. Unless you are versed in the Old Testament revelation of God you will fail to see that God's glory is not power, it is love and faithfulness.

Take for instance Is. 52:13: the servant of God looks so defeated, so weak, so disreputable and yet he is going to be glorified and lifted up and exalted and will shut the mouths of the rulers of the world. That is what Jesus is speaking about here, that Jesus is to be glorified in his death which would in turn show the eternal glory of God in his character of love and faithfulness, mercy and truth.

Q: What is '*eternal life*' (v3)?

It is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (17:3). Not to know about him, but to know him. It is to be in a relationship whereby he knows you and you know him. Eternal life in the Scriptures is not so much everlastingness, the emphasis is not so much on the everness of it, although it is forever, eternal life is knowing the everlasting one. It's being in a relationship with the God who lasts forever, a relationship that will never be taken away from you.

Q: What is the work that Jesus has accomplished/finished (v4)?

Jesus has finished the work of the public and private revelation of the Father's glory through all his words and works and signs, and now he is asking for God's glorifying work at the cross to take place. Jesus is not asking the Father to take him back to his pre-incarnate glory, for he has had the glory of the splendid character of God, his love and faithfulness even while he has been in the flesh. What he is asking for is the full measure of this glory to be demonstrated, the glory which is seen in his death.

Q: What does Jesus say about the relationship between the Father, Son and the disciples in v6-11a?

(i) The disciples have been given by the Father to the Son (v6), but they remain the Father's (v9), because all that belongs to the Son belongs to the Father, and all that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son. And so the Father and Son are one, they are united in sharing these disciples. We often think of Jesus being a gift of God to us. But John's gospel also talks of the disciples being the gift of God to his Son. It's extraordinary to think of yourself as a gift from God to Jesus - but it is a more God centred view of life than just 'God gave Jesus for me'.

(ii) The Son has revealed the Father to the disciples (v6). By receiving Jesus' words the disciples have come to know that Jesus came from the Father, Jesus hasn't come independently of his Father.

(iii) Just as the Father and Son are united before creation in glory (v5), Jesus is glorified in his disciples (v10).

Q: What is it that Jesus prays for the disciples in v11b-19?

Jesus prays that the Father will (i) keep them in his name and (ii) sanctify them. Firstly, Jesus prays for the Father to do that which Jesus has been doing up until now, to keep them and guard them in the Father's name, and for them not to be divided or lose the plot at this critical time when he leaves. The disciples will face opposition from the world, which hates them (v14) and from the evil one, who is a very real enemy (v15). Jesus prays that they would have his joy within them at this time, the joy and peace he promises back in ch 14-16. Secondly, Jesus prays that the disciples would be sanctified (which means to be set apart for, dedicated to) in the truth, which is the truth of God's word (v17). For their sake Jesus is going to consecrate (sanctify) himself completely. He is going to be utterly and completely committed to the truth of God's word, so committed as to die on our behalf for it. And he does it to sanctify them for the coming mission they are coming into, to take up the cross in their mission to the world.



Digging Deeper

Q: What does Jesus pray for those that will believe in him through the word of the disciples (20-26)?

Just as the Father and Son are united - the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father (v21) - Jesus prays that the future believers may be united with the disciples and united with him and the Father. And when people are united with the apostolic message then the world will know that Jesus was sent by the Father (v21). Notice the unity that is being prayed for is not ecumenical, it is not organisational, it is not denominational, it is unity in the word (v20), and unity in glory (v22). As the word of the glorious cross is preached, the world will see that God the Father has sent the Son and will understand that they are one, for the glory of the Father is one and the same as the glory of the Son. The world will see that just as the Father loves the Son, the Father loves those that believe in the Son. Jesus finally prays that all those that the Father has given him will see the glory of the Son. This glory was the glory given to the Son out of the united love the Father and Son had, from before creation.

Q: In what are believers to be united?

Jesus on the night that he was betrayed, was praying for us. As he was about to die, he was praying for those of us who would believe by the disciples' word and teaching. We are to be united with them, not organisationally, or denominationally, but in the same message, the message of the cross.

If God was not three-in-one but a singular God, fellowship would be foreign to him and he would have none to share with us, and we could not learn unity from him. Discuss.

Why would a singular god like the Muslim God Allah, alone for eternity without anyone beside him, value fellowship and unity and intimacy? They are not a part of who he is. And if we were made in his image why would we value fellowship and unity and intimacy? If we were made in a singular god's image and were locked up in solitary confinement we would thrive because we would be going back to what our eternal creator is like, but humans can't tolerate solitary confinement, the UN calls it torture. God's eternal experience is not aloneness, but it is intimacy and unity. He has been for all eternity Father, Son and Spirit. Just as the Father is one with his Son but not his Son, so Jesus prays that believers might be united even though we are different. Why would a singular god like the Muslim God Allah, alone for eternity without any beside him, value others and their differences? By contrast the Father, Son and Spirit invite us to share their heavenly harmony so that people of different genders, ethnicities, languages, cultures might be united around the gospel message. The family of God by its very existence, makes known to the world that God can and will unite enemies, rivals and strangers into one loving family under his fatherly care.

If God was not three-in-one, but a singular God for all eternity, how could he be a God of love? He would only have had himself to love for all eternity, and so would be fundamentally inward looking, Discuss.

The Scriptures tell us that God is love. But if God were a singular God how could He be love? He would have had literally nothing else to love for all eternity, except himself. He would be fundamentally inward looking. Why would he have created the universe? To have people serve him? Because he is lonely? But God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit didn't create the universe to receive love and adoration, since he already had that in himself. No, he created the universe to spread and share the love and joy he already had for his Son. Creation was an overflow of his love for the Son, that this love might be in others also.

It's like a wedding. The bride and groom don't normally have their wedding on their own with no guests, unless its COVID and they have to, right? If they did they could just go to a registry. But instead the groom invites his loved ones because he wants them to share in his love for his bride. The bride invites her loved ones because she wants them to share in her love for her groom. Creation was an overflow of the Father's love for his Son, that this love might be in others also.

As well as our creation, our salvation also is an overflow of God's love for his Son. The Father sent the Son so his love for the Son might be in us. Jesus' mission is to search for those who rejected God and bring them back to where he is, in the Father's bosom, so that we might enjoy the abounding love the Son has always known.

You and I are the inconceivably rich beneficiaries of God's salvation, but our salvation was not the centre of his plans. Rather, at the center was the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father. Discuss.

As well as our salvation being an overflow of the Father's love for his Son, our salvation was also an overflow of the Son's love for his Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus resolved to go through with the plan of the cross. He said '*Not my will Father but yours be done.*' The dominating motive that drove him onward to perfect obedience was to be at one with the Father's will, out of love for his Father. Our salvation is part of something deep and wonderful. The Father decided to include us in his love for the Son and the Son chose to include us in his love for the Father. It's an intra-trinitarian love that fuels our salvation.



Reflecting Further

At the 2012 Olympics, the South African swimmer Chad le Clos won a gold medal in the 200m butterfly beating his childhood hero and the greatest ever Olympian Michael Phelps, by five hundredths of a second. But it was his father, Bert, who stole the show in a post-race interview when he could not contain his emotion. Speaking in Afrikaanglish he said about his son, *"Unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable. I've never been so happy in my life. Wow. Look at him. He's beautiful. What a beautiful boy. He's unbelievable."* The interview was described as the media moment of the games.

Bert's affection for his Son is a snapshot of God the Father's affection for his Son. Discuss.

The reason God created the world and then redeemed the world is to share his delight in his Son, to spread and share the love he has for his Son, out of the overflow of his love and joy, that this love might be in others also. God the Father creates us so that he could say to us in regards to his Son, *'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'* He has created us so that we will say with Him, *'Look at the Son. He's so beautiful. He's unbelievable.'* Before God was ever a creator, God was a Father, loving his Son, for all eternity. This is the fundamental reality of heaven and earth, before heaven and earth were created. You and I and everyone and everything exists because God loves his Son and wants others to love and glorify him too. And, if you belong to God's Son, Jesus Christ, if you trust in Christ as your saviour, God loves you with the same love that he loves his eternal Son.

The truth that God is a real father with a real son is something we could never have known apart from the coming of Jesus. In the Old Testament God is a 'father' figuratively speaking to his people: The prophet Isaiah says, *'You, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name'* (63:16). The psalmist says, *'As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;* (Ps. 103:13).

But when God the Son shows up in our world we begin to discover that there is a deeper reality. God is literally a father to Jesus. This Father-Son relationship is the most fundamental reality that exists. Before God ever created, before he ever ruled the world, He was a Father loving his Son, for all eternity. The Father did not become Father at some point in eternity, that is who he has always been. This is the fundamental reality of heaven and earth, before heaven and earth were created.³²

The persons of the Trinity delight in sharing their love with the others and delight in each receiving love from the others. The Father delights in his Son and the Son delights in the Father and wants to glorify his Father. They rejoice in each other through the Holy Spirit and want to share that joy with others. 'They pour out that love between themselves through the Spirit and out from themselves to others through the Spirit... Jesus is loved by the Father and now Jesus has made the Father known to us as our Father so that the Father's love may be in us. God wants us to enjoy the love of the trinitarian community and to be part of the trinitarian community. We are united to the Son so that we can be as much a part of the divine family as the Son is'.³³



Reflecting Further

Mitchell falls is a grand cascading waterfall in northern Western Australia. It flows down 4 tiers of mesmerising emerald water pools from which the waters tumble from one to the next.

Q: How is this an image of God's love?

The Father is the fountain of life and love and his life and love fill the Son and overflow through the Son to us. We don't bring love into existence, rather love pours out of the Father in an inexhaustible stream and all we do is sit under the cascading fountain of the Father's overflowing love, flowing to us through the Son by the Spirit. We sit there, getting drenched in love, until love flows out from us to the world around us.³⁴

30

Go read:

John 18:1-27

Bible Study 30

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: When have others influenced you to do things you didn't want to do? Why did they have this influence over you?



Digging Deeper

Q: In ch 10 Jesus said that he lays down his life for the sheep '*of his own accord*'. What is the evidence in ch 18 for this?

Q: What evidence is there that Jesus is in control of all the events that are happening?

Q: Why did the detachment of soldiers fall down before Jesus (v6)?

My dad tried to get me to play chess as a boy but I wasn't interested. I wanted to play football. And I also didn't want to play chess because I wasn't very good at it. Whatever I tried I couldn't beat my dad. As I played my dad at chess, I had this feeling that he knew what move I was going to make before I moved and it was if he was controlling the game so that I would make the move that he wanted me to make. One game I actually took some of his pieces and I'm thinking '*I'm winning*,' but it turns out that my moves were the ones that he wanted me to make. He was just letting me take his pieces so that I would leave my self open for him to take my queen and then king. He was so much better than me, so much cleverer than me, that he would control the game so that I would make the move that he wanted me to make.

The same thing is happening in the events leading to Jesus' death. It looks like Jesus' opponents are pulling the strings, but the moves they make are the ones that God has purposed they would make. John tells us that Jesus knew all that was going to happen to him (v4). A detachment/cohort of soldiers confront Jesus. A cohort, was a Roman military technical term for the tenth part of a legion (6000 troops), normally containing 600 troops, but in practice this number could vary greatly. The Romans would often send a surprising number of men to deal even with a single person when they feared a riot might break out, for example the 470 soldiers protecting Paul in Acts 23:23. Jesus would have seen and heard this massive group of soldiers, and he could have fled if he had wanted to, but he is the good shepherd who lays his life down of his own accord. The whole detachment of soldiers and Jewish guards fall to the ground before Jesus (v6)! The arrestors are arrested in their tracks. What is happening? For a brief moment Jesus reveals who he really is. In the Old Testament God's name is Yahweh - '*I am who I am*'. When Moses meets God, Moses says '*Who will I say is sending me?*', and God said, '*I Am*' is sending you. So when Jesus says, '*I Am*,' He is saying, '*I am God*', '*I am Yahweh*', '*I am the one who spoke to Moses*.' For a brief moment the soldiers come face to face with the divine and they have no choice but to fall to the ground. Confronted with the power of Jesus they are powerless.

Jesus' words are fulfilled as his disciples go free (v9). Peter draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant (v10) and in Matthew's gospel (26:52-53) we are told that Jesus then says: '*Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?*' A legion remember consisted of 6,000 Roman soldiers, so Jesus is saying that the Father would give Him more than twelve legions of angels, which is more than 72000 angels available to Jesus.

What can 1 angel do? In Isaiah 37:36 we read this: ‘...*the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp.*’ One angel obliterated 185,000 of God’s enemies in one night, so if a single angel had that kind of power, how much combined strength would there be in twelve legions of angels? 1 angel can obliterate at the very least 185000 of God’s enemies, so 72000 angels can obliterate 185000 multiplied by 72000 which is 13,320,000,000. That’s the combined strength at Jesus’ disposal. I don’t think Jesus needed Peter’s little sword that night, do you? Jesus could have summoned more than 72,000 magnificent, mighty, overwhelmingly powerful angels to obliterate those who had come to arrest Him. But Jesus didn’t call on the supernatural help that was available to Him, because He came as the good shepherd to lay down his life of his own accord. There was no human force on earth strong enough to take Jesus against His will. The only way He was going to be taken was if He allowed Himself to be taken! It looks like Jesus’ opponents are pulling the strings, but the moves they make are the ones that God has purposed they would make. Jesus is the one in control.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the ‘cup’ Jesus speaks of (v11)?

Q: Why has the Father given it to Jesus to drink?

The cup is an image that comes from deep in the Old Testament, in the book of Jeremiah chapter 25:15-16: *‘Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.”’* The cup is the cup of God’s wrath, God’s anger. God sends the prophet Jeremiah to tell the nations of the world that their disobedience means they must drink from the cup of God’s wrath, they must face God’s anger. Now Jesus is about to drink from this cup, so the people of the world don’t have to, so you and I don’t have to. Jesus is about to drink from this cup, by being crucified. Jesus had lived his whole life heading towards this moment. He knew it was coming but, now face to face with it, he feels its crushing weight on him. Crucifixion – which means ‘fixed to a cross’ - brought maximum shame and maximum pain to those unfortunate enough to be executed that way. Crucifixion was intended to deliberately delay death until maximum torture and humiliation had been inflicted. We get the word excruciating from crucifixion – the most severe pain known to man was the pain of crucifixion.

But more than the pain and public shame, Jesus knew that drinking the cup meant bearing God’s anger for the sin of the world. It’s hard to get your head around what that actually involves. We say it all the time without actually thinking about it. *‘Jesus paid for the sins of the world.’* I think it’s helpful to think of it like this: Do you remember when you were a kid and you first discovered what you could do with a magnifying glass and the sun? You can focus the rays of the sun down to a sharp point and the energy and heat generated is so intense you could burn pieces of paper, grass, ants. This could entertain a little boy for hours. Maybe not a good idea to do that unsupervised in the Perth summer. Imagine now an enormous magnifying glass through which you are able to converge the punishment due for the sins of the world, down so that the whole power

and force of it all were to come down at one moment in time, on one person. That's what Jesus was facing. And the punishment that Jesus faced in our place is his Father's punishment. Jesus had shared an intimate relationship with his Father for all eternity. The prospect of his Father turning his face way from him in anger for only a moment, repelled him. He could not stand the thought of it. No wonder in the synoptic gospels we read he said, *'Father, take this cup from me'*. He pleads with his Father not to go through with his plan. In the gospel of Luke we read *'And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground'* (22:44). This condition is called hematidrosis, which occurs in cases of extreme stress when tiny blood vessels in the sweat glands rupture causing blood to mix with sweat. It has been reported in increased rates in people awaiting execution. Here we see Jesus in his full humanity, in great emotional anguish. Jesus cries out, *'If there is any other way, Father, do it.'* If there was another way for the world to be saved, the Father would have done it. If there was a way that could have avoided his own beloved Son being crushed, he would have done it. But there is no other way for the guilty to go free. Jesus must drink the cup. And the incredible thing is this: Jesus drinks the cup. On the cross Jesus swallows down the cup that we should have drunk from, and He drinks all of its wrath. Every last drop. Not one drop remains for us. We do not need to taste any of it. The only person in all of history who had no need to drink the cup, drank it. The only person in all of history who had no need to taste God's anger for sin, tasted it. He drinks it so that you and I don't have to. This is the great exchange. Jesus experienced his Father turning his face away from him so that we would never have to.

Because Jesus prayed, *'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?'* (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), we can cry out *'Abba father, my daddy.'*

How blasphemous it is to think that our sin doesn't matter. That God doesn't care about my sin. My sin is so foul that the only way it could be cleaned was by the Son of God dying! How blasphemous it is to think we are good enough for God. If we were good enough for God then Jesus would not have had to die. How blasphemous to think that there is another way to the Father than by Jesus Christ's death. This has to be the only way, or the Father would have avoided his beloved Son from dying.



Digging Deeper

Q: Why do you think Peter betrayed Jesus 3 times (v17-27)?

The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. When the wolves come - Judas who betrays him, the Jewish leaders who have him arrested and beaten, Pilate who caves into the crowd, the Roman soldiers who spit on him and mock him and beat him up - when these wolves come, Jesus does not desert his sheep. The hired hands, the disciples, run away and Peter denies Jesus, but the good shepherd lays his life down for you and me. Peter's disowning of Jesus comes from the strong desire for self-preservation. He was afraid of being found guilty by association, for Jesus is now a criminal in the hands of the temple police. He may also be concerned that his assault of the High Priest's servant may be taken further and prosecuted. As the rooster crows, again the words of Jesus are fulfilled (13:38). Although Peter was watching the trial of Jesus, he himself was on trial, and he failed dismally.

Peter's denial is in stark contrast to Jesus' interrogation before the authorities. *'Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing, while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything'*.³⁵ The denial is a fulfillment of Jesus' prediction (13:38), and highlights the contrast to the post-Jesus resurrection Peter, who filled with the Holy Spirit, willingly gave up his life for Jesus.



Reflecting Further

Q: What are the implications for your life that God is control?

The fact that God is in complete control has profound implications for your life. It means nothing can stop his plans for you, nothing can stop his plans for your life. Even if you sometimes make a wrong move or stuff up, God will still achieve his good purposes for you. Too often I live my life forgetting that God is in control. I let myself get anxious about things, I worry about things: Finances, my kids. I need to remember that God is in complete control. We don't need to live with uncertainty or insecurity. We can have complete confidence in Him and rely on Him. He will bring about his good purposes for us. It means that we Christians can have something that the world craves – absolute peace of mind. A supernatural peace that surpasses all understanding.

31

Go read:

John 18:28-19:16

Bible Study 31

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Consider the following from Soren Kierkegaard, a philosopher in the 19th century:

'There is a view of life which holds that where the crowd is, the truth is also, that it is a need in truth itself, that it must have the crowd on its side. There is another view of life; which holds that wherever the crowd is, there is untruth...' '[A] crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction...for to win a crowd is not so great a trick; one only needs some talent, a certain dose of untruth and a little acquaintance with the human passions'.³⁶

Q: What do you think Kierkegaard means by '*the crowd is untruth*' and how do we see this play out in the arrest and sentencing of Jesus?

We see this dynamic of the crowd being untruth at work as the murderous mob of Jews incited by the lies of the Jewish leaders condemn Jesus, an innocent man, to death.



Digging Deeper

- Q: What crime was Jesus found guilty of?**
- Q: From a legal standpoint, how fair do you think Jesus' trial was?**
- Q: Who is in charge of Jesus' trial?**
- Q: How was the word that Jesus had spoken, fulfilled in 18v32?**
- Q: What do you think of the Jews' reply in 19v15?**
- Q: What is the significance of the rooster crowing 3 times?**
- Q: Was Jesus the only one on trial? Who else was on trial and why?**

Jesus' trial was a phony, a miscarriage of justice. It took place in the middle of the night, when the official courts were not in session; there were no formal charges brought; there were no witnesses brought; and Annas was not the high priest that year. It was a 'Kangaroo Court', a lynch mob. It took place at night because the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to die before Passover, their holy day, when by law they couldn't deal with this kind of matter and they didn't want Jesus' supporters rising up if they delayed. And the Jewish leaders wanted it at night because as the gospel of John keeps telling us, darkness is the symbol of evil, when people do evil deeds, when they are hidden.

And notice the hypocrisy (18:28). While the Jews are involved in lynching the innocent, at the same time they are concerned about their ceremonial cleanliness. They are so concerned to eat the Passover, they do not realise that they are about to sacrifice the true Passover Lamb.

Throughout the arrest and trial Jesus is the one in control. Jesus' trial winds up declaring his own message, for the longer it goes on, the longer he is declared to be what he hasn't been declared for the whole 18 chapters of the gospel up until this stage, that is, the King of the Jews. That is his crime, to be the king of the Jews. The truth comes in irony (as in 11:50). He could have said nothing and gone free but he chooses to go to the cross by his own words. As we saw in the previous study He lays his life down of his own accord. Jesus is so in control that he determines what kind of death he would have, as they play into his hands (v32). If Jesus was killed under Jewish law he would have been stoned, but in the 1st c the Jews were obliged to have the occupying Romans conduct their executions because they were in charge of law and order, so the Jews send Jesus to Pilate, the governor. Under Roman law, perpetrators of serious crimes are crucified. God prophesied through the prophet Isaiah 600y before the birth of Jesus that the Messiah would be pierced for our transgressions (Is. 53). God prophesied through King David 1000y before Jesus that the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced (Ps. 22:16), long before crucifixion was ever invented. Nothing took place that God hadn't sovereignly ordained. By murdering Jesus, his opponents fulfil the very event that God had planned before the beginning of time.

God is in control, but the way he brings about the victory is a way that no-one could have guessed. He wins the victory by having the King die – and then rise again from the dead, just like he predicted he would.

As the rooster crows, again the words of Jesus are fulfilled (13:38). Although Peter was watching the trial of Jesus, he himself was on trial, and he failed dismally.



Digging Deeper

Q: Does Pilate find Jesus innocent or guilty?

Q: Why did Pilate allow Jesus to be crucified?

Q: What do you think lies behind Pilate's famous statement, *'What is truth?'* (18:38)

Q: What has John's gospel told us truth is?

Jesus makes Pilate palpably uncomfortable. Pilate is confronted with the truth and must decide whether he loves truth or lies and darkness. The evidence points to the fact that Jesus is innocent. Pilate acknowledges that (18:38, 19:4, 12) but he still has Jesus flogged, he still has him crucified. Facts lose their importance when preferences trump truth. The truth doesn't fit his preferences. If he releases Jesus a riot would break out among the crowd and word would get back to Caesar that he could not keep order, and he would lose his position. Given the choice between one insignificant man dying and his own career taking a nose-dive, Pilate chooses for Jesus to die, even if He is innocent. Pilate ignores the truth and caves in to the pressure of the crowd. Pilate sacrifices Jesus on the altar of self-interest.

Neither truth nor justice are his highest priorities. He is more concerned with keeping the peace and keeping his job, so Pilate subordinates the truth to his personal preference. Pilate wasn't a skeptic. He was a cynic. A skeptic won't believe a truth claim until there is sufficient evidence. A cynic won't believe even if there is sufficient evidence.

Pilate had the privilege of standing before the One who claimed to be Truth incarnate and would later prove it by rising from the dead. Yet Pilate wouldn't submit himself to the truth. He is staring the truth in the face but yet refuses to believe it. He subordinated truth to his personal preferences which makes him the patron saint of politicians.

It looks as though Jesus is on trial before Pilate but it is in fact Pilate who is on trial before Jesus and he was guilty. Although he is governor over the Jews, the collective power of the crowd forces him to take action when he clearly doesn't want to. The influence of the crowd proves too strong for Pilate to resist, resulting in him doing their dirty work for them.

Pilate reveals much when he asks, 'What is Truth?' Pilate in effect is saying '*Truth does exist but I don't care because my preferences matter more*', and his actions are ultimately commensurate with his words. He elevates his preferences over facts and truth.

We have seen throughout the gospel of John the answer to Pilate's question: Jesus' glory is grace and truth, (1:14); Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (14:6); the Spirit of truth guided the disciples into the truth because he takes what is Jesus' and declares it to them (16:13-14); God's word is truth (17:17); everyone who is of the truth listens to Jesus (18:37), because Jesus testifies to the truth. In utter contrast, the Devil is the father of lies and there is no truth in him (8:44).

Jesus is on trial, but yet is he? For he is in control of all the events (18:4). What we have in these chapters is a series of trials. It looks as if we are witnessing the trial of Jesus, but in actual fact, the prosecution is on trial. And in the end this is our trial as well, isn't it? As we read, we think we have Jesus on trial and we can judge Jesus, but it doesn't matter how we evaluate Jesus, it matters how Jesus evaluates us. We think we can pass judgement on Judas, as a rotten rat betraying Jesus for money; on Peter, for being a wimp and coward; on Caiaphas and Annas for their evil scheming; on Pilate for being spineless in condemning an innocent man. But we can't make any of those judgements without judging ourselves, can we? The claims of Jesus go beyond the first century, he is talking about the kingdom of heaven, he is talking about truth itself, and his claims confront us. v37 challenges us where we stand, with regard to truth and with regard to Jesus, for Jesus says *'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'*

Jesus is not the only one who is on trial, everyone of us is on trial, the trial of whether we are of the truth and listen to him.

The world today of deconstructionist spin doctors, the world of postmodernists, those who elevate their preferences over facts and truth, is a world that denies God. When you get rid of God, of absolutes, the inevitable outcome is that you will get rid of truth. It's as old as Pontius Pilate.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of Barabbas being released (v40)?

Barabbas is murderer. He is a terrorist. He is on death row. One of those crosses on the hill at Calvary was for him that day. That's why Pilate picks him. He is trying to get Jesus released because he believes he is innocent, but he doesn't want to be the one to do it, or he will have a revolt on his hands. So he picks the most vulgar criminal he possibly could. He is trying to force the Jewish leaders' hands. *'Here's Jesus who hasn't done anything wrong, and here is a murderer, which one do you want me to release to you?'* It seems like a no contest. Seems like a no brainer. Who wants a murderer running around town? Pilate is trying to get them to pick Jesus. But they choose Barabbas. What has Jesus done but heal lepers, open blind eyes, set men free from evil spirits, bring people back from the dead. What has he done? *'Who do you want?'* *'We want Barabbas!'* Imagine the 2 criminals that are crucified that day. The 1st thief is in his cell and he hears the jailer walking towards him and put the key in the lock. The jailer says, *'Follow me,'* and he takes him to be crucified. The 2nd thief is in his cell and he hears the jailer walking towards him and he puts the key in the lock and says *'Follow me,'* and he takes him to be crucified.

Barabbas is in his cell and he hears the jailer walking towards him and he puts the key in the lock and says *'Follow me'*, but he unlocks Barabbas from his chains. He says *'You are free. Somebody has taken your spot.'* He walks out of prison and is welcomed by all his terrorist friends. Barabbas means, *'Son of the Father'* (*Bar* = son, *Abba* is father in Hebrew). The son of the father by name and the real Son of the Father stand side by side. *'Which one do you want me to release?'* They choose Barabbas. Jesus stood there silent for he knew the will of the Father. The Father would have to treat Jesus like Barabbas deserve so he could treat you and I like Jesus deserves.

Q: In what sense are you and I like Barabbas?

Barabbas is like you and me. I am Barabbas. You are Barabbas. We deserve the punishment. We deserve the guilt. We deserve the shame but, Jesus says, *'Let me take your sin. Let me have your pain. Let me have your shame'*. The Father treats Jesus like you and I deserved so he could treat you and I like Jesus deserved.

Q: Why do the Jewish leaders stir up the crowd to demand Jesus be crucified?

The Jewish leaders are threatened by Jesus' popularity and his denunciation of their leadership. They had no real charge to bring against Jesus (18:30), so they say he must die because he made himself out to be the Son of God (19:7) and Jewish law demands that blasphemy (dishonouring God), be punished with death. But if you really are the Son of God then how can you be guilty of speaking the truth? It is no blasphemy to say God is your Father if he is your Father, in fact it would be a blasphemy to say that he wasn't. But their expediency traps them into denying their own faith, for look where they wind up in 19:15. The very people who could rightfully say that God was their king, who were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, the King of Kings who was going to rule the universe, deny that same King who is standing in front of them. The Jewish leaders are very much on trial and show by their actions the state of their hearts.



Reflecting Further

Q: Are you on the side of truth? How do you know? What does this look like in your life?

32

Go read:

John 19:16b-37

Bible Study 32

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: What do you know of the practice of crucifixion?

Q: In what sense was this form of execution the height of pain and the depth of shame?

The cross was an instrument of the Roman Empire's brutalizing power to humiliate. Crucifixion was the ancient world's summum supplicium or 'ultimate punishment'³⁷. Of the 3 official methods of capital punishment: crucifixion, decapitation and burning alive – crucifixion was regarded as the most shameful and most brutal (though none of the 3 sound particularly nice). Crucifixion – which means 'fixed to a cross' - brought maximum shame and maximum pain to those unfortunate enough to be executed that way. Crucifixion was intended to deliberately delay death until maximum torture and humiliation had been inflicted. We get the word excruciating from crucifixion – the most severe pain known to man was the pain of crucifixion. When crucified the criminal would first be whipped, known as 'scourging' in the 1st c. He would be stripped of all his clothing, his hands would be tied to a post, with his back facing the scourger. The back, buttocks, and legs were flogged repeatedly with full force. The whip was made of strips of leather fastened to a handle and had small pieces of metal or bone tied at intervals along the leather straps designed to rip through flesh. The bone fragments would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues and tear them apart and as the flogging continued the fragments would tear the underlying muscle from the bone, producing quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. The whipping would leave no areas of intact skin bigger than a 20c piece. There was no limit to the number of blows inflicted—as many as it would take to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death.

After the scourging, the soldiers would often taunt their victim. There were a number of different types of crosses used to crucify criminals. There were the traditional cross shape, plus x shaped crosses, or even trees were used. In the Scriptures we read that Jesus had to carry the heavy wooden horizontal beam of the cross to the place of execution. The pain would have been severe as he carried the beam on his ripped up back. He carried a signboard outlining his name and his crime and was led through the crowded streets on full public display. The place of execution was selected to be in a very public place, such as along roads or just outside the main gates of a city, at the eye level of onlookers so everyone who passed by would vividly see the consequences for anyone who would be foolish enough to oppose Rome.

The criminal was thrown to the ground on his back, with his arms outstretched along the crossbar, and big iron nails were hammered into his wrists. Then the feet were nailed from the side, to the vertical beam. The signboard would then be nailed to the top of the cross to notify onlookers of the crime, and the soldiers and the crowd taunted and jeered the condemned man. Not uncommonly, insects would burrow into the eyes, ears, nose and wounds of the dying and helpless criminal, and birds of prey would tear at these sites. As the cross was lifted up, the weight of the body pulling down on the outstretched arms and shoulders, made it terribly difficult to breathe, made worse by the onset of muscle cramps due to fatigue. The criminal would try and get air into his lungs by arching upwards on his feet. But this would cause searing pain in his legs, so he would alternate between the 2 positions, which was made all the more painful because his whipped back would scrape up and down the rough wood whenever he shifted positions. The actual cause of death by crucifixion varied somewhat with each case, but the two most prominent causes probably were shock from inadequate perfusion of critical organs due to blood loss and dehydration, and inadequate oxygen levels in the blood due to restricted breathing.

The length of survival generally ranged from three hours to three days and appears to have been inversely related to the severity of the scourging. Imagine taking 3 days to die! 3 days of pain! If the soldiers wanted to hasten death they would take an iron club and break the criminal's legs so they were no longer able to lift themselves up, and they would die within a few minutes.

But even after death the public shame of crucifixion was still not over. Crucified criminals were not given the dignity of a burial. The corpse was left on the cross to be eaten by wild animals and birds. Crucifixion was the most degrading of deaths, the total public humiliation of its victim. The criminal experienced the heights of pain and the depths of shame. Were the goal of crucifixion merely death, a single soldier with a sword could have done it in a moment, but the pain and shame of crucifixion was meant to make clear to all who saw it that *'This person is worth nothing. They are less than human.'*



Digging Deeper

Q: Throughout John's gospel Jesus predicts his own death. Flick back and find these references and try to summarise what Jesus says is the reason that he has to die.

Q: What does Jesus' death mean? How should it be interpreted?

Q: Jesus says, '*It is finished*' (v30). What is finished?

We don't interpret the Bible, the Bible is the interpretation, it is God's interpretation of the events. What we've got to do with the Bible is read it and comprehend it. The author has an intention in what he is writing, and our task as a reader is to understand what he meant, not to interpret what he meant. E.g. when we read the newspaper, we don't interpret what is written, we don't interpret the interpretation, we read it, it is an exercise of comprehension. If '*Jesus died on a cross*' is a fact, then how should this fact be interpreted? The death of Jesus in ch19, is not just recorded in brute fact, it is interpreted for us as the fulfillment of God's prophetic plans to bring the Messiah to his glory, as a sacrifice for sins.

The challenge of the facts is acute for those who care to think about them. Some believe that Jesus never lived, the Muslims believe that Jesus didn't die and the Jews believe that Jesus did die but didn't rise from the dead. So John 19 and 20 is a great challenge to them. Jesus is not a matter of opinion, he either did live or he didn't live. He either did rise or he didn't rise from the dead. These are not matters of opinion, these are matters of fact. You may have an opinion about the facts, but the facts are the facts. And all these opinions can't all be true, because he cannot have lived and not lived, died and not died, risen and not risen. They can all be wrong, but they can't all be right. Christianity is not a philosophical plaything, it is not an idea, it actually happened or it didn't happen, and if it didn't happen

it is wrong and if it did happen, well what does it mean? Jesus didn't just die as an innocent martyr, he died as a sacrifice for sins, for our sins. His death is the payment of our sin, and because he has paid for them completely, he cries out, '*It is finished*'. His life's work to bring us back into a relationship with God by paying for our sins, is completed. The cry in v30 picks up on what he has come to do all along, that he has come to do his Father's work and longs that it be accomplished (17:4). And whoever believes in him will have eternal life (3:15-16), for they have passed from death to life (5:24). We, though slaves to sin, are set free by the Son (8:34-36) on the cross. There is nothing we can bring to God to pay for our sins. There is nothing else we can bring to God and nothing else we need to bring to God. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient.



Digging Deeper

Q: Which Old Testament Scriptures does Jesus fulfill in Ch 19?

Q: What is the significance of Jesus' fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures?

Jesus' life was not taken from him, but he laid it down of his own accord (10:18). This was because the events surrounding Jesus death were in exact accordance with the predicted plan of God. Nothing took place that God hadn't sovereignly ordained.

So while the soldiers thought they were merely casting lots for a good cloak, they were unwittingly fulfilling the sovereign plans of God outlined in Ps. 22, which predicted that the Messiah would die surrounded by his enemies casting lots for his clothing. And when the soldiers came to break Jesus' legs to speed up the dying process and found that he was already dead, it was because he was fulfilling the Old Testament stipulations that the sacrificial Passover lamb was not to have any of its bones broken, (Ex. 12; Num. 9; Ps. 34). His side is pierced, fulfilling Zec.12:10. When he cries out, '*I am thirsty*' and someone gives him something to drink, yet another Scripture is fulfilled (Ps.69:21).

The significance of these fulfillments is that they point to the fact that Jesus is the predicted Messiah. He is the Son of God. He has come fulfilling everything that was predicted.

Q: Many argue that it is repugnant to think that Jesus, pathetically hanging on the cross, could be the God of the universe. How would you answer them?

Q: In ch 17 Jesus asked that the Father would glorify the Son. Where is the glory in being executed on a cross?

Throughout the book of John, we have seen Jesus' glory is his love and faithfulness, his grace and truth. We see Jesus' glory in full measure as he dies upon the cross, as he is faithful unto death and so loving that he lay down his life for his enemies. We see Jesus at his most Godly, at his most glorious, when he is hanging from that cross, nails through his hands, gasping for air. Jesus says, '*When you have lifted up the Son of Man*' (lifted him up on the cross that is) '*then you will know that I am he*', or '*then you will know that I am God*' (8:28). According to Jesus, God is most recognisable when he is hanging on the cross.



Reflecting Further

Q: What is your response to Jesus' death?

33

Go read:

John 19:38-20:23

Bible Study 33

C

Context

Handwriting lines for Context

O

Observation

Handwriting lines for Observation

M

Meaning

Handwriting lines for Meaning

A

Application

Handwriting lines for Application



Kicking Off

A man went on a holiday to the Holy Land with his his wife and mother-in-law. While they were there the mother-in-law passed away. The funeral director in the Holy Land told the son-in-law, "You can have your mother-n-law shipped home to Australia for \$10,000, or you can bury her here in the Holy Land for \$1000." The son-in-law thought about it and told the funeral director he would have her shipped home. The funeral director asked, "Why? Why would you spend \$10000 to ship your mother-in-law home, when you could spend only \$1000 to have her buried here?" The son-in-law said, "A man died in the Holy Land 2000 years ago, he was buried here and three days later he rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance with my mother-in-law."

Q: Unlike this man, not everyone believes that Jesus' resurrection actually happened. Skeptics give alternative explanations to the biblical accounts of why the tomb was empty and why the resurrection appearances of Jesus never happened. What are some of these alternate explanations?

Skeptic's explain away the empty tomb:

- i) The swoon theory is only a 200 year old theory that claims that Jesus did not die on the cross but merely fell unconscious ("swooned"), and was later revived in the tomb, perhaps by Joseph of Arimathea who owned the tomb. The theory has never gained much of a following, but has poked its head into the debate over the years. The gospels state categorially that the Roman soldiers assessed Jesus on the cross and that he was dead. Roman soldiers were experts in crucifixion and would not have permitted anyone to be taken down from a cross still alive. And a man who had been beaten, crucified and then buried, does not recover enough to be able to push a tomb stone open, and then overcome Roman guards to make his getaway.

- ii) Some people claim that Jesus' disciples stole Jesus' body to make it look like Jesus had risen from the dead. But there was no way they could overpower a Roman guard, trained to kill and protect under threat of their own life if they allowed prisoners to escape. The disciples had nothing to gain and everything to lose by stealing Jesus' body. Because they believed in Jesus' resurrection they were ostracized as traitors and heretics by the Jewish community. All the apostles, (except John who was imprisoned), were executed in painful ways for their belief in Jesus' resurrection. If they had taken Jesus' body from the tomb and knew that Jesus' resurrection was a lie, why would they die for this lie? As historian John Dickson states, 'It is an extremely difficult historical and psychological question to answer without a resurrection'.³⁸
- And as Charles Colson states: "I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."³⁹
- iii) Some claim that thieves stole the body. However, the most valuable items that could be sold for a decent return – Jesus' burial clothes - were left behind. In addition, Jesus' head piece was folded up in a different place than where Jesus was laid, which would be a very strange action for a grave robber.

iv) Some argue that Jesus' disciples went to the wrong tomb and that's why they didn't find Jesus' body. Luke's gospel states that the women who went to the tomb on the Sunday, had been to the tomb on the Friday and seen Jesus laid there (Lk. 23:55-24:1), so would not have gone to the wrong tomb. Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph Arimathea, a prominent man in Jerusalem, which could have easily been rechecked for the presence of Jesus' body, and was guarded by Roman soldiers, unlike the other tombs around it.

Skeptics also explain away the resurrection appearances of Jesus. They claim:

- i) the disciples hallucinated. The trauma of seeing their beloved master crucified, in combination with not eating or sleeping, lead to the disciples all having the same hallucination that Jesus has risen from the dead. However, while hallucinations can be experienced for a variety of reasons (e.g. secondary to psychotic illnesses, induced by drugs), hallucinations are individual experiences, not collective experiences. 500 people do not have the exact same hallucination, at different times and in different situations - not even 2 people do.

- ii) the disciples saw a vision. The disciples saw not the physical raised body of Jesus, but they had a religious vision. However, the disciples put their hands in Jesus' wounds and Jesus ate food with them. The accounts of Jesus' appearances were definitely physical.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus burying Jesus' body (v38-42)?

Crucifixion was designed as the ultimate public humiliation, from beginning to end, and this continued after death, as criminals who were crucified were not given the dignity of a burial. When the bodies were taken down, they were taken to the local dump where they were left to rot, and where birds and animals would feed on them. At times, families would petition for permission to take the body and perform a proper burial. If that was denied, they may offer a bribe. Like Nicodemus, it appears as if Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent figure in the Jewish community. Joseph and Nic leverage their influence and wealth to salvage Jesus' body. Their love for Jesus led them to do something Jesus' closest followers lacked the courage to do. Unwittingly their actions also provide us with even stronger evidence for the resurrection. If Jesus was removed from the cross and taken to the dump, then later appeared in public, it would have been incredibly remarkable, but explainable: he had not died, but had survived. But Jesus was taken down from the cross by Nic and Joseph who would have noticed if he was alive (and would have hoped beyond hope he was) as they prepared him for burial. If Jesus wasn't dead before (which as we have stated earlier is an impossibility), he would have suffocated after being wrapped in layers of cloth. These men's loving actions meant that the supernatural nature of Jesus' resurrection was brought into sharper focus. Jesus being buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, was also a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy from 700y before Jesus was born: "*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth*" (Isa. 53:9).



Digging Deeper

Q: After his death, Jesus appeared to many people at different places and times. Look up the following references of the appearances of the risen Jesus: Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1, 9; 1 Cor 15:1-11.

Q: How strong is this accumulated weight of eyewitness accounts, as evidence for the truth of Jesus' resurrection?

The New Testament records at least 12 separate post-resurrection appearances by Jesus.

1. To Mary Magdalene in the garden early on the Sunday morning;
2. To a group of other women on the same morning: Mary mother of James, Salome, Joanna.
3. To the two travellers on the road to Emmaus;
4. To Peter in Jerusalem on that same Sunday;
5. To ten disciples in the upper room on the Sunday night;
6. To eleven of them a week later;
7. To a group of seven of those disciples by the Sea of Tiberius;
8. To 11 disciples on a mountainside in Galilee;
9. At the same place some time later to more than 500 people at once;
10. To James the brother of Jesus;
11. To a large group of early Christian leaders on the Mount of Olives;
12. To Paul on the road to Damascus, several years later.

Jesus' resurrection was witnessed by various different people, at different places and in different settings. There is no stereotyped repetition here. In any court, this accumulated weight of eyewitness evidence would tip the balance of probability well and truly into the favour of the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

Q: Which Scriptures foretell that Jesus must rise from the dead (20:9)?

- i) Ps16 - see Acts ch 2 for Peter's explanation of the significance of this Psalm.
- ii) The story of Jonah. See also Matthew 12:40.
- iii) 2 Samuel 7:12-13
- iv) Is 53:10
- v) Psalm 49:15

Q: Why was the stone rolled away at the tomb?

I had always assumed it was so Jesus could get out. But he didn't need the stone rolled away so he could get out. Throughout the story he appears and disappears and walks through walls. The stone was rolled away so the disciples could get in and see that he had gone, and so we can look in and see that the resurrection is real. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive.

Q: What does Jesus mean when he says to his disciples '*receive the Holy Spirit*' (v22)? Didn't they receive the Holy Spirit later at Pentecost? Does this mean they received the Holy Spirit twice?

Jesus breathes on his disciples as a symbolic anticipation of the gift of the Spirit which they will receive when he returns to be with the Father, and brings in the age of the Spirit, poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2).



Digging Deeper

Q: In what sense do Jesus' disciples have the authority to forgive sins and withhold forgiveness (v23)?

What a responsibility they were given and we also have been given. Our responsibility is to preach the gospel, the good news of forgiveness. If people accept the message and repent, their sins will be forgiven and we can reassure them with the authority of Jesus that they are saved. If they reject the message they will be left in their sins and we can warn them with the authority of Jesus that their sins are not forgiven.



Reflecting Further

Q: Can Islam and Judaism and Christianity all be true?

Christianity and Islam and Judaism can all be wrong, but they can't all be right. They are incompatible. They don't disagree on some fringe teaching, they disagree on the fundamental teachings of Jesus' death. Islam teaches that Jesus didn't die on the cross, but someone else was killed in his place.⁴⁰ Judaism says that Jesus did die on the cross but he didn't rise from the dead because he was not the Son of God. Christianity claims that Jesus died on the cross and also rose from the dead.

Jesus could not both die on the cross and not die on the cross. He couldn't both rise from the dead and not rise from the dead. If Jesus has not died then Christianity is a hoax and a fraud. If Jesus has died then Islam is fundamentally wrong. If Jesus did rise from the dead then Judaism is wrong. The evidence is historically overwhelming that Jesus died and rose again. We have the evidence of a 7th century Quran and a 17th century gospel of Barnabas, saying that Jesus didn't die, and against that we have the New Testament and the Roman and Jewish historians recording that he did. There is no contest.

A Muslim who became a Christian was asked by some friends, 'Why have you become a Christian?' He answered, 'Well, it's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions, and you didn't know which way to go, and there at the fork in the road were two men, one dead and one alive - which one would you ask which way to go?'

Q: What do you think of this response?

34

Go read:

John 20:24-29

Bible Study 34

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Mary Elizabeth Frye wrote a poem about death which is often recited at funerals:

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush.
Of quiet birds in circling flight,
I am the soft star-shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

Q: What do you think of this poem in light of Jesus' resurrection?

It's an incredibly moving poem, and tries to offer hope for those who do not know what is beyond the grave. But is it really a consolation to imagine that the rain on your roof is your loved one? The only hope beyond the grave is Jesus. The Sunday promise for those who believe that Jesus rose, is that even though they die, they will live forever. Birth, life, death, life. Your life will not end if you are in Christ. That is the Sunday promise for all who have faith in Christ. It the promise of eternal life. Our hearts may stop beating. Our lungs may stop breathing. But because of Easter Sunday we will not die. We will live forever. And we don't have to wait until the afterlife to have eternal life, for as we have seen eternal life begins the moment you believe (3:16; 17:3).



Digging Deeper

Q: Is believing in Jesus' resurrection just a leap of blind faith?

Q: What do you think of Jesus' answer: '*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*' (v29)?

Christianity stands or falls on the truthfulness and validity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then he was just one among many religious upstarts who claimed much but delivered little, and no more ink should be spilt remembering his exploits. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, as he promised he would, then surely this means he is who he claimed to be, and it has massive implications for how we live our lives.

Christianity is not just a matter of opinion. Far from it. The facts and truth of Christianity are seen in two areas that the world by and large ignores: (1) history and (2) the Scriptures.

- (1) It is seen in history because God is not an object of human imagining or of reasoning, but a subject of human history. Jesus was seen in space and in time. The events of the Bible happened publically. There are Jewish and Roman historians (Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny) other than the authors of the New Testament, who have recorded Jesus' life, death and even resurrection.
- (2) God not only is in history, but God also writes history. Before the events, during the events, after the events, in the Scriptures God makes clear the significance of what happened. But people talk about the existence or non-existence of God while omitting the evidence for God that is in the world, namely the person of Jesus, who actually is God. If you are going to remove every place where you are going to see the facts of the evidence, then surprise surprise you do not find the evidence, and you come to your conclusion.

Our problem started several centuries ago, during the Enlightenment when the concepts of knowledge and belief and faith were divided as if they were three distinct points along a continuum. It has consequently become entrenched in people's thinking that knowledge is something that is based on facts which we can know with certainty. Belief however, is less certain, it's unproven, it's what someone thinks about something. And faith is uncertain, requiring a 'leap of faith' to make up for the gaps in the facts. Knowledge therefore gives rise to science, whereas belief and faith because they are relative and untestable, give rise to religion and morality. And so we put religion and science in two different boxes, we put morality and science in two different boxes.

But Jesus' resurrection is not opinion. We believe that it happened, we have 'faith' that it happened, not just because we want to believe it happened, but because of our knowledge of the facts. There are masses of solid historical evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead. Jesus is the best-reported, best-evidenced figure of ancient history. There is far more historical evidence for Jesus than there is for Julius Caesar - and no-one would claim that Julius Caesar was a myth. You can put your confidence in these facts. What the facts tell us is extraordinary, it is stupendous, but it is also true. (See a good apologetics book for why you can trust in the facts of the resurrection e.g. 'Jesus on Trial', 'The Case for Christ', 'More than a Carpenter').

But our faith is in something that is unseen. All these years later, we haven't actually seen Jesus alive from the dead first-hand. But there are lots of things that we trust in without seeing them first-hand, because we trust the eyewitnesses, the reports. In the end you have to check your sources out to see whether they are right. The sources are in the Scriptures. It did happen, we don't see it first hand, but does that really matter? No, because Jesus said to Thomas, '*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*' (v 29).

We do not need first-hand knowledge because we have the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the apostles who have written it down for us. That is the evidence that we need.



Digging Deeper

An African impala can jump more than 3m high and 10m in length. But these amazing animals can be kept in an enclosure in a zoo with just a 1m wall. Yes, a 1m wall, your maths is not off. They can jump over 3m but a 1m wall can stop them.

Q: Do you know why?

These animals won't jump if they can't see where their feet will land. The 1m wall obstructs their sight of the outside where freedom awaits. Because they cannot see, they do not jump. That means that impalas stay trapped because they refuse to go where they cannot see. It's a popular saying that 'seeing is believing', but this is impala faith. Jesus says '*You don't need to see to believe. Trust in the testimonies of the disciples.*' This is not a blind faith but a faith in trustworthy evidence.



Digging Deeper

Q: What does Jesus say when he greets the disciples (v19, 21, 26)?

Q: Why do you think he says this?

Q: Why does Jesus show Thomas his hands and feet and side (v27)?

Q: What is the implication of Jesus' resurrection body for a believers' body after death?

It's Sunday because on Friday it was finished. Discuss.

On Friday Jesus said, *'It is finished. It is completed. It is accomplished. It is concluded. Done. Ended. Over. Satisfied.'* It is Sunday because on Friday it was finished. If it was not finished on Friday, there would be no Sunday. On Friday the authorities had executed the disciples' leader. The disciples were afraid. They were despairing. They were beaten. But that's because they didn't know Sunday was coming. Jesus says to his disciples, *'Peace be with you'* (v19, 21, 26). The peace that Jesus gives is different than the peace the world gives. He deals with the root problem, the lack of peace between us and God. Before Friday there was no peace between us and God because of our sin. But on Friday our sin was dealt with. On Friday God's anger for sin was borne by Jesus on the cross. On Friday our sins were forgiven, wiped clean, never to be remembered again. On Sunday we have shalom, because on Friday it was finished. If it was not finished on Friday there would be no peace on Sunday. On Friday the wounds on Jesus' hands and in his side were marks of his suffering and death. Now on Sunday they are marks of his victory. On Friday Jesus had a spear thrust into his side to prove he was dead. On Sunday the wound in his side proved he was alive.

Q: If the doors were locked how did Jesus stand among his disciples (V26)?

Q: What is the significance of Thomas' profession 'My Lord and my God' (v28)?

On Friday the disciples were beaten, broken, despairing. On Sunday they are celebrating. It is Sunday and Jesus is alive. And Jesus is alive because on Friday it was finished. Jesus says, *'It's no longer Friday, it is Sunday. Touch my wounds all you want. I am not a ghost or a spirit but a fleshy body. My Friday wounds are proof it is now Sunday. Stop doubting Thomas and believe it is Sunday.'* As soon as Thomas saw Jesus he was overcome with awe and reverence and immediately cries out *"My Lord and my God!"* Before that Sunday, they called Jesus rabbi, teacher. They called him Christ, the Messiah. They called him the son of God. Now on Sunday Thomas calls him God. No one, before Thomas, had called Jesus, 'God'. It was an incredible and dangerous thing to say. Jewish leaders would not have hesitated to pass the death sentence on Thomas for blasphemy. But it was Sunday. And on Sunday Thomas knew that Jesus was God and his Lord.

Jesus' resurrection body has both continuity and discontinuity with his previous earthly body. It has continuity for his wounds remain and can be felt. It has continuity for in the gospel of Luke we read that Jesus ate fish. But there is discontinuity also as somehow Jesus is able to walk right through the locked doors and stand among his disciples. This has implications for believers, as Jesus' resurrection body is the proto-type of our future resurrection bodies. We also will be given resurrection bodies, which will have both continuity and discontinuity with our mortal bodies.

The resurrection of the body was a scandal to Greek philosophers who taught the immortality of the soul – that when the body dies, the soul is finally freed from its mortal prison to exist eternally in a non-physical existence.

However, the resurrection of the body is absolutely essential to Christian doctrine. God's purpose is not just someday to have lots of spirits in heaven, but bodies on the new earth. One of our deepest longings is to have new bodies. That's why our superheroes are people who are given new superhuman bodies like Superman, the Hulk, Captain America. Movies like this keep getting made because we want to be like these guys who get new bodies. How many of you, your alarm wakes you up in the morning and you feel like you've haven't even been asleep. *"You gotta be kiddin me. Just 10 more minutes of sleep, C'mon."* Snooze. Snooze. Snooze. *'I just can't face the day today. Throw me a bone.'* You drink a six-pack of Red bull and swallow a packet of Beroccas, but it doesn't do the trick. You're getting old, it takes longer to recover. You wake up tired. You're body just can't do what it used to do. For instance, I can't touch my toes any more. I can just touch my knees. Our bodies are weak. They are on the way down. We spend so much time on our bodies: going to the gym, getting facelifts and botox and tummy tucks. But Jesus' resurrection body is the guarantee for our future resurrection bodies.



Digging Deeper

Q: Is it wrong for a believer to doubt?

Q: Is doubt different to unbelief?

Because of his doubts poor Thomas has become the patron saint of doubters, and will forever be remembered as ‘Doubting Thomas.’ But there has never been a worshipper of Christ who did not doubt, just a little bit. That’s OK. Doubt is different to unbelief. Unbelief is a hardness of heart that refuses to acknowledge that Jesus died on Friday and rose on Sunday. But belief with some doubt from time to time is normal. Many who have struggled with doubt have turned out to be some of Christ’s strongest disciples. Tradition tells us that Thomas was the disciple who travelled furthest to tell others about Christ, proclaiming the gospel in Babylon, Persia, and all the way to India where there are churches even today who trace their heritage to Thomas.

Q: Why is it that we are ready to believe historical accounts outside the Bible but don’t believe the Bible, even though it has the accounts of first-hand eye-witnesses?

Some argue that we can’t accept the eyewitness accounts of the early believers, because they are obviously biased; their belief is their bias. But this is not a reasonable objection. It’s like refusing to accept the evidence of an eyewitness to a road accident because he is so sure of what he saw. We accept the evidence of such a person - we accept it critically of course, we examine it and scrutinise it and think about it. But we don’t reject it outright. To do so would be to ban all eyewitnesses from our courts of law.³⁸ In the end all history is testimony, so what we need to do is decide whether the testimony is trustworthy.



Reflecting Further

Have you ever doubted your faith? Discuss.

Q: How might you answer someone who is dubious about Jesus' resurrection?

A lot of Australians are dubious about the resurrection. *'Did it really happen? How can I be sure? You can't prove it.'* That might be you. You might be surprised to know then, that every secular historian in every history department, in every university, in every city, in every country across the world take it as fact that the first Easter Sunday has left a resurrection shaped hole in history.

A leading ancient historian, Dr. Pinchas Lapide, who is a practicing Jew, concludes that the evidence points to the resurrection of Jesus. He says, *'How was it possible that his disciples, who by no means excelled in intelligence, eloquence, or strength of faith, were able to begin their victorious march of conversion...? In a purely logical analysis, the resurrection of the Jesus is 'the lesser of two evils' for all those who seek a rational explanation of the worldwide consequences of that Easter Faith. Thus according to my opinion, the resurrection belongs to the category of the truly real' and 'I accept the resurrection of Jesus not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as an historical event.'*⁴² For Lapide, it is not Jesus' resurrection which marks the division between Christianity and Judaism, but Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, which he does not accept.

To say, *'I don't believe the resurrection'* is to go against the facts. There is no credible historical evidence that can validate any alternative explanation other than Jesus rose from the dead. The only possible reason why Christianity took off was because the tomb really was empty and people really did see Jesus alive and they would have rather died than deny the truth of what they saw.

35

Go read:

John 20:30-21:25

Bible Study 35

C

Context

O

Observation

M

Meaning

A

Application



Kicking Off

Q: How should life after death change the way we live life before death?

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, and there's no God who sees everything you do, no judge who will judge you one day, and no hell, then it's time to get drunk, there are fights to start, there are one night stands to be had, it's time to live like there is no tomorrow. But there is a tomorrow, there is a judge, there are consequences for my actions, there is a Hell. Life after death must change the way we live our life before death. God owns us: our bodies, our energy, our time. You don't have to choose what to do with your day. You have to choose what to do with Jesus' day. What are you going to do with Jesus' time? He is Lord. Are you living with him as Lord? Life after death must change the way we live our life before death.



Digging Deeper

Q: In what way is Jesus' resurrection a sign (v30)?

Q: Why did John write his account of Jesus' life (30-31)?

The importance of the resurrection is not just that it happened, but its significance. What does it mean? Jesus didn't come back to enjoy a good time with his friends, eat some fish and go through some walls. The resurrection is significant in a number of ways:

(1) The resurrection is all about the resurrection day (ch 11).

Jesus rose from the dead as the first born, the one who brings in the resurrection age and all believers will now follow him to that final resurrection and receive eternal life.

(2) The resurrection means that Jesus is Lord and Judge.

Jesus' is now sitting at the right hand of the Father (Luke 22:66-69) and has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:16-20). He is Lord of all and the judge of the world (Acts 17:31). That's what Thomas testifies to (v28). The reader is told in Ch 1 that Jesus was God, but Jesus' disciples now recognise him as God. On that first Good Friday, Caesar was on the throne. It appeared that He was Lord. But on Sunday the resurrection demonstrated that Jesus was Lord and Caesar was not. Jesus was king and Caesar was not. Jesus is Lord over every president and army general and dictator in this age and every age to come. The resurrection means that Jesus is Lord and I am not. You are not. The resurrection means that we need to shift our allegiance to Jesus. It means that we need to live very differently from how we were living before we knew that Jesus is Lord.

John wrote his gospel to persuade people to believe in Jesus. The whole point of the gospel has been this (v30-31), to point to who Jesus is, and that by believing people might have life in his name. Life!! For Christians, birth, life, death is not the whole story. It's birth, life, death, life! The task for the reader is to identify who is the Messiah, the Son of God. John shows it is Jesus.



Digging Deeper

Q: What is the significance of Jesus rising on the third day?

In the Old Testament from time to time, salvation and rescue and restoration are symbolised as being on the third day. You see it in Hosea 6:1-2 classically for example. Jonah is swallowed by a giant fish and raised on the 3rd day, so to speak, by being vomited out of the fish's mouth. In John we have already seen it, for in ch 2 the temple that will be destroyed will be raised on the third day. Jesus' resurrection brings restoration and salvation and so appropriately comes on the third day.

Q: Why do you think Peter is asked essentially the same question 3 times by Jesus (v15-17)?

Q: What does Jesus predict about Peter's future? (v18-19)

It's no coincidence that Jesus asks Peter the same question 3 times. Peter is given the opportunity to reaffirm his love for Jesus the same number of times that he denied him. Jesus, full of grace and truth, forgives him and restores him into fellowship with him, and entrusts him with a significant task. This is how the Lord treats us when we fail.

Notice, Peter is not given an office or a title but a job. He is not called Reverend or Most Reverend, he is told to do something. Christian ministry is about doing things, it is not about status, but service. Like our Lord himself who as the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, so Peter is going to lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus predicts Peter's death, that in his old age he will be led to where he doesn't want to go, and as Jesus was put to death, he will be put to death, and he will glorify God in his death, as Jesus did.

Q: What hope does Jesus' resurrection hold for believers?

i) The resurrection means that all our sins are PAID IN FULL. When a criminal is sent to jail, he does his time and the penalty for his crime is paid, and he walks out free. Jesus was innocent, but he was executed as a criminal on the cross, and he took the punishment for your sins and my sins. His resurrection demonstrates that he has fully paid for the sins of the whole world, because He walked out free. If Jesus was still in the grave, it would mean His sacrifice was insufficient to pay for our sins, and we would still be in our sins. The resurrection was God's way of stamping PAID IN FULL right across history.

If you are feeling guilty for something you have done in the past, or your conscience is weighed down, and you think 'God could never forgive me for what I've done', if you come to Christ your sins are paid in full. Your mistakes are paid in full. Your failures are paid in full. You can have a brand new start with God.

ii) The resurrection means the sting of death has been removed and we can have eternal life. Many psychologists want to tell us: 'Death is just a part of the cycle of life. Death is your friend. Don't fight it, embrace it.' That is the lie of the Devil. Death is not your friend. Anything that kills my loved ones is not my friend, it is my enemy. Strokes are not friends. Brain tumours are not friends. Car accidents are not friends. Death is the enemy. But death has been defeated by Jesus! For those who love Jesus, death's sting has been removed. Everyone dies, but those who die in their sins are condemned to eternal punishment – sin is the sting of death. For those who are in Jesus, the sting – sin - has been removed and so we will live forever with Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:55).

I have been with so many people on their deathbeds who don't know Jesus and have no hope. Because of Easter Sunday, Christians never see one another for the last time. Birth life death is not the whole story. For Christians it is birth, life, death, life!



Reflecting Further

Materialism is the theory/ideology/belief that only physical matter exists and the spiritual world does not. This is championed by atheists such as Richard Dawkins.

Q: How does materialism deal with the resurrection?

Which is the more intellectually honest approach? To rule out the evidence on the basis of a theory or to adapt a theory on the basis of the evidence? We mustn't confuse science with materialism. Materialist philosophy will not allow anything to happen other than what we can materialistically explain, because according to them, there is nothing other than this materialistic world. And therefore, a resurrection is by definition impossible, no matter how much evidence you provide. Science however, is a view of life whereby you will constantly change your theories in the light of the evidence that is available to you. Here the overwhelming weight of evidence is that a man rose from the dead. Every piece of historical analysis you can do on it points to the same direction - Jesus rose from the dead. And the only reason you will not accept the evidence is because of a materialistic ideology which says that is impossible.

We need to look at the evidence rather than sticking to a theory which is not based on any evidence. Every time there is any evidence like the resurrection it is denied because it doesn't fit in with the theory. That is called a closed mind.

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