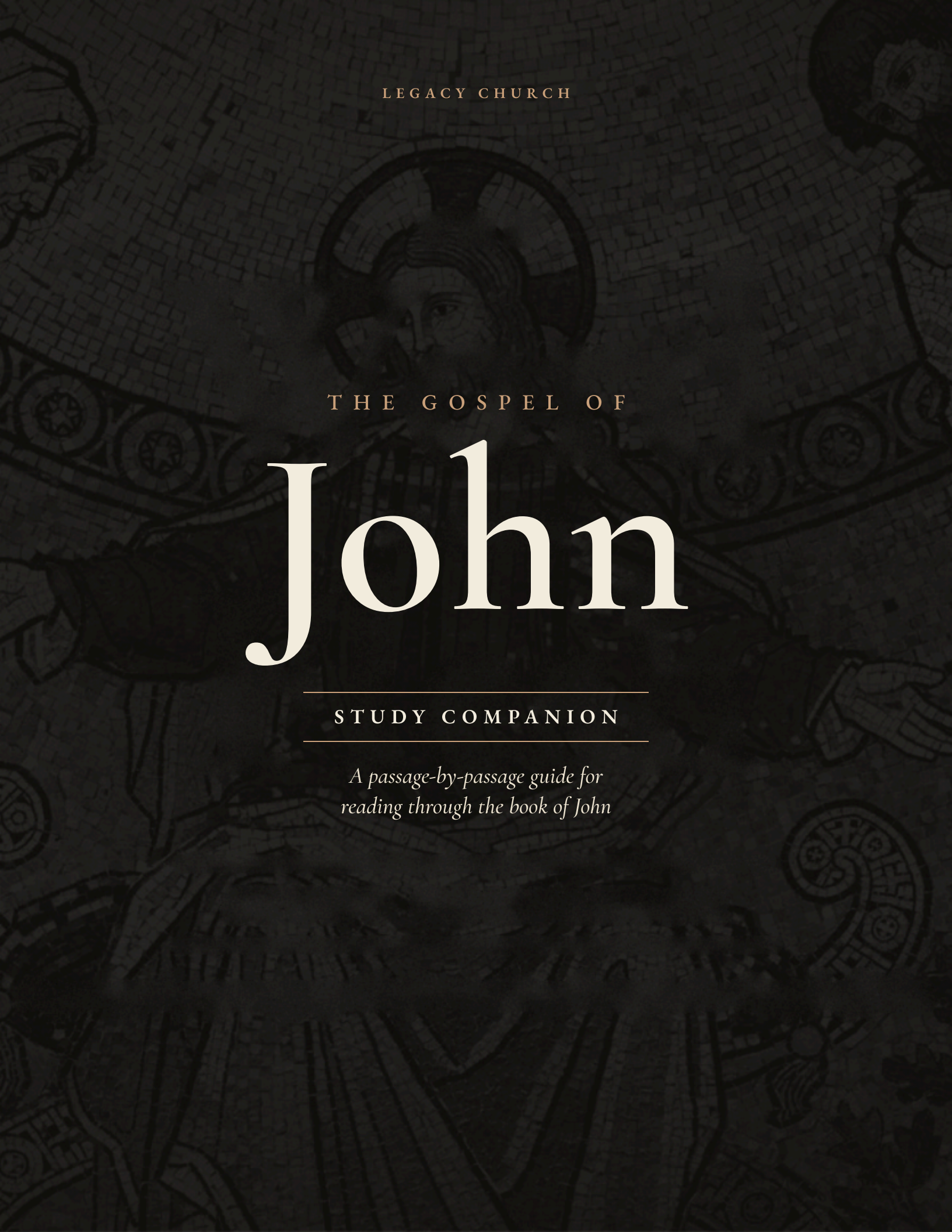


LEGACY CHURCH

THE GOSPEL OF

John

STUDY COMPANION

A passage-by-passage guide for reading through the book of John

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It All Begins With Jesus

The Word Before the Beginning

John 1:1–3

John does not begin his account of Jesus with a birth or a genealogy but before the beginning itself, because everything else in the book depends on who this person already was.

i. In the Beginning Was the Word

John 1:1

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
> John 1:1, ESV

Everyone likes a good origin story. Every good film and every good book starts with one, and all four Gospel writers give Jesus one. But they do not start in the same place. Mark opens at the Jordan with the baptism, showing that Jesus is the Son of God. Luke traces the line back to Adam, showing that Jesus is the second Adam. Matthew starts with Abraham and David, showing that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.

John starts before the beginning. And he does it with a word his readers already argued about. The Greek is logos. To the Jews the Logos was God. To the Greeks it was the ordering power that made sense of the world, the force that put chaos into shape. Everyone who read it had a position on it.

So John takes the term they had been theorizing about and tells them the thing they never considered. The Logos is not a force. It is not a concept or a principle or an idea. It is a person, and He has a name.

> *You have been theorizing about what this Logos is. Let me introduce you to Him.*

ii. The Word Was With God

John 1:2

> He was in the beginning with God.
> John 1:2, ESV

God does not predate the Word. Jesus does not come after the Father. He was in the very beginning with God, and that is the qualifier of His deity. If Jesus came after the Father, He is not supreme and not preeminent. If Jesus came after the Father, He was created, and therefore inferior. John will not allow it.

There is something else in this that is easy to walk past. Because Jesus was there in the beginning, He is the Author of beginnings. That qualifies Him to give you one.

And this is not only about the day you were saved. You can let the old life die, move on into the new one, and still pick up junk along the way. You are sinned against by leaders, by parents, by children, by a spouse, and you carry hurt and anger. Or you sin against yourself and carry guilt and shame. Those things

Background

This is not John the Baptist. This is John the Beloved, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the only writer in history who got to give himself his own nickname.

He was the closest friend Jesus had. He was the only male disciple who did not abandon Him at the crucifixion, and he stood near enough to watch his friend take His last breath. Jesus trusted him with the care of His mother.

He went on to write five books of the New Testament and to lead the first century church. If there was ever a man who could tell us who Jesus is, it is John. When John speaks, we listen.

Words to Know

Word

λόγος · *logos*

Word, reason, the ordering principle. A term both Jews and Greeks used, which John hands to a person.

Beginning

ἀρχή · *archē*

Origin, first cause. The same word that opens Genesis in the Greek Old Testament.

Was

ἦν · *ēn*

Continuous past being, with no starting point in view. Used three times of the Word in verse 1.

Came Into Being

ἐγένετο · *egeneto*

To begin to exist. John uses it for everything in creation and never for the Word.

compound. They start to consume your thoughts and control your emotions, and when they do, it is time for a new beginning.

> *He was there in the beginning, and He comes to bring you a new beginning.*

iii. All Things Through Him

JOHN 1:3

> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
> JOHN 1:3, ESV

Genesis says that in the beginning God spoke. John says that in the beginning was the Word and all things were made through Him. When God speaks creation into existence, that word is the Word. Jesus is the means by which everything that exists came to exist.

Paul says the same thing at length in Colossians. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church, and the beginning, so that He would come to have first place in everything.

> *It all begins with Jesus because all things are for Jesus.*

Ways We Take His Place

- We control all things *His sovereignty*
- We judge thoughts and intentions *His authority*
- We chase approval and affirmation *His glory*
- We master our own destiny *His supremacy*
- We arbitrate what is true *His verity*

If Jesus is Lord, then you are not. The trouble with much of Christianity today is that we pull Him off the throne and take the seat ourselves.

Questions for Reflection

1. John answers the Logos question with a person, not a principle. Where do you still relate to Jesus as an idea?
2. Which of the five ways of taking His place is most familiar in your week?
3. What would a fresh start look like for you today?
4. Who do you say that Jesus is? Answer it out loud before you answer it in theory.
5. Name one area you have never actually begun with Jesus.

The Word Became Flesh

Life, Light, and the God Who Moved In

John 1:4–14

John presents a solution before he states the problem, so we go back to a garden and a warning about death in order to understand why life in Him is the answer to anything.

i. In Him Was Life

John 1:4–5

> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
> John 1:4–5, ESV

Start in Genesis 2. Two trees, one instruction, and a warning that on the day you eat of it you shall surely die. They ate, and what followed was not a funeral but something worse. Spiritual death. Separated from the presence of God, enslaved to sin, children of wrath. That is the human condition, and it is worth saying plainly: we are physically dying and spiritually dead.

So what is the answer to death? Life. And the Greek matters here, because the New Testament uses two different words. Bios is biological life, lungs and pulse and function. Zoe is life as it was meant to be lived, eternal and abundant and holy. Bios is life from dust. Zoe is life from above.

Notice where John locates it. Not around Him. Not associated with Him. In Him. Which means that outside of Him there is none, and that matters because we spend most of our lives chasing things that only ever give the illusion of it. Zoe is not in your success, your marriage, your bank account, your following, your calling, or your children.

> *Bios fills your lungs. Zoe fills your soul.*

ii. He Was Not the Light

John 1:6–8

> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
> John 1:6–8, ESV

John the Beloved felt he had to clarify that John the Baptizer was not the Light. Ask yourself why that clarification was necessary. It is because we are prone to prop up a person, to deify a leader, to turn a messenger into a celebrity.

Your pastor is not the Light. Your teacher is not the Light. Your husband is not the Light. Your father is not the Light. If you disagree with your pastor, you are not disagreeing with the Light. If someone in authority tells you to do something, that does not by itself mean it came from the Light.

This will matter eventually. There will come a day when your pastor says something that is not from God, or your husband does something that is not

Background

John's opening has already made its largest claim. The Word was in the beginning, was with God, was God, and everything that exists was made through Him.

From there he turns from who Jesus is to what He came to do. But he gives the solution before he states the problem, so we have to go back to Genesis to find it.

Watch for three claims stacked into eleven verses. He is the Life. He is the Light. And He is the God who moved into the neighborhood.

Words to Know

Life
ζωή · *zōē*
Life as it was meant to be. Eternal, abundant, holy. The kind John says is found in Him.

Life
βίος · *bios*
Biological existence. Breathing and functioning. The word behind biology, and it ends at the grave.

Overcome
καταλαμβάνω · *katalambanō*
To grasp, or to overpower. Both are true here: the darkness neither understood Him nor extinguished Him.

Dwelt
σκηνόω · *skēnoō*
To pitch a tent. He tabernacled among us, the way God dwelt with Israel in the wilderness.

from God, and you will need to know the difference between the Light and the witness to it. The people who struggle most with this are the ones who love authority.

> *It isn't about the messenger. It's about the message.*

iii. And Dwelt Among Us

John 1:12–14

> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
>
> John 1:12–14, ESV

The Logos put on flesh and took on everything that comes with it. He became fully man without ever ceasing to be God. The church calls this the hypostatic union, and the danger is that we emphasize one nature at the expense of the other. Most of us maximize the fully God and minimize the fully man, which quietly undercuts the whole thing, because in order to atone for the sins of man He had to become one.

Hebrews tells us why it had to be this way. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. God became human in order to experience what humans experience, so that we would not be afraid to come near.

> *He gets us, He understands us, and He still chooses grace.*

Born Not Of

- Not of blood *not your heritage*
- Not of the flesh *not your past*
- Not of the will of man *not your effort*
- But of God *supernatural rebirth*

Good news for anyone trying to escape the sins of their fathers, and for anyone still paying for their own. The new birth supersedes both.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where have you been looking for zoe in something that can only give bios?
2. The darkness did not comprehend and did not overcome. Which of those two do you need this week?
3. Have you made a witness into the Light? Name the person.
4. What changes about prayer if He genuinely understands what it is like to be you?
5. Which do you minimize more often: that He is fully God, or fully man?

Behold the Lamb

The Father Revealed and the Herald Who Knew His Place

John 1:18–34

John turns from doctrine to narrative, and the first man we meet is one who becomes great by refusing to be mistaken for someone greater.

i. The Father Revealed

John 1:18

> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
> John 1:18, ESV

No one has ever seen God. Moses asked to see His glory and was told he could not see God's face and live. We cannot see God. But we can see Jesus, and Jesus is God, and Jesus has revealed Him. To see Jesus is to see the Father. To know Jesus is to know the Father.

Jesus says it Himself. When Philip asks to be shown the Father, Jesus answers that He has been with them the whole time, and that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father. Paul says it in Colossians: He is the image of the invisible God. Hebrews says it: He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

This matters because Christians get it twisted. We paint God angry and Jesus happy, God as the Father coming with the belt and Jesus as the hero stepping in front of it. We would never say it that way, but we operate from it. So we love Jesus and avoid the Father. Understand that it was not only the Son who suffered for your sin. The Father did too.

> *He is the exact imprint of His nature. They are not in disagreement about how they feel about you.*

ii. Knowing Who You Are Not

John 1:19–28

> So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."
> John 1:22–23, ESV

The religious establishment sends a delegation to ask who he is, and his first answer is a list of who he is not. I am not the Christ. I am not Elijah. I am not the Prophet. It is a strange way to introduce yourself, and it is the whole point.

This was his chance. He was finally gaining traction with the top brass, and they asked him point blank whether he was Elijah or a prophet, probably because that is what people were already saying about him. It would have been easy to accept the promotion. Instead he had enough humility to know his role and enough self-awareness to keep it. He was a herald announcing that the King was coming.

Background

The first seventeen verses of John are theology. The Word was in the beginning, was with God, was God, made all things, and became flesh.

Verse 18 closes that opening section, and then the book changes gear. John moves from theology to narrative, from who Jesus is to what happened.

One clarification first. John the Baptizer was not a Baptist. That tradition did not appear until the seventeenth century. He was a baptizer, and what he was doing with water was more offensive than we tend to realize.

Words to Know

Made Him Known

ἐξηγέομαι · *exēgeomai*

To lead out, to explain fully. The word behind exegesis. Jesus is the Father's exposition of Himself.

Baptize

βαπτίζω · *baptizō*

To immerse. For Jews this was ritual purification, or the rite by which a Gentile converted.

Lamb

ἀμνός · *amnos*

A sacrificial lamb rather than a flock animal. The word carries the altar with it.

Takes Away

αἴρω · *airō*

To lift up and carry off. Not to cover over or overlook, but to remove entirely.

Are you a leader running from leadership? A servant trying to be seen, anointed for quiet faithfulness and chasing a spotlight that does not fit? Perhaps you are called to plant and frustrated that you are not harvesting, or a teacher trying to be a prophet. Or perhaps you are a prophet trying to be a peacemaker, and your silence is costing people clarity.

> *Know your role. Own your role. No role is more important in the Kingdom.*

iii. Behold the Lamb

JOHN 1:29–34

> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
> JOHN 1:29, ESV

In one chapter John the Beloved has shown us the Light and the Life, and now John the Baptizer adds the Lamb. Light, Life, and Lamb. And this title is not a fresh image invented on the spot. It is the whole Old Testament arriving at once.

He is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, which means God knew the problem before He made the world and had the solution ready. He is the animal killed in the garden to cover the nakedness of the first sinners, the ram God provided in Isaac's place, the Passover lamb, the guilt offering, and the one Isaiah saw led to the slaughter.

> *God was not figuring out how to deal with sin in real time.*

The Lamb Through Scripture

- Slain before the world was made *Revelation 13:8*
- Covering the first sinners *Genesis 3:21*
- Provided in Isaac's place *Genesis 22*
- The Passover lamb *Exodus 12*
- The guilt offering *Leviticus 5*
- Led to the slaughter *Isaiah 53*

By baptizing Jews outside the temple and apart from priestly mediation, he was saying that heritage and ritual were no longer enough. Everyone needed repentance, not rituals.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you relate to the Father and the Son as though they feel differently about you?
2. Where are you currently trying to be something you were not called to be?
3. What has your honesty cost you lately?
4. Which ritual are you leaning on in place of repentance?
5. The Lamb takes sin away rather than covering it. What are you still treating as merely covered?

God Speaks

How He Talks and What He Is Saying

John 1:32–34

One clause about a voice John once heard opens the larger question, which is not whether God still speaks but how He does it and how you would know.

i. Described, Not Prescribed

John 1:33

> I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."
>
> John 1:33, ESV

Read that middle clause again. He who sent me said to me. God spoke to John, and John heard it. Before we do anything with that, we need a category, because this is where a lot of Christians get into trouble.

Scripture does two different things. Sometimes it is descriptive, telling us what happened. Sometimes it is prescriptive, telling us what should happen. The mistake is to take something descriptive and treat it as prescriptive. Hosea marrying Gomer is described, not prescribed. Peter's shadow healing people is described, not prescribed. We want to be people who rightly divide the word of truth.

So when John hears the voice of God here, that is description. It does not by itself mean you will hear it the same way. But there are plenty of other passages that are prescriptive, and they leave no room for doubt. My sheep hear my voice. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

God still speaks. He is not far off and distant. He is close, and He is relational, and He speaks clearly.

> *The question isn't whether God is speaking. It's how He speaks and what He is saying.*

ii. Through the Bible and the Son

2 Timothy 3:16

> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
>
> 2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV

This is the clearest way He speaks. We open the Scriptures, the Spirit illuminates His own words, and in that moment we are not merely reading about God, we are in communion with Him. And yet so many people who badly want to hear God's voice walk straight past their Bibles to get to it.

Background

John the Baptizer has just pointed at Jesus and called Him the Lamb of God. Now he explains how he knew.

He was told. Someone had given him a sign to watch for, and when the Spirit came down and stayed, he knew he was looking at the one he had been sent ahead of.

That single clause is the doorway. We are not studying the dove here. We are studying the voice.

Words to Know

Breathed Out by God

θεόπνευστος · *theopneustos*

God-breathed. Not inspired the way a poem is, but exhaled.

Voice

φωνή · *phōnē*

A sound or an utterance. The word behind telephone.

Bring to Remembrance

ὑπομιμνῄσκω · *hypomimnēskō*

To remind. The Spirit returns you to what was already said.

Conscience

συνείδησις · *syneidēsis*

Co-knowledge. An inner witness that knows along with you.

I understand why. You need answers the Bible does not plainly give. How do I raise my kids in this world. What job should I take. Who should I marry. Where should I live. And because those answers are not printed on a page, we go looking for a prophetic word or an audible voice or a good feeling to lead us. It is not entirely wrong. It is a little lazy.

If the Lord never gave you another prophetic word and never led you any other way, but you still had your Bible, you would have everything you need to live a life that pleases Him. And He also speaks through His Son, who is the clearest and most complete revelation of God there is. Your coworker is unbearable and you ask Jesus to speak. He already did. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

> *The Bible is the language of the Holy Spirit.*

iii. The Gift That Makes Us Nervous

JOHN 14:26

> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.
> JOHN 14:26, ESV

He speaks through the Spirit, who teaches and reminds and bears witness with our spirit. He speaks through your conscience and convictions, which is one of the primary ways He will lead you and something you should almost always listen to. We dislike that one because it is subjective and does not apply evenly to everyone. He speaks through other believers, through wise counsel, through working a hard passage out together.

And He speaks through prophecy, which is the one that makes me most uncomfortable. We have all watched the abuses, up close and far off. Prophecy elevated to the authority of Scripture. Prophecy used to manipulate, to steer someone's life, to silence anyone raising a concern, to make money, to build a name.

Every fiber in me wants to outlaw it. Paul says do not despise prophecy, and I suspect he says it because it is so easy to despise. But I do not want my experience to shape my reading of the Bible. I want the Bible to shape my reading of my experience. And if abuse were reason enough to shut a gift down, I would have to shut down teaching too, because every line above is just as true of teaching.

> *The abuse of something shouldn't make us abandon it. It should make us want to see it done right.*

Where He Speaks

- Through the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16*
- Through the Son *Hebrews 1:1–2*
- Through the Spirit *John 14:26*
- Through conscience *Romans 14*
- Through other believers *Acts 15*
- Through prophecy *1 Corinthians 14:1*

Would you outlaw the last one if it were up to you? There is grace for you in that place. We are in it together.

Questions for Reflection

1. Name something you have treated as prescriptive that the text only describes.
2. Which are you actually waiting on: a word from God, or an answer you already have?
3. When did you last let the Bible correct your experience?
4. Whose wise counsel have you been avoiding because you suspect what they will say?
5. Where was God speaking this week and you chose not to listen?

My Beloved Son

Affirmation Before Achievement

Matthew 3:13–17 · John 1:43–51

The Father says He is pleased with His Son before the Son has done a single thing in public ministry, and the timing of that sentence is the whole gospel in miniature.

i. The Public Affirmation

Matthew 3:16–17

> And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."
> Matthew 3:16–17, ESV

This is the moment John the Baptizer was referring back to, and it happened about six weeks before the scene in John 1. Jesus is baptized, goes straight into the wilderness, and spends forty days being offered every promise of God without any of the suffering. He never takes the shortcut, and it is on the way back that we find Him in John's account.

What is happening here is an unveiling. Jesus is being publicly revealed as the Son of God, the one the Psalms and Isaiah pointed to. Public ministry is about to begin, so the affirmation needs to be public too. Everyone saw it. Everyone heard it. It is one of only three times in the New Testament that the Father speaks audibly, and every one of them is about the Son.

It is also the clearest picture of the Trinity in the Gospels. The Father is the voice, the Spirit is the dove, and the Son is the subject. Think of it as an informal inauguration. He is thirty years old and the work is about to start.

> *God likes Jesus, and He wants everyone to know it.*

ii. The Timing

Matthew 3:15

> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.
> Matthew 3:15, ESV

Now notice that the timing is strange. If you were writing this story, the affirmation belongs at the end. Put it after the cross. Put it three days later at the tomb. Say well done then. Instead the Father says it before the Son has healed anyone, taught anything, or gone anywhere.

That is not a narrative accident. In Christianity, sonship and affirmation come before the good works rather than after them. Every other system defines a set of values and behaviors, has you spend your life performing them, and pays out at the end. Here salvation is a gift, because it was never the sort of thing that could be earned. It is like trying to save up for something priceless.

Background

John the Baptizer describes seeing the Spirit come down and rest on Jesus. He is remembering the baptism, which had happened about six weeks earlier.

The baptism itself is not in John's Gospel. He only alludes to it, so we borrow Matthew's account and then return to finish John 1.

Watch the order of events. It is the point of this study, and it is the reason the gospel is good news rather than a performance review.

Words to Know

Beloved

ἀγαπητός · *agapētos*

Dearly loved. Related to agape, the love that gives rather than gets.

Well Pleased

εὐδοκέω · *eudokeō*

To take delight in, to be glad about. Not mere approval.

Righteousness

δικαιοσύνη · *dikaiosynē*

Right standing. A courtroom word before it is a moral one.

Free Gift

δωρεά · *dōrea*

A present given without obligation. The opposite of wages.

And there is only one thing to do with a gift, which is to receive it, humbly rather than entitled. Have you spent years assuming that if you can just be good enough, God will finally like you? That is not how any of this works, and hearing so is not condemnation. It is freedom.

> *You didn't earn it to begin with, so you can't un-earn it.*

iii. Jacob's Ladder

John 1:47–51

> And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."
> John 1:51, ESV

Nathanael asks whether anything good can come out of Nazareth, and Philip does not argue with him. He says come and see. Then Jesus tells Nathanael He saw him under the fig tree, and the man who was sneering a minute ago is calling Him the Son of God and the King of Israel.

What Jesus says next is a direct reach back into Genesis 28. Jacob dreams of a ladder set on the earth with its top in heaven, angels going up and down it, and the Lord standing above. He wakes and says surely the Lord is in this place. He calls it the house of God and the gate of heaven. Every piece of that dream Jesus now applies to Himself.

> *He is the connection point and the access point to the kingdom of heaven.*

Jacob's Ladder and Jesus

- A ladder joining earth to heaven *He is the ladder*
- God speaks from above it *He is the Word*
- Jacob calls it the house of God *He is the temple*
- He calls it the gate of heaven *He is the way*

Nathanael went from a sneer about Nazareth to a confession of kingship in about two sentences. Philip never argued. He just said come and see.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you living from affirmation, or still working toward it?
2. What are you doing to pay back something that was priceless?
3. Where has entitlement crept into how you receive from God?
4. Who in your life needs to be told come and see rather than argued with?
5. If the Father said over you what He said over His Son, would you believe it?

Jesus Made Wine

Freedom, Conscience, and the Christian Table

John 2:1–12

Before working through the miracle at Cana line by line, we have to deal with the fact that the first thing Jesus ever made was something a great many Christians would not make and would not approve.

i. The Elephant in the Room

John 2:9–10

> When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine … he called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."
>
> John 2:9–10, ESV

Read that plainly and you cannot avoid it. Jesus made wine, served wine, and at minimum approved of it. That is the elephant in this passage, and it deserves an honest hearing.

I have reason to take it seriously. Raised around heavy drinking, and with my insecurity, my appetite for escape, and no self-control, I was an alcoholic and addict by sixteen. At seventeen I was court-ordered into treatment. I got clean with no real interest in staying clean. At eighteen I became a Christian, felt real joy for the first time, and told the Lord I was done.

For five years I did not touch it. I also did not know my Bible. All I knew was the wreckage, so I assumed the world drinks and Christians should not look like the world. I held that hard, and I was bothered by believers who drank. I quietly filed them as weaker, lukewarm, compromised.

Then I actually read this passage and it stopped me. Jesus is making the very thing I would never make. It took six months of study to work through what Scripture says, and I had to admit I was wrong.

> *I had let my history and my preferences shape my theology instead of my Bible.*

ii. What Scripture Actually Says

Psalm 104:15

> … and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.
>
> Psalm 104:15, ESV

The Bible speaks in two directions and never apologizes for either. On one side, wine gladdens the heart of man. Ecclesiastes tells you to drink with a cheerful heart. Proverbs pictures vats overflowing as blessing. Deuteronomy tells the traveler to spend his money on whatever his appetite craves, wine included, and rejoice before the Lord.

Background

The wedding at Cana is where Jesus performs His first sign, and we will work through the passage itself in the next study.

First there is a question the text raises that most of us were handed an answer to long before we read it for ourselves.

This study is deliberately lighter in tone than the subject sometimes gets. It is a matter of conscience, not a test of orthodoxy, and it should be handled as one.

Words to Know

Wine

οἶνος · *oinos*

Fermented grape wine. The ordinary word, not a euphemism for juice.

Drunkenness

μέθη · *methē*

Intoxication. This, and not the drink itself, is what Scripture forbids.

Be Sober

νήφω · *nēphō*

Clear-headed and alert. We are called to pursue this, not merely avoid its opposite.

Freedom

ἐλευθερία · *eleutheria*

Liberty. Real, and always submitted to love for the person next to you.

On the other side, wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler. Isaiah pronounces woe on those who chase it morning and night. Paul lists drunkenness among the works of the flesh, and again among the things that will keep a person out of the kingdom. Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

Both sets are in there, and the honest reader has to live in the tension rather than clip one side out. You may carry real horror stories here: the abusive relative, the friend lost to alcohol poisoning, the drunk driver. If so, you are not crazy for wanting distance from all of it. But sex is at least as destructive when abused, and nobody proposes banning that.

> *The answer to people using something wrongly is usually showing them the right way, not taking it away.*

iii. Three Views, and Where We Land

Ephesians 5:18

> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.
> Ephesians 5:18, ESV

The first view is prohibition, which holds that alcohol is sinful in itself. You cannot hold that and stand on the Bible, because Scripture calls it a gift and its Author made it. The second is abstinence, a personal decision to avoid it as wisdom. That is honorable, and the reasons are good ones: a family history of abuse, a struggle with self-control, someone close to you who would stumble, a conscience that will not permit it, or simply not enjoying it.

The third is moderation, which is where we land. Alcohol is not sinful, drunkenness is. Receive it as a gift, with self-control and discernment. Submit the freedom to the Lordship of Christ, never cross into drunkenness, and do not let it become the way you handle your problems.

Whichever you hold, the guardrails run both directions. If you abstain, do it in faith rather than fear, and do not mistake abstinence for righteousness or judge those who drink moderately. If you partake, honor those who abstain, do not mistake freedom for righteousness, and use it to build fellowship rather than division.

> *Be known for what you embrace, not only for what you avoid.*

How the Church Has Held It

- Clement of Alexandria *a gift to use, not be ruled by*
- Irenaeus *to refuse creation slights its Maker*
- Martin Luther *drunkenness forbidden, drink is not*
- G. K. Chesterton *drink from gladness, never misery*
- C. S. Lewis *temperance means right measure*
- John Piper *abstains by choice, not by rule*

Two thousand years of Christians have landed in different places on this without accusing each other of leaving the faith. That is the tone worth keeping.

Questions for Reflection

1. Name one conviction you hold that came from your upbringing rather than the text.
2. Does anything function as a crutch for you when life gets heavy?
3. Where has your freedom cost someone else their footing?
4. If you abstain, is it from faith or from fear? Be honest about which.
5. Who have you quietly filed as a weaker Christian, and on what basis?

Water to Wine

The First Sign and the Work It Required

John 2:1–12

The first miracle is performed quietly, among people who could do nothing for Him, to spare a poor family a humiliation that would have followed them for the rest of their lives.

i. The Problem

John 2:1–3

> On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."
> John 2:1–3, ESV

On a first read it seems almost comic. A party runs dry and Mary turns to the Creator of heaven and earth to sort out the drinks. But this was a real problem with real consequences, and knowing them makes the story land differently.

A Jewish wedding in that world ran about a week. It was a public celebration and the family fed and supplied everyone who came. You were expected to have saved enough to host it properly, and failing to was a mark on your character. Run out and you became the cheap, lazy, selfish family in a small town where your living depended on your name.

So this couple could not cover their own celebration, and their reputation and possibly their livelihood were about to be destroyed in front of everyone they knew.

There is something else here that is easy to miss. As far as we can tell, this is the first time Mary comes to Jesus not as her son but as God. She is not asking a grown boy to run to the market. She is asking the Almighty to do an Almighty-sized thing.

> *She is asking for a miracle, not a favor.*

ii. The Response

John 2:4–5

> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."
> John 2:4–5, ESV

Woman reads harsher in English than it sounded in Greek. It is a term of respect, closer to ma'am, and it is the same word He uses when He speaks tenderly to her from the cross. What does this have to do with me is an idiom that creates distance, and my hour has not yet come appears six times in this Gospel, every time pointing to the cross and the resurrection.

So He is doing two things at once. He is putting space between a human timeline and the Father's, and He is almost certainly thinking about Calvary while standing at a wedding reception.

Background

This is the first of the signs in John's Gospel, and the writer says plainly that it manifested His glory and that the disciples believed.

It is worth reading slowly, because almost nothing in it is decorative. The setting, the jars, the timing, and the quality of the wine are all carrying weight.

Watch for how much work the miracle asks of the people who receive it.

Words to Know

Sign

σημεῖον · *sēmeion*

A pointer. John never calls these wonders; they indicate something beyond themselves.

Hour

ὥρα · *hōra*

His appointed time. In John it always means the cross and what follows.

Woman

γύναι · *gynai*

A respectful form of address, nearer to ma'am than to a rebuke.

Glory

δόξα · *doxa*

Weight, worth, visible splendor. What this quiet sign put on display.

Mary is not brushed off, and she does not argue. She turns to the staff and tells them to do whatever He says. That is not resignation. That is faith in His Lordship. And if He tells you nothing, then you do nothing, and you wait.

> *Do whatever He tells you, whenever He tells you. Don't hesitate and don't deviate.*

iii. The Means

John 2:6–11

> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it.
> John 2:7–8, ESV

He does not simply make wine appear. The six stone jars held twenty or thirty gallons each, which puts them somewhere around three to four hundred pounds full. Someone had to haul water, trip after trip, until every one of them was filled to the brim. It required more than belief. It required belief with sleeves rolled up.

And here is what makes it remarkable. The servants knew perfectly well they were carrying water. They kept going anyway, and the master of the feast tasted the finest wine of the night.

Spurgeon noticed where this happens. It would have made more sense to open with a sign in front of the authorities, the way Moses went to Pharaoh. Instead the first declaration of His divinity comes at a small wedding, among ordinary people who could do nothing for Him. It was not flashy, it did not demand an audience, and He did not even take credit.

> *He doesn't do the miracle to prove He is God. He does it to meet a need.*

Layers in the Story

- A ministry that opens at a wedding *and a reign that will*
- Mary intercedes for someone else *not for herself*
- Jars kept for purification *the old covenant*
- The best wine served last *the age to come*
- Moses turned water to blood *judgment*
- Christ turns water to wine *mercy*

Mary sees a need that is not hers, brings it once, and trusts. She does not argue her case for an hour. Imagine a church that prayed like that.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where has the wine run out, and have you actually asked?
2. What has He told you to do that you have not yet done?
3. Are you carrying water you are not yet seeing turn?
4. Whose need could you bring to Him this week instead of your own?
5. Would you still obey if the instruction made no visible sense?

Zeal for His House

What Made Him Pick Up a Whip

John 2:13–17

The man who prayed for the forgiveness of the people driving nails through His hands made a whip when religious leaders were exploiting the people who had come to worship.

i. A House of Trade

John 2:13–16

> In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.
>
> John 2:14–15, ESV

Anywhere there is religion there are snakes in the grass and wolves among the sheep, people who have learned that devotion and desperation convert into money. That was running in the temple courts at Passover, and the same exploitation is alive now.

It shows up when the prophetic is used to leverage someone's hunger to see God move, keeping them chasing the next revival, the next movement, the next big thing. It shows up in prosperity preaching that trades on people's wallets, promising that giving buys health and wealth. It shows up in the abuse scandals that have run through Protestant and Catholic clergy alike.

And it shows up in the quietest form of all, which is a culture where everyone is pressured to serve and give past their capacity. I have sat with leaders who told me plainly that twenty unpaid hours a week is a reasonable ask because it is for the Lord.

That is the heart of what Jesus walked into: leaders arranged to take as much as possible from the people rather than give as much as possible to them. A church will talk about money, and it will ask you to serve, because there are chores in the house of God and they cannot fall on a few. But it must never take advantage of you.

> *The organization of the church exists to serve you.*

ii. The Sacrifice They Cheapened

John 2:16–17

> And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."
>
> John 2:16–17, ESV

Consider what it took to get there. A journey that could run close to a thousand miles, weeks or months of travel across desert and sea, and expense the whole way. You raised a lamb for a year to keep it spotless, brought it into your home so you would feel the sting of losing it, and guarded it the entire trip.

Background

Jesus has been baptized, declared the Lamb of God, and has performed His first sign at a wedding in Cana. This scene closes out John 2.

It is the first of two occasions when He clears the temple courts, and it is the most physically forceful thing He does in the Gospels.

Read it looking for what provoked Him, because His anger here is specific rather than general, and it is aimed at people who should have known better.

Words to Know

Zeal

ζῆλος · *zēlos*

Burning heat. Passion intense enough to consume the one who has it.

House of Trade

οἶκος ἐμπορίου · *oikos emporiou*

A marketplace. The word behind emporium, applied to His Father's house.

Whip

φραγέλλιον · *phragellion*

A cord scourge. He made it Himself, which means He took the time to.

Temple

ναός · *naos*

The sanctuary proper, where God dwells. Paul uses it of your body.

Now imagine arriving after all that and having a religious official inspect your lamb and inform you it is not good enough for God, so you had better buy one of his. Understand how demoralizing that is. Anything you give God is precious when it is given out of love. Whether the amount is fifty or fifty thousand, if it is given because you love Jesus, it is holy.

They were also nullifying the sacrifice, by making convenient something that was designed to be costly. The whole point was that it took something from you, because we do not value what costs us nothing. Churches tend to grow two kinds of people: the ones who raise the lamb all year and make the long trek, and the ones who show up, serve, and give whenever it happens to be convenient.

> *Anything you give God is precious, so long as it is given out of love.*

iii. You Are the Temple

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
> 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, ESV

At bottom they were keeping people who only wanted to meet with God from meeting with Him, by adding requirements: our animals, bought with our money. Jesus said it to them elsewhere, that they shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, neither entering themselves nor letting anyone else in. So ask the honest version of that question. Is your attitude, your bitterness, your laziness, your anger keeping someone out who would otherwise come in?

And they had defiled the place itself, dragging corruption into rooms meant to stay holy. The old covenant existed to prepare us for the new one. Ezekiel and Jeremiah promised a covenant in which His Spirit is placed inside us and His word written on us. Which means we have become the temple, and the response to what defiles it should look about the same.

> *We are the temple, and our response ought to be the same.*

Five Sins in the Courts

- Taking advantage of people *for profit*
- Denying the sacrifice *not good enough*
- Nullifying the sacrifice *made convenient*
- Shutting the kingdom *adding requirements*
- Defiling the temple *a den of thieves*

He prayed for the forgiveness of the men crucifying Him. When His people were being exploited, He made a whip. If you have been taken advantage of, justice is His.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever been made to feel your offering was not good enough?
2. Which are you right now: the one who raised the lamb, or the one who found it convenient?
3. Is anyone kept from the kingdom by how you live?
4. Where have you let devotion be leveraged into obligation?
5. If your body is the sanctuary, what have you carried into it?

Born Again

What the Best Man in Jerusalem Still Lacked

John 3:1–21

The most religious, most educated, most respected man in the room is told he has to start over from the beginning, which means the bar was never behavior and never information.

i. Activity Cannot Save You

John 3:1–3

> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
> John 3:3, ESV

Understand who is asking. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a ruler on the Sanhedrin, and the teacher of Israel, which is to say the man other authorities went to for answers. Religious devotion, moral credibility, social standing, political influence. If anyone was right with God by human measurement, it was him. He comes at night, opens with a compliment, and Jesus skips past it entirely.

By saying this to Nicodemus of all people, Jesus is saying that religious activity cannot make anyone right with God. In their day that meant rituals, sacrifices, and laws. You may think you are clear of all three. You are not.

Our rituals are church attendance, saying grace, joining a serving team, taking communion. Our sacrifices are what we do after we sin, when we pray more and fast more and read more to balance the ledger. We think far too little of the evil of our sin if we believe a little fasting settles it. Our laws are what we do not drink, do not listen to, do not wear, do not watch.

Every one of those has a place in the life of a believer. The error is concluding that because we do them, we are right with God, or that because someone else does them, they are. Nicodemus was a better man than most of us. He did the right things, avoided the wrong ones, and believed he was doing it all for God. And he had built his life on something that could not hold it.

> *Don't ever let your maturity outpace your humility.*

ii. Knowledge Cannot Save You

John 3:9–10

> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"
> John 3:9–10, ESV

That question should unsettle anyone who loves the Bible. It is entirely possible to know the Scriptures inside and out and still need to be born again. The danger for a church that prizes the text and rewards theological competence is that we get fooled by our own knowledge the same way anyone else gets fooled by their own activity.

Background

John 3 is the most quoted chapter in the Bible and one of the least carefully read. It is a night conversation between Jesus and a man with everything to lose.

The famous verse in it is not a standalone slogan. It is the closing commentary on an argument that starts with a religious expert being told he has to begin again.

Read the whole conversation before you read verse sixteen, and the verse will land differently.

Words to Know

Again
ἄνωθεν · *anōthen*
Both again and from above. Nicodemus hears one; Jesus means the other.

Spirit
πνεῦμα · *pneuma*
Wind, breath, Spirit. One word, which is why verse eight works.

Kingdom
βασιλεία · *basileia*
Reign or rule more than territory. Something you enter, not visit.

Lifted Up
ὑψόω · *hypsoō*
To raise high. John uses it for the cross and for exaltation at once.

There is no correlation between how much of the Bible you know and how righteous you are before God. Paul describes people in the last days as always learning and never arriving at the truth. So no, do not stop reading. Read, study, wrestle with it. Just remember that Scripture exists to lead you to God, not to make you right with Him.

What has always struck me here is that a man could spend his entire life studying these writings and fail to recognize the Author standing in front of him.

> *He couldn't recognize the subject of everything he spent his life studying.*

iii. To Live, You First Have to Die

JOHN 3:14–16

> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
> JOHN 3:14–15, ESV

Nicodemus asks how this can be, and Jesus answers with a snake on a pole. Israel had complained against God in the wilderness, serpents came, people died, and the remedy God gave was not a cure but a direction to look. Anyone bitten who looked at the bronze serpent lived. That is the whole mechanism: not effort, not merit, just looking at what God lifted up.

So being born again is not being improved upon. It is dying first. Deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me, and whoever tries to save his life will lose it. Paul says he dies daily. That means dying to your dreams, your will, your opinions, your shame, and your sin.

This is where most people get off. They do not want to die. They think, at worst, that they are a fundamentally decent person who could use a little Jesus added on top. But coming to Him means you no longer have good works to boast in, sin to wallow in, a will to exert, or an opinion to press.

> *When you come to Jesus, you die.*

Signs of the New Birth

- You love the brethren *1 John 3:14*
- You love in deed, not word *1 John 3:18*
- You hate your own sin *Romans 8:13*
- Your heart cries Abba *Romans 8:15*

None of these are entrance requirements. They are evidence, the way a pulse is evidence. You do not produce them to become alive; you have them because you are.

Questions for Reflection

1. Name one ritual you quietly count on. Be specific.
2. When you sin, what do you do to balance it out?
3. Has your knowledge of Scripture outpaced your need for grace?
4. What in you is still refusing to die, and what would it cost to let it?
5. Do you need Jesus as much today as the day you started? Answer honestly.

He Must Increase

The Humility of the Best Man

John 3:22–36

John the Baptizer's followers complain that Jesus is drawing their crowds, and instead of rebuking them or joining them, he teaches them the most humbling sentence a person can say.

i. Nothing You Have Was Not Given

John 3:22–27

> John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."
> John 3:27, ESV

The setup is almost funny. Both men are baptizing, the crowds are shifting toward Jesus, and John's followers come to complain about it. Notice how they phrase it: the one who was with you, the one you bore witness about. They know exactly who He is. Their teacher told them He was the Lamb of God.

So they are upset that God is getting the crowds, because it means they are not, and that reveals why they were in ministry in the first place. They had been the ones baptizing, drawing people, building something. Now it is going elsewhere and they sound childish, greedy, and very impressed with themselves.

John neither rebukes them nor agrees with them. He teaches them. And he starts by dismantling the assumption underneath the complaint: nobody receives anything except what heaven hands them. Every person who crossed the desert to hear him, every baptism, all of it was a gift rather than a return on his own excellence.

You may have worked hard for what you have, and that is real. But the ability to work at all was given to you. Nobody is self-made. Success always requires things outside your control to line up: the right person, the right moment, parents who could help, someone willing to take a chance on you.

> *No one is a self-made man.*

ii. I Am Not the Christ

John 3:28

> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him."
> John 3:28, ESV

In other words, I am not the Messiah, I am not the Savior, and I am not God's gift to the world, so stop treating me as though I were. I am not the answer to everyone's problems and I do not have the answers to everyone's questions.

Sit with the honesty in that for a moment. It costs him the thing his followers are trying to protect on his behalf, and he gives it up without a fight because it was never his.

Background

This passage follows immediately on the Nicodemus conversation, and it turns from how a person enters the kingdom to how a person serves in it.

The scene is a territorial dispute. Two ministries are baptizing in the same region and one of them is losing ground.

Watch how the complaint gets answered. John does not defend himself, and he does not scold. He explains what he has understood about his own place from the beginning.

Words to Know

Increase
αὐξάνω · *auxanō*
To grow or become greater. Used of plants and of reputations.

Decrease
ἐλαττόω · *elattoō*
To be made less. John chooses the word for his own diminishing.

Bridegroom
νυμφίος · *nymphios*
The groom, to whom the bride's attention rightly belongs.

Joy
χαρά · *chara*
Gladness. His is complete at the exact moment his own share shrinks.

Imagine what would change if every pastor and ministry leader actually believed that sentence and taught it. Imagine what would change if every Christian did.

> *I am not the Christ.*

iii. The Friend of the Bridegroom

JOHN 3:29–30

> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.
> JOHN 3:29–30, ESV

The affection and attention of the bride belong to the groom. It would be wrong for the bride to kiss the best man, and wrong for the best man to spend the day wishing he were the groom. There is little more dangerous than an insecure leader quietly longing for the devotion of a bride who is not his.

If you lead anything, the temptation is to say the things and do the things that win you people's affection. Scripture has a phrase for leaders who give in to it: they tickle the ear. They will tell you what you want to hear because they want you to like them and follow them. Paul warns that people will gather up teachers to match their own appetites.

John's answer is to name his role and stay in it. He is the supporting part, not the lead. The day is not about him and the story is not his. That is the ordinary Christian posture too, in a church and out of one, and it ends in the strangest kind of joy: his gladness is complete precisely as his own standing shrinks.

> *It should be about Jesus, not about the gifting or personality of a leader.*

What He Refuses

- Credit for what was given *3:27*
- The title of Christ *3:28*
- The bride's affection *3:29*
- The leading role *3:29*
- His own increase *3:30*

His followers wanted him to fight for the crowd. He told them the crowd was never his to keep, and then said he was glad to lose it.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are you treating as earned that was actually given?
2. Whose attention are you competing for that belongs to Jesus?
3. Have you ever sat under a leader who tickled ears? What did it cost you?
4. Where are you the supporting part, and are you at peace with that?
5. Could you say John's last sentence and mean it?

Living Water

The Woman at the Well and the Detour He Chose

John 4:1–42

Having given the good news to the most respectable man in Jerusalem without being asked, Jesus now walks thirty miles out of His way to offer the same thing to the least respectable woman in Samaria.

i. He Had to Pass Through Samaria

John 4:1–9

> And he had to pass through Samaria ... Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.
> John 4:4–6, ESV

You need two groups to follow this. Seven hundred years earlier Assyria captured the northern kingdom and scattered its people to dilute the bloodline. Many who remained intermarried with people who worshiped other gods, and what emerged was a people who held to Yahweh and the Torah, rejected the rest of the Old Testament, expected a messiah of their own, and kept some pagan practice alongside it.

The result was a confused and compromised people, and the Jews wanted nothing to do with them. Traveling between Judea and Galilee, a Jew would swing thirty miles east rather than cut straight through. So when the text says Jesus had to pass through Samaria, that is not geography. He was compelled.

He arrives at a well at the sixth hour and finds a woman alone. Both details are odd. Drawing water was communal, done by groups of women in the cool of morning or evening. Nobody hauls a full jar through the desert at noon unless they are avoiding somebody.

Then He does the unthinkable and speaks to her. Asking for a drink was not rudeness; offering one was how you signaled safety and honor, and He is requesting hospitality from a Samaritan woman who could not have offered it to a Jewish rabbi without breaking every rule she knew.

> *In chapter three He comes for the elite. In chapter four He comes for the outcast.*

ii. Living Water

John 4:10–18

> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
> John 4:13–14, ESV

Your body was made to need water and cannot go long without it. Your spirit needs something too, or it stays dead. That is what He is offering, and it is the same thing He told Nicodemus about in different language.

Background

This chapter is best read directly against the one before it. Both are conversations about the same offer, made to two people who could not be less alike.

Nicodemus came at night, on his own initiative, holding every credential. This woman is found at noon, sought out, holding none.

Watch what it costs Jesus to be there at all, and watch how her understanding of who He is grows across the conversation.

Words to Know

It Was Necessary
δεῖ · *dei*
Must, or is compelled to. John uses it of divine necessity, not convenience.

Living Water
ὕδωρ ζῶν · *hydōr zōn*
Running water, as opposed to still. He means it in both senses.

Spring
πηγή · *pēgē*
A source that produces its own water rather than storing someone else's.

Worship
προσκυνέω · *proskyneō*
To bow toward. A posture before it is ever a location or a style.

It is nearly impossible to describe to someone who has not tasted it, rather like describing love to a person who has never felt any. The closest I can get is this. You know the deep, physical satisfaction of cold water when you are genuinely parched. Imagine that, except not in your body. In the deepest part of you, steady and joyful, running underneath everything else you do.

Then He tells her to call her husband and the real reason she came alone comes out. Five husbands and a man who is not one. Divorce was not easy to obtain and was usually the man's to initiate, so five of them marked her as the worst of the worst among a people already despised. She may well have been the cause. She may equally have been discarded by a cruel culture and worse men. We are not told, and the point does not depend on it.

> *You live with nothing to prove and nothing to lose.*

iii. In Spirit and in Truth

JOHN 4:19–42

> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
> JOHN 4:23–24, ESV

She changes the subject to the argument of her day, which was where worship properly happens. That is the whole problem in one question. Their entire practice of a spiritual kingdom was external. Where do we worship, when do we worship, how do we worship. Ours runs the same way, only with different names attached to the buildings and the calendar.

None of those things are bad. They are deceptive, because you can get every external right and never once worship in spirit and truth, which is how a person ends up looking immaculate outside and full of dead bones inside. The kingdom is spiritual. It is internal first and external second, and Paul's list of the Spirit's fruit is what it looks like when it works from the inside out.

She leaves her water jar behind, which means she never got what she came for, and goes to tell the very people she had been avoiding in her shame. They come, they hear Him themselves, and they believe. One of the first evangelists in the book is a woman with a reputation, sent by the man who went thirty miles out of His way to find her.

> *Worshiping in spirit and truth is not an outward expression. It is an inward reality.*

How She Sees Him

- A Jew, and a problem *4:9*
- Sir *4:11*
- Greater than Jacob? *4:12*
- A prophet *4:19*
- The Christ *4:29*

The longer she stays in the conversation, the more of Him she sees. That is usually how it goes, and it is a reason not to leave early.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who is your Samaria, and what route do you take to avoid it?
2. Are you drinking from a spring, or hauling water daily?
3. Which externals are you counting as worship?
4. What shame sends you to the well at noon?
5. She told the people she had been avoiding. Who would that be for you?

The Enemy of Honor

Why the People Closest to You Praise You Least

John 4:43–46

Jesus goes home expecting to be ignored and is met by a crowd, and the reason the crowd is there turns out to be the reason He does not trust it.

i. A Strange Welcome

John 4:43–45

> For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast.
>
> John 4:44–45, ESV

Something does not line up. He leaves for Galilee saying a prophet gets no honor at home, and then arrives to a warm reception. What changed? The text tells you: they had seen what He did in Jerusalem.

That sends us back two chapters, where John notes that many believed in His name when they saw the signs He was doing, and then adds that Jesus did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew what was in people.

So the welcome is not about who He is. It is about what He can do. People then were like people now. They fall in love with the gifted.

If you are gifted at anything, understand that this will happen to you. Put a real gift on display and people are drawn to it the way moths go to a flame. An entire industry exists because that reflex is reliable. But notice why Jesus performed signs in the first place. Not to build a following and not to be honored. He was moved by compassion. He did it because He loved people and wanted to help.

> *Don't live off the praise of men. It won't last, and it turns to wrath.*

ii. No Honor at Home

John 2:24–25

> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.
>
> John 2:24–25, ESV

The saying is as true now as it was then, and the reason is simple. The people who know you best have the hardest time honoring you, because they know you. The closer someone gets, the more of your weakness, insecurity, pride, and failure they see. Everyone else gets the version you can maintain.

This is what wrecks marriages. It is harder to honor a spouse than someone you are dating, because dating hides things that living together cannot. So a husband becomes less honorable than he should be, and a wife gives less honor than she should, and then he meets someone at work who only sees the good in him

Background

This passage is three verses long and it does not work unless you have read the two chapters before it.

That is worth noticing on its own. These books were written to be read in one sitting, the way you would watch a film rather than pause it five times. Read in fragments, you lose the callbacks the author planted on purpose.

Here is one of them. The explanation for the welcome in chapter four is sitting in chapter two, and without it the scene reads backwards.

Words to Know

Honor

τιμή · *timē*

Weight or worth. To honor is to assign true value, not to compliment.

Flattery

κολακεία · *kolakeia*

Praise offered to get something. Its aim is the speaker, not the hearer.

Smooth Talk

χρηστολογία · *chrēstologia*

Fine-sounding speech. Paul pairs it with flattery as a way of deceiving.

Prophet

προφήτης · *prophētēs*

One who speaks for God. Rarely popular with the people who raised him.

because she is not around for the rest. She admires an incomplete picture. He is drawn to an honor that is as shallow as the picture.

So husbands, it starts with you. You cannot expect honor while you are absent, angry, and anxious. Protect, provide, and be the best Christian in your own house. Wives, honor has to be spoken and not only felt. Train your eyes to find the good in him and say it out loud. And the same logic runs to parents, who know their children's failings intimately and can end up correcting the bad without ever celebrating the good.

> *Ask who in your life you have let familiarity turn into dishonor.*

iii. Flattery Is Not Honor

PROVERBS 29:5

> A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.
> PROVERBS 29:5, ESV

What the Galileans give Him is not honor. It is flattery, and the two are not cousins. One is righteous and the other is not. This is not conversion, it is a performance, which is exactly why He does not hand Himself over to it.

Biblical honor starts from the fact that every person carries the image of God and therefore real worth. To honor someone is to agree with that, name where they are reflecting it, and call them further into it. Which means honor speaks truth rather than pleasantries, believes the best while keeping its eyes open, and celebrates what is righteous while refusing to celebrate what is not.

Flattery is cheap by comparison. It sounds generous but it is self-serving, embellishing something in order to get something: affection, money, time, support. Two tests. If you only ever say positive things to someone, you have a flattery problem. And if someone only ever tells you positive things, you are not being honored, you are being handled.

> *Flattery is cheap. True honor costs something.*

Five Ways We Honor

- By speaking honestly *Ephesians 4:15*
- By not being a hindrance *Romans 14*
- By compassion, not criticism *Galatians 6:1*
- By celebrating the good *1 Corinthians 1:4*
- By strengthening weakness *Galatians 6:2*

Paul opens most of his letters thanking God for what is good in people he is about to correct. Correction and celebration were never alternatives.

Questions for Reflection

1. Whose praise are you living off, and what happens when it stops?
2. Who has familiarity made it hard for you to honor?
3. Name one good thing about your spouse or child you have never said aloud.
4. Are you being honored in your closest relationships, or handled?
5. If your gift disappeared tomorrow, who would still be there?

Healing on the Sabbath

The Power and the Danger of Tradition

John 5:1–16

In one afternoon Jesus keeps a religious tradition and breaks one, which tells you the question was never whether tradition is good but whether it is still doing what it was made to do.

i. He Kept the Traditions

John 5:1

> After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
> John 5:1, ESV

Start with the easy line to skim past. There was a feast, so He went. He observed the festivals, the public reading of Scripture, the Sabbath. He participated in tradition and appears to have enjoyed it.

That may feel like a contradiction. Religious activity cannot save you, and He refuses to be governed by religious convention. Both true. But the fact that a tradition cannot save you does not make it bad.

Most of us are predisposed against tradition for three reasons at once. We are Americans, formed by a break with inherited custom. We are Protestants, a church born out of protest against its abuse. And we live after modernity, trained to question authority and suspect anything old. Our instinct is to tear it down.

A tradition is something you do consistently in order to remember something important or to grow a value into yourself, and it is a powerful tool when it works. Communion is exactly that: a weekly reminder that however far off you feel this week, His broken body and shed blood are sufficient. So do not throw one away because it feels religious. Find the truth at the center and let it do its job.

> *Don't be quick to discard a tradition. Look for the truth at the center of it first.*

ii. He Goes Where No One Else Will

John 5:2–7

> When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."
> John 5:6–7, ESV

Understand the place. Five covered walkways crowded with the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed, lying in the heat, waiting on a legend about stirred water. Desperate, unable to care for themselves, and not pleasant to be near. Jesus goes anyway, because He loves the broken and dirty exactly as much as the put-together and clean. He is not put off by your filth, your weakness, or your shame. He walks into it and asks the same question.

Background

John 5 opens with a healing that should have been uncomplicated and instead starts the conflict that runs the rest of the book.

The chapter puts two things side by side that we usually treat as opposites: Jesus honoring a religious tradition, and Jesus deliberately violating one.

Hold both. The difference between them is the whole point, and it is not the difference between old and new.

Words to Know

Sabbath
σάββατον · *sabbaton*
Ceasing. A rest that presupposes six days of real work.

Weakness
ἀσθένεια · *astheneia*
Without strength. The word behind invalid, describing the crowd at the pool.

Bed
κράβαττος · *krabattos*
A poor man's mat. Carrying it is what the leaders objected to.

Whole
ὑγιής · *hygiēs*
Sound or healthy. The word behind hygiene, and more than repaired.

Then read the man's answer, because it is devastating. Not that he cannot be healed, but that he has nobody. Thirty-eight years, and every time the moment came, someone else got there first.

Sit with that. He was surrounded by people as desperate and broken as he was, people exactly like him, and not one of them helped. That cannot be us. We do not get to want our own healing so badly that we are willing to deny someone theirs. Christians should be the first to take the loss and give up the spot.

> *He isn't put off by your filthiness.*

iii. He Breaks the Traditions

John 5:8–16

> Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed."
> John 5:8–10, ESV

Now the other side. The fourth commandment said work six days and rest on the seventh, and its purpose was to enjoy God, family, and life, and to give a body a break. You break it by not working hard and you break it by not resting well. Around that good law they built a second layer of rules governing exactly how it must be kept, and what was given to produce life started producing death instead. Man was not made for the Sabbath.

Jesus knew precisely what He was doing when He told a newly healed man to pick up his mat. He was not careless about God's commands. He was indifferent to man's, and those are not the same thing. Just because a religious person tells you this is what we do does not make it what you should do. Institutions have never had trouble treating their own rules as though they carried God's weight.

The leaders see a man walking after thirty-eight years and object to what he is carrying. That is the religious spirit exactly. They should be rejoicing and instead they are auditing. It is the danger of rules: you build a standard tall enough that nobody clears it, and it robs you of the ability to see anything good happening in front of you.

> *Man's rules are not always God's rules.*

Why We Distrust Tradition

- We are Americans *formed by breaking with custom*
- We are Protestants *born protesting its abuse*
- We live after modernity *trained to suspect authority*
- We have seen it misused *usually up close*

There are two kinds of wolves worth watching for: the ones who water the gospel down, and the ones who fence it in. One makes the Christian life too easy, the other makes it impossible.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which tradition have you discarded without asking what it was for?
2. What tradition does your family need that it does not have?
3. Whose turn have you taken because you wanted yours?
4. Where have you treated a preference as though it were a command from God?
5. When something good happens, is your first instinct to rejoice or to audit?

Let Them In

How the Father Loves the Son, and What That Asks of Us

John 5:15–20

Jesus explains His entire method in one sentence, that He does only what He sees the Father doing, and then says the Father shows Him everything because He loves Him.

i. Where Persecution Comes From

John 5:15–18

> The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.
> John 5:15–16, ESV

This is where the opposition to Jesus formally begins, and two things about it are worth marking. First, what triggered it. He did the right thing and materially changed a man's life. That was the offense.

So understand that doing the right thing sometimes gets the wrong response. The moment your faith moves from something you hold internally to something you actually do, you are inviting opposition. He did the best available thing and people were angry that He had not done it their way. A servant is not above his master.

Second, and more uncomfortable, is where it came from. Not from the world. From the religious system. Most of us brace for hostility from outside the church, and there is some. But nearly all the persecution in the New Testament comes from religious people rather than from irreligious ones.

Which means it more often arrives from the person sitting beside you on Sunday than the one sitting beside you at work.

> *It didn't come from the world. It came from the religious system.*

ii. My Father Is Working

John 5:17

> But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."
> John 5:17, ESV

They could not reconcile it. If God rested on the seventh day, how could He be working on a Sabbath? The answer is that God rests and God works, and He never stops doing the second one. He does not cease working any more than fire ceases being hot.

So the question is never whether God is at work. He is always up to something. The question is what He is doing.

Right now He is working something in you and seeking to do something through you. You may not know what either one is. You should. That is worth asking Him directly and then staying quiet long enough to hear an answer.

Background

A man paralyzed for thirty-eight years has just been healed, and the religious leaders have responded by objecting to the mat he is carrying.

What follows is Jesus explaining Himself, and the explanation escalates the conflict rather than settling it. Calling God His own Father is heard as a claim to equality, and it is.

Read verse nineteen and verse twenty together. The first says how He operates. The second says why He is able to.

Words to Know

Working

ἐργάζομαι · *ergazomai*

To labor. Present tense here: still working, right now, without pause.

Equal

ἴσος · *isos*

Of the same rank. The leaders supply this word, and they are not wrong.

Shows

δείκνυμι · *deiknymi*

To display or make visible. The evidence John gives that the Father loves.

Friend

φίλος · *philos*

One let in on what the master is doing, as opposed to a servant.

> *The question isn't whether God is working. It's what He is doing.*

iii. Let Them Know, See, and In

JOHN 5:19–20

> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.
> JOHN 5:20, ESV

First the method. The Son does nothing on His own but only what He sees the Father doing. That is discipleship: watch the Father, then imitate Him. A lot of us have quietly substituted imitating the church or imitating other Christians, which is easier and considerably less reliable. Seeing the Father takes knowing the Word rather than merely reading it, and praying steadily enough that the inner conversation becomes an upward one.

Then the reason. Notice the logic in verse twenty. The Father loves the Son, and the evidence given is that He shows Him everything He is doing. Love is demonstrated by honesty and transparency. He is not only letting Him know. He is letting Him in.

Jesus repeats the pattern in John 15, telling His disciples He no longer calls them servants but friends, because He has made known to them everything He heard from His Father. So a husband can tell his wife he loves her every morning and work hard all day to show it, and still not have intimacy, because knowing and seeing build trust while only being let in builds closeness. The same is true of God.

> *Most of us bring God our reverence and our requests. What He wants is our real.*

Seeing Before Doing

- Know the Word, not just read it *John 5:39*
- Pray without ceasing *1 Thessalonians 5:17*
- Watch what the Father does *John 5:19*
- Then do likewise *John 5:19*

Copying other Christians is faster than watching the Father, and that is exactly the problem with it. It is the lazy version, and it is only as good as whoever you copied.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you been opposed for doing something right? Where did it come from?
2. What is God working in you right now, and what through you?
3. Are you imitating the Father, or imitating Christians you admire?
4. Who in your life knows you and sees you but has never been let in?
5. What have you never said to God because you assumed He would rather not hear it?

Christ the Judge

The Verdict, the One Who Gives It, and the Day We Stand Before Him

John 5:21–30

The Father has handed all judgment to the Son, which means the one who renders the final verdict on every life is the same one who laid His own life down.

i. His Judgments Are True

John 5:22–23

> For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.
> John 5:22–23, ESV

Before anything else, keep in mind who is on the bench. This is the one who honored the man betraying Him and asked mercy for the men driving the nails. He is the most kind, the most gracious, and the quickest to forgive. He is good, and He is the Judge.

And His judgments are true. God has never seen falsely, never seen partially, and never seen anything through a bias. You and I have never experienced that. However clearly you think you see, you are seeing in part and filling gaps you did not know were there. In most disagreements both people are wrong about something, because both suffer from the same human problem, which is perspective.

He does not have one. He sees everything exactly as it is, so whatever He says on that day cannot be argued with.

> *He is rendering the truth by rendering the verdict.*

ii. His Judgments Are Just

John 5:30

> I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.
> John 5:30, ESV

Because He sees perfectly, every verdict He gives is perfectly right. This is where we struggle, because human justice is fragile. It bends with culture, with politics, and with public opinion. Even the best judge on the best day is limited by the evidence and by what he cannot know. Sometimes the guilty go free and the innocent are condemned.

Not so with God. He weighs every thought, every action, and every motive on the scales of His own holiness. That means two things. When He vindicates, it is final and full, and when He says you are clean you do not get to argue. And when He condemns, it is final and full, with no hidden evidence left to surface later.

> *There are no bribes, no loopholes, no appeals.*

Background

Jesus is still answering the leaders who want Him dead for healing on the Sabbath, and He does not soften anything.

In a few sentences He claims to give life, to raise the dead, to share the Father's honor, and to judge the world. Everything John has said about Him since the first verse, He now says about Himself.

Most of those claims are welcome. The one we tend to skip is the last one.

Words to Know

Judgment
κρίσις · *krisis*
A verdict, the decision of a court. The root of the English word crisis.

Just
δίκαιος · *dikaios*
Right, in line with what God is. Used of a ruling with nothing bent in it.

Authority
ἐξουσία · *exousia*
The right to act and to decide. Here it is given by the Father to the Son.

Honor
τιμάω · *timaō*
To value at full worth. The Son is to be honored exactly as the Father is.

iii. The Day We Stand Before Him

JOHN 5:24–29

> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
>
> JOHN 5:24, ESV

Every person who has ever lived will stand before Jesus, and on that day there will be two groups. The first are those who concluded and confessed that they needed saving, and who staked their lives on His mercy. For them it is the greatest day there is, because everything they hoped for turns out to be real.

But they still give an account. There is no condemnation for those in Christ, and yet Paul says we must all appear before His judgment seat, and that each person's work will be tested by fire. What survives is rewarded. What burns is lost, though the builder is saved.

The second group gets what it chose. God will not force anyone to spend eternity with a people they do not want, honoring a God they do not agree with.

> *Forgiveness doesn't remove accountability.*

The Titles of Jesus

- He has all authority *Lord*
- He governs and protects *King*
- He loves with fierce loyalty *Bridegroom*
- He wanted us, so He made us *Creator*
- He enjoys us *Friend*
- He renders the verdict *Judge*

We are glad to talk about the first five. The sixth is the one we leave out, and leaving it out is what gets us into trouble.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which title of Jesus do you lean on most, and which do you avoid?
2. Where are you certain you see a situation clearly? What might you be filling in?
3. How does it change that day to know the Judge is the one who died for you?
4. If your work were tested by fire this week, what would be left standing?
5. Is there a verdict of His, that you are clean, that you are still arguing with?

Feeding the Five Thousand

A Hungry Crowd, a Failed Test, and a Boy With His Lunch

John 6:1–15

Jesus feeds a crowd He could have sent home, and He does it in a way that trains His disciples to look for needs, to trust Him with the impossible, and to hand over what they have.

i. His First Inclination

John 6:5

> Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"
> John 6:5, ESV

The crowd arrives and the first thing Jesus does is ask how they are going to feed everyone. That says something about His character. He sees a need and He meets it. And this was probably not even a need so much as a desire. No one was going to starve by missing a meal. Most of us would have taught and then told everyone to take care of themselves.

That is not Jesus. He is not so concerned with eternity that He neglects you in this age. And by putting the question to Philip He is training His disciples to think the same way. We live in a culture built around self, and it is steadily rejecting the idea of putting someone else's needs ahead of your own. So train your eyes. Start in your home, your church, and your work.

> *He is not so heavenly minded that He is no earthly good.*

ii. The Test

John 6:6–7

> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."
> John 6:6–7, ESV

God will often test us, not because He is missing information but because He wants us to see something we would not have seen otherwise. Philip fails. He is asked to do something remarkable and immediately explains why it is impossible. To be fair to him, he is not wrong about the money.

But he has forgotten who he is talking to. This is the one who turned water into wine. The test was about how much Philip trusted God's ability. When things feel hopeless and insurmountable, do you start explaining why it cannot be done, or do you go to God in faith and ask for help? Everyone has met the person who only gives the reasons a thing will not work. Do not be that person.

> *What do you mean we? We aren't going to feed anyone. You are.*

Background

A large crowd has followed Jesus around the Sea of Galilee because of the healings. John notes that the Passover is near.

The count of five thousand is the men alone. With women and children the crowd was far larger, possibly three times that.

This is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, recorded in all four Gospels. John tells it for what it reveals about Jesus, and for what it asks of the people standing next to Him.

Words to Know

Test
πειράζω · *peirazō*
To prove by trial. Not to gain information, but to bring something to the surface.

Give Thanks
εὐχαριστέω · *eucharisteō*
To be grateful aloud. He thanks the Father before there is enough.

Fragments
κλάσμα · *klasma*
Broken pieces. Twelve baskets of them, gathered so that nothing is lost.

Sign
σημεῖον · *sēmeion*
A miracle that points past itself. John's word for the works of Jesus.

iii. A Boy and His Lunch

JOHN 6:8–13

> "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"
> JOHN 6:9, ESV

This may be the wildest thought in the whole account. Jesus needs nothing and can do anything, and He still wants us to participate. He holds back the solution until someone is willing to put something in. That person is not wealthy or important. It is a boy, giving up his lunch. Where the great disciple fails the test, the boy passes it.

You may feel that what you offer is small. Do not let that stop you. Jesus does not need much, only a heart of faith and a dash of selflessness.

Then He multiplies it, and there is a principle here: God multiplies what we steward well. The boy does not look at his lunch as his property. He sees it as the Lord's, which he is responsible for. So the question stops being what you can give back to God. It becomes, this is all Yours, so what do You want done with it?

> *It means managing something, not owning something.*

How the Miracle Unfolds

- He sees the crowd *6:5*
- He tests His disciple *6:6*
- A boy offers what he has *6:9*
- He gives thanks *6:11*
- Everyone eats their fill *6:12*
- Nothing is lost *6:13*

It is easier to squander what you have been entrusted with than to steward it. Faithful with little, entrusted with much.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who near you has a need or a desire that you could meet this week?
2. When something looks impossible, do you list the reasons or ask for help?
3. What small thing have you held back because it seemed inadequate?
4. Do you treat your money and your time as yours or as His?
5. Do you squander more than you steward?

The Bread of Life

The Greater Moses and the Only Work God Asks For

John 6:16–40

The crowd asks for a sign like the one Moses gave, and Jesus answers that He will not perform one, because He is the bread that Moses' manna was pointing to.

i. The Greater Moses

John 6:16–21

> They saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."
> John 6:19–20, ESV

Moses needed God to part the sea so the people could cross on dry ground. Jesus walks on it. That is the latest in a line of comparisons John has been drawing, and it is easy for us to miss why they matter.

Moses brought the Law and stood as mediator between God and Israel. Under that covenant your hope rested on a priest offering the right sacrifice at the right time, year after year. Jesus comes to establish a new covenant, in which God softens the heart, puts His Spirit within, and writes the Law inside us.

But if Jesus is not greater than Moses, He has no authority to fulfill what Moses gave, and certainly none to establish something new. He would simply be a heretic starting a religion. Because He is greater, His message, His testimony, and His covenant are greater.

> *Moses was the messenger. Jesus was the very message.*

ii. The Work of God

John 6:26–29

> Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."
> John 6:28–29, ESV

Notice what He does not say. He does not give them a mission or a list. The greatest thing you could ever do for God is believe: to put your faith, hope, and trust in Him, and to say that He is who He says He is and has done what He said He did.

We tend to think other things outweigh that. Ministry, giving, healing the sick, reaching thousands. Those matter, but they matter less. Against all odds, in a culture telling you not to and in a body telling you not to, you still chose Jesus. That is a miracle.

> *Your yes is so precious to God.*

Background

The night after feeding the crowd, Jesus crosses the sea by walking on it. The crowd follows by boat and finds Him in Capernaum.

What they want is another meal. What they get is the first of seven statements in John that begin with the words I am.

To hear it properly you need the theme John has been building since chapter one. For a first century Jew no one stood higher than Moses, and John has been quietly setting Jesus beside him.

Words to Know

It Is I

ἐγώ εἰμι · *egō eimi*

Literally, I am. Spoken on the water, and the frame for each I am statement.

Work

ἔργον · *ergon*

A deed or task. The crowd asks for works, plural. Jesus answers with one.

Believe

πιστεύω · *pisteuō*

To trust, to rest your weight on. In John it is always a verb, never a noun.

Bread

ἄρτος · *artos*

The daily staple, the thing that kept a person alive from one day to the next.

iii. I Am the Bread

JOHN 6:30–40

> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."
> JOHN 6:35, ESV

They ask for a sign so that they can believe, and they bring up the manna. Jesus corrects them twice. It was not Moses who gave that bread but the Father, and that bread perished. Then He gives His answer: I will not perform a sign. I am the sign.

Manna had to be given every day. He is given once. He is the thing that satisfies and sustains, and once you have Him you are meant to carry a satisfaction in your soul that no one can take away. Paul describes it as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

So stop looking to lesser pleasures. More money, more influence, and more attention are empty carbs. They fill you for a moment and leave you hungrier when they wear off.

> *It is the only thing that can make everything less enticing but more fulfilling.*

Moses and Jesus

- Moses brought the word. Jesus is the Word *1:1, 17*
- Moses could not see God. Jesus makes Him known *1:18*
- Water to blood. Water to wine *2:1–11*
- Moses lifted the serpent. Jesus is lifted up *3:14*
- Water from a rock. Living water *4:14*
- Moses wrote. Jesus is who he wrote of *5:46*

The letter to the Hebrews puts it plainly. Moses was faithful in God's house as a servant. Christ is faithful over it as a son.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does it matter to your faith that Jesus is greater than Moses?
2. What do you assume God values more than your trust in Him?
3. Where are you asking Jesus for a sign when He has already given Himself?
4. What are the empty carbs you keep going back to?
5. What would it look like to be satisfied in Him this week?

When God Offends

A Hard Saying, a Thinning Crowd, and the Twelve Who Stayed

John 6:41–69

At the height of His popularity Jesus says the one thing certain to empty the room, and He says it on purpose, because He would rather have disciples than a crowd.

i. Disciples, Not Crowds

John 6:41–58

> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.
> John 6:54, ESV

Jesus knows there are two groups in front of Him: those who want manna and those who want the Bread of Life, those who want a sign and those who want what the sign points to. So He says something that will separate them. He cares about quality over quantity.

He does this more often than we like to admit. He tells the rich ruler to sell everything. He tells great crowds to count the cost before they follow. He puts up barriers because He wants the ones who come to be the ones who really want Him.

That exposes two habits in the church. We measure success by attendance and attention instead of by disciples. And we make the gospel so easy that people never count the cost of following Him.

> *He would rather His group be pure than large.*

ii. Jesus Is Offensive

John 6:60–66

> When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"
> John 6:60–61, ESV

He knew how they would respond and said it anyway. Our culture has no idea what to do with offense. One group thinks it is wrong to offend anyone, ever. Another wears offensiveness as a badge and calls it boldness. When Jesus offends, it is not ego. He is declaring what is true because He cares about souls.

He offends by what He says: that He is the only way, and that He decides what is good and evil. He offends by what He does, when He works outside our theology or allows what we did not want. John the Baptist felt that in prison, and Jesus answered, blessed is the one who is not offended by me. And He offends by what He demands, which is everything.

> *It's okay to be offensive. It's not okay to be offensive for offense's sake.*

Background

Jesus has just called Himself the bread that came down from heaven. The crowd, which knows His family, begins to grumble.

He does not explain it away. He goes further and tells them they must eat His flesh and drink His blood.

He is pointing to the cross, and to the trust that takes Him in completely. They hear it as literally as possible, and many who had followed Him walk away for good.

Words to Know

Grumble

γογγύζω · *gongyzō*

To mutter in complaint. The same word used of Israel in the wilderness.

Feeds

τρώγω · *trōgō*

To chew, to eat as a meal. A blunt, physical word, chosen on purpose.

Hard

σκληρός · *sklēros*

Harsh, rough. Not hard to understand, but hard to accept.

Take Offense

σκανδαλίζω · *skandalizō*

To stumble or be tripped. The root of the English word scandal.

iii. To Whom Shall We Go

JOHN 6:67–69

> Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."
>
> JOHN 6:68–69, ESV

Jesus turns to the twelve and asks whether they want to leave as well. He demands a choice, and Peter chooses. He goes against the crowd, against his culture, and against the accepted religious thinking of his day.

Follow his train of thought. We believed, and over time belief became knowledge, and knowledge demanded faithfulness. C. S. Lewis made the same point: Christianity is either of no importance or of infinite importance, and the one thing it cannot be is "moderately important."

So check your own heart. Are you offended with God over how your life has taken shape, over what He asks of you, or over what He has allowed? It is a good time to be honest with Him and to land where Peter landed. Lord, this is hard, but where else can I go?

> *You've ruined me, Lord. I now know the truth, and I can't go back.*

How He Offends

- By what He says *exclusive truth*
- By what He does *outside our box*
- By what He allows *the prayer unanswered*
- By what He demands *all of us*

We cannot put God on trial. He does not answer to us. The comfort is in knowing that everything He does comes out of goodness.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you measure your faith by crowds or by discipleship?
2. What has following Jesus actually cost you?
3. Which do you lean toward: never offending, or enjoying it?
4. Are you offended with God about anything right now? Name it.
5. Can you say with Peter that there is nowhere else to go?

Right Judgment

Unbelieving Brothers, God's Timing, and a Standard That Keeps Moving

John 7:1–24

At a feast that celebrates God dwelling with His people, God is standing in the temple, and the most religious people present cannot see Him because of the way they judge.

i. Not Even His Brothers

John 7:1–5

> For not even his brothers believed in him.
> John 7:5, ESV

There is holy irony in the setting. The feast celebrates that God wants to be with His people. He is not put off by you but drawn to you. And the one who became flesh and dwelt among us is present at the feast, unrecognized.

His own brothers are mocking Him. They grew up with a perfect older brother and with parents who told the stories of His birth, and they did not believe. Do you have family who do not believe? You are in good company. And perhaps you carry guilt over a child who walked away, thinking that if you had been better it would be different. God was the perfect parent, and Adam and Eve still rebelled.

Take heart from how this ends. Two of these brothers, James and Jude, would write books of the New Testament and call Him Lord.

> *You could have been Jesus and they would have found fault.*

ii. Right Thing, Wrong Time

John 7:6–13

> Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil."
> John 7:6–7, ESV

The brothers had the right idea without knowing it. Jesus would reveal Himself to the world. It was not yet time. Timing matters in the kingdom. Get it wrong and God does not leave you, but you may forfeit effectiveness. So after asking God what He wants you to do, ask the next question, which is when. If you move too fast, slow down and seek counsel. If you move too slowly, stop waiting for a green light that may never come.

Notice too who hates Him. We hear the world and think of the irreligious. But Jesus has spent His ministry confronting the religious establishment, and that is who wants Him dead. Expect opposition from those who say you must look, act, and think like them.

> *We have the right idea with the wrong timeline.*

Background

It is the Feast of Booths, also called Tabernacles or Sukkot, one of three feasts for which Israel traveled to Jerusalem.

It remembered the forty years in the wilderness, when the people lived in tents and God lived among them. To tabernacle means to dwell with.

It falls six months after Passover. If the feast of chapter five was also a Passover, about eighteen months have gone by since the healing at Bethesda, and the leaders are still angry about it.

Words to Know

Feast of Booths
σκηνοπηγία · *skēnopēgia*
Literally, tent pitching. John 1:14 uses the same root: the Word tented among us.

Time
καιρός · *kairos*
The right moment, the appointed season, as opposed to time on a clock.

World
κόσμος · *kosmos*
The ordered system set against God. Here it is the religious establishment.

Judge
κρίνω · *krinō*
To decide, to reach a verdict. Jesus commands it, and commands it done rightly.

iii. Judge With Right Judgment

JOHN 7:14–24

> Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.
> JOHN 7:24, ESV

At the feast everyone has an opinion about Him: a good man, a deceiver, a man with a demon. He did everything right and people still spoke falsely of Him, and He did not chase each one down to correct the story. Some of us live under a pressure that everyone has to like us. He did not.

Then He exposes the leaders. They circumcise on the Sabbath when the eighth day falls on it, yet they are furious that He made a man whole on the Sabbath. This is not the ordinary hypocrisy of condemning a thing and then doing it. It is holding a principle and applying it only when it suits. We do the same whenever we condemn the sins we do not commit and excuse the ones we find acceptable.

> *Hypocrisy is when we change the standard depending on who's being judged.*

The Moving Standard

- Honor your body *but ignore gluttony*
- Be pure *but be entertained by impurity*
- Watch your language *but gossip as prayer requests*
- Tell the truth *but exaggerate the story*
- Hate sin *but tolerate pride and envy*

Hypocrisy is not failing to live up to your standard. Everyone does that. It is keeping one standard for yourself and another for everyone else.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you believe God is drawn to you rather than put off by you?
2. Whose faith are you carrying guilt for that is not yours to carry?
3. Do you tend to move too fast or too slowly? What is God's timing asking of you now?
4. Whose opinion of you are you working too hard to correct?
5. Where do you hold others to a standard you excuse in yourself?

Rivers of Living Water

A Confused Crowd, a Cry in the Temple, and the Power of the Word

John 7:25–52

On the last and greatest day of the feast, while the priests pour out water and the people pray for rain, Jesus stands up and announces that He is what they have been asking for.

i. Filling In the Gaps

John 7:25–36

> So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.
> John 7:30, ESV

The crowd notices something odd. The leaders have promised to arrest Jesus, and here He is teaching in front of them while they do nothing. So the people do what we all do. They fill in the gaps and decide the authorities must secretly believe He is the Christ.

They were wrong. They did not know the leaders' hearts or the politics at play, and they built a confident conclusion on limited information. The piece they were missing was that God was at work, holding the leaders back. So hold your assumptions loosely and give yourself room to be finite.

Jesus then says He is going where they cannot follow. It is the fourth time in John that He has pointed to His death, and no one hears it. People tend to hear what they want to hear, and then fail in the hour of trial.

> *Being confident doesn't equal being correct.*

ii. Come to Me and Drink

John 7:37–39

> On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"
> John 7:37–38, ESV

The seventh day was the climax. The priests circled the altar seven times while the people waved branches and cried out for God to save and to send rain. Into that moment Jesus stands and shouts.

You are singing about the wells of salvation, and I am the well. You are praying for renewal, and I am its source. You are longing for the Spirit to be poured out, and that outpouring comes through Me. John adds that He was speaking of the Spirit, whom believers would receive once Jesus was glorified. And the water now flows out of the heart, not out of a rock.

> *You're remembering how God gave water from the rock. I'm the Rock that gives living water.*

Background

It is still the Feast of Booths. Jesus is teaching openly in the temple, and everyone knows the authorities want Him arrested.

Each day of the feast the priests carried a golden pitcher of water from the Pool of Siloam and poured it out at the altar while the people sang from Isaiah 12 about the wells of salvation.

It looked back to the water from the rock in the wilderness, and forward to the Spirit God had promised to pour out.

Words to Know

Hour

ὥρα · *hōra*

In John, the appointed time of the cross. Until it comes, no one can touch Him.

Thirst

διψάω · *dipsaō*

To be parched. The only qualification Jesus gives for coming to Him.

Living Water

ὕδωρ ζῶν · *hydōr zōn*

Running water, as from a spring, as opposed to water standing in a cistern.

Glorified

δοξάζω · *doxazō*

To be shown in full weight and splendor. John uses it of the cross and what follows.

iii. No One Ever Spoke Like This

JOHN 7:40–52

> The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"
>
> JOHN 7:45–46, ESV

The officers sent to arrest Him come back empty handed, and it was not a miracle that stopped them. It was His teaching. Christianity is a teaching movement, built on the explanation of the Scriptures and the gospel. Faith comes by hearing.

The leaders answer with contempt: have you been deceived as well? That is one of the most Pharisaical things a person can do, to assume that whoever disagrees with you is deceived or immature. It is fine to think you are right and someone else is wrong. It needs to stop there.

Then Nicodemus speaks. The man who once came by night now asks for a fair hearing. He is not yet a disciple, but he has moved. They mock him and insist no prophet comes from Galilee, which was not even accurate. Jonah did.

> *Miracles can get your attention, but teaching transforms your heart.*

What Jesus Was Claiming

- You sing of the wells of salvation *I am the well*
- You pray for rain and renewal *I am the source*
- You remember water from the rock *I am the Rock*
- You long for the Spirit *He comes through Me*

The only requirement He names is thirst. Not knowledge, not standing, not a clean record. If anyone thirsts.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where have you built a confident conclusion on limited information?
2. What hard thing has Jesus said that you would rather not hear?
3. What are you thirsty for, and where have you been taking that thirst?
4. When someone disagrees with you, what do you assume about them?
5. Like Nicodemus, where have you moved toward Jesus without yet stepping out?

What Christians Believe About the Bible

Three Words, One Disputed Passage, and Why You Can Trust What You Hold

John 7:53–8:11

The account of the woman caught in adultery was not part of what John originally wrote, and the fact that your Bible tells you so is a reason to trust it more, not less.

i. Inspired, Inerrant, Infallible

2 Peter 1:21

> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
> 2 Peter 1:21, ESV

Christians use three words for what they believe about the Bible, and each one builds on the one before it. Inspiration means the Scriptures were breathed out by God through human authors. They wrote with their own personalities, styles, and vocabularies, but God is the ultimate author, not merely an editor or an influence.

Inerrancy follows. Because God is the author and cannot lie, everything Scripture affirms as true is true, whether doctrine, ethics, or history. That is not a flat, literalistic reading of every verse. Genre and intention matter, and the Bible can accurately record a lie without endorsing it.

Infallibility follows from that. Scripture cannot fail in its purpose, because God cannot fail. It will not mislead you, and it will accomplish what He intends.

> *Because Scripture is God-breathed, what it says, God says.*

ii. A Passage John Did Not Write

John 7:53–8:11

> They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.
> John 7:53–8:1, ESV

Those three words describe the original writings. They do not promise that every later copy is perfect, that every scribe decided flawlessly, or that nothing was ever added. Your translation is a translation. It is not itself inspired, but it is accurate, trustworthy, and sufficient.

That matters here, because this passage is a later addition. In what John wrote, the text moves from 7:52 straight to what we call 8:12. The account of the woman was told and retold in the early church, and in time scribes placed it in John so that it would not be lost. It became common in copies during the medieval period, and those were the manuscripts available when the King James Version was translated.

Since then far earlier manuscripts have been found, along with the writings of the first generations of Christians, who quoted the New Testament constantly. That is how we know. And translators could have quietly removed the story. Instead every major translation keeps it and marks it.

Background

Most Bibles set John 7:53 through 8:11 in brackets, with a note that the earliest manuscripts do not include it.

Before reading the passage itself, it is worth asking what that note means, and what Christians actually claim when they call the Bible the Word of God.

The claims are older than the church. They are how Israel understood its Scriptures, and how Jesus and the apostles spoke of the Old Testament.

Words to Know

Scripture
γραφή · *graphē*
A writing. In the New Testament, the sacred writings as a recognized body.

Carried Along
φέρω · *pherō*
To bear or carry. Peter's word for how the Spirit moved the human authors.

Truth
ἀλήθεια · *alētheia*
What corresponds to reality. Jesus says of the Father, your word is truth.

Witness
μαρτυρία · *martyria*
Testimony given by one who saw. What the apostles understood themselves to be writing.

> *Nothing is swept under the rug. Nothing is covered up. Nothing is hidden.*

iii. Why This Builds Confidence

Isaiah 40:8

> The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.
> Isaiah 40:8, ESV

This can be unsettling. One of the best loved stories in the Gospels was not in the original, and you may wonder what else you have not been told. But the very fact that you know this is proof that your Bible is trustworthy. It is because we know what the original said that we can say with confidence that this was added later.

And the story itself is ancient, known among the earliest Christians, and consistent with everything the Gospels teach about Jesus. It sounds like Him. It reflects His grace, His wisdom, His mercy, and His hatred of hypocrisy, and God has used it in the lives of believers for centuries. No doctrine and nothing of the gospel hangs on it.

So take the larger point. If the Scriptures have been preserved, then the promises of Christ have been preserved. And if God is faithful to preserve His Word, He is faithful to preserve you.

> *If we can trust God's Word in ink, then we can trust God's Word in blood.*

Three Words

- Inspiration *God breathed it out*
- Inerrancy *true in all it teaches*
- Infallibility *cannot fail in its purpose*
- Your translation *accurate, trustworthy, sufficient*

When Paul told Timothy that all Scripture is breathed out by God, he meant the Old Testament. The apostles' own writings were recognized as Scripture because they carried the same authority.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of the three words is least familiar to you, and what does it change?
2. How do you react to learning that this passage is a later addition?
3. Have you read the footnotes and brackets in your own Bible? What do they tell you?
4. Where do you most need to trust that Scripture will not mislead you?
5. What promise of Christ do you need to believe has been preserved for you?

Cast the First Stone

A Ruined Morning, a Trap, and a Woman Given a New Beginning

John 8:1–11

The religious leaders bring a woman to Jesus as bait, and He turns the question back on them until the only one left with the right to condemn her is the one who refuses to.

i. People as Pawns

John 8:1–6

> "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"
> John 8:4–5, ESV

On a day meant for joy, the Pharisees find something to be angry about. Everyone knows a person like that, who has every reason to celebrate and is bent on being dissatisfied, and who ruins the day for everyone nearby. Do not be that person.

Then look at what they do with her. She is a means to an end. And the charge itself raises a question: where is the man? The Law required both to be put to death. Either they invented the whole thing or they let him walk, and either way they are breaking the Law they claim to defend.

It is a trap. The Law of Moses said stone her, and Rome did not permit the Jews to execute anyone. Whatever Jesus answers, they have a charge. The irony is that she was caught sinning, and they are in the act of sinning. Self-awareness is the least discussed Christian virtue: the ability to see your own sin more clearly than someone else's.

> *Pharisees drag the sinner into the light while hiding their own sin in the dark.*

ii. Written in the Dust

John 8:6–9

> And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."
> John 8:7, ESV

What was He writing? No one knows. Some point to Jeremiah 17, where those who turn away from the Lord, the fountain of living water, are written in the earth. Others think He wrote the accusers' own hidden sins. Either way, notice that He does not rush. He slows the moment down and lowers the temperature.

Then He speaks, and there is more here than a rebuke of hypocrisy. The Law said the witnesses were to throw the first stones, so that the blood would be on their hands if they had lied. He is saying, if you want to follow the Law, follow all of it. Which of you saw it?

They leave one at a time, the older ones first. The longer you live, the better acquainted you are with your own sinfulness.

Background

The Feast of Booths ran seven days, and then came an eighth. The rabbis pictured it as a father asking his children to stay one more day before they left for home.

It was a day for lingering and closeness. In Scripture the eighth day carries the sense of a new beginning, the day ordinary life starts after the celebration ends.

That is the morning Jesus sits down in the temple to teach, and it is the morning the scribes and Pharisees choose to interrupt.

Words to Know

Wrote

καταγράφω · *katagraphō*

To write down or draw. The only place in the Gospels where Jesus is said to write.

Without Sin

ἀναμάρτητος · *anamartētos*

Sinless. Used only here in the New Testament, and true of one person present.

Condemn

κατακρίνω · *katakrinō*

To pass sentence against. The verdict Jesus alone could give and does not.

Lord

κύριος · *kyrios*

Master, the one with authority. To say it is also to say that you are not.

You cannot throw the stone. Jesus can.

iii. Neither Do I Condemn You

JOHN 8:10–11

> Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."
>
> JOHN 8:10–11, ESV

Listen to her answer. She does not excuse her sin, play the victim, or use the moment to attack her accusers. She calls Him Lord. That is more than acknowledging His authority. It is admitting you have none: I am not the lord of my life, and Your approval is the only one that matters.

Then come the two halves of the gospel. The first is neither do I condemn you. Where the Law would condemn us, Jesus frees us, and takes the condemnation on Himself. The second is go and sin no more, and we do that half a disservice by leaving it out, or by saying it as though it were bad news.

It is not. You no longer have to do the thing that brings shame, guilt, and misery. By the grace of God and the power of the Spirit, you now can do otherwise.

She's getting her eighth day. A new beginning.

What the Story Teaches

- People are not pawns *love them, don't leverage them*
- See your own sin first *quicker to confess than condemn*
- Only Jesus can throw the stone *and He does not*
- Lord means surrender *I am not in charge*
- Grace gives a future *not only a clean past*

The plank and the speck. If you are more grieved and more angry over someone else's sin than over your own, you are standing with the wrong group in this story.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there an occasion you tend to spoil for others? What is underneath that?
2. Have you ever used a person to make a point or win an argument?
3. Whose sin do you see more clearly than your own right now?
4. Which half of the gospel do you tend to leave out: no condemnation, or sin no more?
5. Where do you need an eighth day, a new beginning?

A Theology of Healing

What Scripture Promises, What It Does Not, and How to Pray

John 9:1–7

Jesus heals a man born blind and corrects the assumption that someone's sin must be behind it, which opens the question of what Christians should and should not believe about healing.

i. Is It Always God's Will?

1 Peter 2:24

> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
> 1 Peter 2:24, ESV

The first view says God always wills physical healing, because it was purchased at the cross. If healing does not come, the fault is ours: too little faith, hidden sin, or a spiritual battle not yet won.

The trouble starts with Isaiah 53. Its context is transgression and iniquity, and Peter quotes it about sin and righteousness, not disease. Then there is the record. At Bethesda Jesus walks through a crowd of the sick and heals one. Paul carried a thorn that God declined to remove, left Trophimus sick at Miletus, and told Timothy to take a little wine for his frequent ailments. If healing were secured in the atonement the way forgiveness is, we would receive it when we are justified.

And when Jesus says your faith has made you well, He is affirming the object of that faith, not its intensity.

> *Faith doesn't save, Jesus saves. Faith doesn't heal, Jesus does.*

ii. Has Healing Ceased?

James 5:14–15

> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.
> James 5:14–15, ESV

The second view says God no longer heals. Miracles confirmed the message of Jesus and the apostles, and now that we have the Scriptures they are not needed. This is just as hard to hold. We are plainly told to pray for the sick. Paul, the same man who was not healed, lays hands on people in Acts and they recover.

Some answer that these were special graces for the apostles alone. But Scripture never says so, and the generations after them did not think so. Justin Martyr, writing around the middle of the second century, speaks of Christians healing in the name of Jesus. Irenaeus, a few decades later, says some heal the sick by laying hands on them.

> *That is not said, or even alluded to, in the Bible.*

Background

The disciples see a man blind from birth and ask whose sin caused it. Jesus says neither his nor his parents', but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Then He makes mud, sends the man to wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man comes back seeing.

The narrative is taken up in the next study. Here the passage is the doorway to a subject surrounded by a great deal of noise: divine healing, and three common views of it.

Words to Know

Blind

τυφλός · *typhlos*

Unable to see. John uses it of the man's eyes, and later of the leaders' hearts.

Displayed

φανερόω · *phaneroō*

To make visible. The purpose Jesus gives for the man's condition.

Sent

ἀπεσταλμένος · *apestalmenos*

The meaning of Siloam. The man is healed by going where the Sent One sends him.

Thorn

σκόλοψ · *skolops*

A stake or splinter. Paul's word for the affliction God did not remove.

iii. He Heals as He Wills

JOHN 9:1–3

> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."
> JOHN 9:3, ESV

The third view is where we land. God still heals, and we are to ask with real faith. But He heals as He wills, and it is not always His will on this side of heaven. Healing is a miracle, and a miracle is by definition not the norm. Suffering is the norm, and Scripture says it produces endurance, character, and hope. We reserve the right to ask our Father, and He reserves the right to say no.

Sickness may be an attack, the result of a fallen world, the fruit of poor choices, or something that simply happens. Jesus never tells a sick person that their faith is the problem, so never say it. He healed people who did not ask and did not believe. Pray, anoint with oil, and go to the doctor, because medicine is a gift of God and not a rival to faith. Then check in a few days later, and bring a meal.

> *It's either going to be healed or used.*

What We Believe

- God can and does heal today *He has not changed*
- Healing is miraculous *not normative*
- Suffering is normative *Acts 14:22*
- It is not always His will to heal *2 Corinthians 12*
- No healing does not mean no faith *2 Timothy 4:20*
- Medicine is common grace *1 Timothy 5:23*

God is always good and never on trial. He takes no pleasure in our suffering, but like every good parent He knows that some of it is good for us.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of the three views were you raised with, or have you assumed?
2. Have you ever been told, or told someone, that a lack of healing was a lack of faith?
3. How do you pray for the sick: with faith, with submission, or with both?
4. Where has God used an illness or hardship in your life rather than removing it?
5. Who is sick that you could pray for, check in on, and serve this week?

Bad Leaders and Good Shepherds

A Healed Man Thrown Out, and the Shepherd Who Went to Find Him

John 9:8–10:21

When Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd He is not offering a gentle picture. He is passing judgment on leaders who have just thrown one of God's sheep out, and announcing that God has come to shepherd His people Himself.

i. One Thing I Do Know

John 9:24–34

> He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."
> John 9:25, ESV

This is the testimony of every believer. When you are born again your sight changes: how you see the world, how you see yourself, and what you can tolerate looking at. John Newton captained a slave ship before he became a pastor and wrote that he was blind, but now he sees.

The Pharisees answer that they are disciples of Moses. They were discipled by the Law and not by the Lord, and that is a danger for anyone who loves the Bible. It is possible to know the book forward and backward and have no knowledge of its Author. We want to be disciples of Jesus, and Scripture is meant to lead us into a living relationship with the Father.

Then they throw him out. That is what bad religious leadership does when you do not fit the narrative, submit to the system, or protect their authority. There is a biblical place for church discipline, but it is for unrepentant sin or destructive heresy, never for pointing to Jesus instead of the system.

> *Everyone has a unique story. No one has a unique testimony.*

ii. Thieves and Hired Hands

John 10:1–13

> Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?
> Ezekiel 34:2, ESV

Jesus says He came into the world for judgment, and this is the verdict. A bad shepherd was never sent. He does not come in by the door. Not everyone who stands in a shepherd's place got there the right way, and some sought it out of ambition, for praise or money or to feed an ego rather than a flock.

He sees sheep as a resource and not a responsibility. It is about what he can get from you, and about getting you invested in what God is doing in his ministry rather than in your own life. He grows fat while the sheep go hungry, neglects the weak and the wounded, does not go after the strays, and leads with force and harshness. And when the wolf comes he is gone, because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Background

Six centuries earlier, in Ezekiel 34, God charged Israel's leaders with feeding themselves instead of the flock, and promised to come and shepherd His people in person.

Now a man born blind has been healed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees interrogate him and his parents, looking for a way to discredit Jesus.

He will not give them one, so they cast him out. Jesus goes and finds him, and what follows in chapter ten is spoken with that scene still in view.

Words to Know

Cast Out

ἐκβάλλω · *ekballō*

To throw out. Used of what the leaders do to the man, and of what a shepherd does in leading his sheep out.

Door

θύρα · *thyra*

The single entrance to a sheepfold. Jesus is both the way in and the way to pasture.

Good

καλός · *kalos*

Good in the sense of noble or fitting. The shepherd as a shepherd ought to be.

Hired Hand

μισθωτός · *misthōtos*

One who works for a wage. He has no stake in the flock, so he runs.

Bad shepherds devour, deceive, and destroy.

iii. The Good Shepherd

JOHN 10:11–18

> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
> JOHN 10:11, ESV

The Good Shepherd is known by His sheep. He is among them, not above them, and He calls them by name. He leads rather than drives. Cattle are driven from behind with fear. Sheep are led from the front and follow out of trust, because the shepherd has gone first and shown that the path can be walked.

He gives abundant life, which is not material prosperity but the things no one can steal: love, joy, peace, and a deep contentment anchored in the next life rather than this one. He does not run from danger. He fights. And He lays down His life willingly. No one takes it from Him.

God also promised through Jeremiah to give His people shepherds after His own heart. So those who know the Good Shepherd will shepherd the way He does.

They are flock focused, not self focused.

Two Kinds of Shepherd

- Climbs in another way *enters by the door*
- Sees a resource *sees a responsibility*
- Feeds himself *feeds the flock*
- Drives from behind *leads from the front*
- Flees the wolf *lays down his life*
- Ignores the stray *seeks the lost*

The Pharisees ask whether they are blind too. Jesus answers that the person who admits he cannot see is far better off than the one who insists that he can.

Questions for Reflection

1. How has your sight changed since you came to Christ? What can you no longer look at the same way?
2. Do you know the Bible better than you know its Author?
3. Have you been cast out or pushed aside by leaders? Where did Jesus find you afterward?
4. If you lead anyone, which column describes you on an ordinary week?
5. What would it look like to follow the Shepherd's voice in one specific thing?

Jesus Is God

A Plain Question, a Plain Answer, and What Follows From It

John 10:22–42

Asked to say plainly whether He is the Christ, Jesus answers with a sentence so clear that His hearers pick up stones, and if that sentence is true then nothing He ever said is merely an opinion.

i. Tell Us Plainly

John 10:22–26

> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe."
>
> John 10:24–25, ESV

His first response is, in effect, have we not already covered this? And if the words were not enough, the works should have settled it. A man shows up healing, delivering, and giving people their lives back, and they are still asking who He is.

There is a lesson in that for the rest of us. Sometimes actions are not enough to make the point, and words matter too. A father can work fifty hours a week and make every game, and if he never says I love you his children can grow up wondering whether he was there out of duty or desire. It happens in marriages as well. Do the labors of love, and use the language.

If you are quiet and action oriented, use your words. If you are quick to talk, remember that your actions are what give your words meaning.

> *Actions may speak louder than words, but they don't always speak as clear.*

ii. No One Will Snatch Them

John 10:27–29

> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
>
> John 10:27–28, ESV

This verse is often brought into the debate over whether a believer can lose salvation. That is a real question, but it is not the question this verse is answering, and we should not force an agenda onto the text.

What it says is that no outside force can steal you. Not the devil, not an enemy, not a bad shepherd. It is meant to make you feel the way a child feels climbing into a parent's bed after a nightmare. Nothing can get you here.

> *No one can take you away from God.*

Background

It is winter, at the Feast of Dedication, the festival we know as Hanukkah. Jesus is walking in the temple in Solomon's colonnade.

The leaders surround Him and demand an end to the suspense. Is He the Christ or not?

He has already told them, in words and in works. He has said that before Abraham was, I am. He has called Himself the Good Shepherd. Now He will say it in a way no one present can misread.

Words to Know

Dedication

ἐγκαίνια · *enkainia*

Renewal. The feast marking the rededication of the temple, about two centuries before.

Snatch

ἁρπάζω · *harpazō*

To seize by force. What no outside power is able to do to those He holds.

One

ἕν · *hen*

One thing. The form is neuter: one in nature, not one and the same person.

Blasphemy

βλασφημία · *blasphēmia*

Slander against God. The leaders' charge, and their own summary of what He claimed.

iii. I and the Father Are One

JOHN 10:30–42

> I and the Father are one.
> JOHN 10:30, ESV

It is sometimes said that Jesus never claimed to be God and that the church made Him one later. The proof otherwise is in the response. They pick up stones, and they say why: because you, being a man, make yourself God.

If that is true, we have to reckon with it. He is not a messenger of truth, which would make Him a prophet. He is its source. Take the nature of God and put it in a form you can see, and you get Jesus. So His words are not moral reflections or religious opinions. If He is not God they are arrogant and dangerous. If He is, they are final.

The passage ends across the Jordan, where people say that John did no sign, but everything he said about this man was true. The one Jesus called the greatest born of women never worked a miracle. You do not have to in order to matter in the kingdom. He lived the message he preached, and many believed.

> *If Jesus is God, then everything He has ever said isn't speculative, it's authoritative.*

Give These Their Weight

- Come to me, and I will give you rest *Matthew 11:28*
- Love your enemies *Matthew 5:44*
- The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins *Mark 2:10*
- My words will not pass away *Matthew 24:35*
- No one comes to the Father except through me *John 14:6*

Read each one twice. Once as the saying of a teacher, and once as the voice of God. They are not the same sentences.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who needs to hear from you in words what you have only been showing in actions?
2. What have you feared could take you out of His hand?
3. Which saying of Jesus do you treat as advice rather than as the word of God?
4. Do you rank believers by the signs that follow them? Where did that come from?
5. Could it be said of you that everything you said about Jesus was true?

The Resurrection and the Life

A Delay, Two Sisters, and a Dead Man Called by Name

John 11:1–53

Jesus hears that a friend He loves is dying and waits two more days, and in what follows He shows that resurrection is not only an event at the end of time but a Person standing at the tomb.

i. He Stayed Two Days Longer

John 11:1–16

> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.
> John 11:5–6, ESV

Read the logic. He loved them, so He stayed. Jesus loves Lazarus and allows him to suffer. He loves Mary and Martha and allows them to be in pain. We tend to think love is shown by removing as much suffering as possible, but we do not parent that way, and neither does God.

So when things are hard, and we realize He could have prevented it, we ask whether He is loving. He is not hardened toward our suffering and takes no joy in it. But He knows what we know, that suffering is how strength and endurance are produced. People who spend their lives avoiding hard things do not last long in the faith, and He wants you to last.

> *Love does not always mitigate suffering.*

ii. Two Sisters

John 11:17–37

> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"
> John 11:25–26, ESV

Martha comes full of trust and still grieving, and the one does not undermine the other. Her only shortfall is that her theology was accurate but deferred. She believed in resurrection on the last day and left no room for right now. Her doctrine could anchor her future but not yet interpret her present. She thought resurrection was an event and missed that it is a Person.

Mary says the same first sentence and stops there. If You had been here. In her pain it becomes an accusation, which is normal, and still not right. This is the Mary who chose the good portion, and perhaps she felt that ought to have counted for something.

Jesus does not correct her. He weeps with her. When someone you love is in the worst of it, do not avoid them because you lack the words. Sit with them. And notice that He is angry. D. A. Carson, in his commentary on John, argues that the word points to outrage. Death is an intruder.

Background

Lazarus lives in Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, with his sisters Martha and Mary. Luke records an earlier visit, when Martha served and Mary sat at the Lord's feet.

The sisters send word that he is ill. Jesus says the illness is for the glory of God, and then He stays where He is.

By the time He arrives Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. This is the last and greatest of the signs in John, and it is the one that seals the decision to kill Him.

Words to Know

Resurrection

ἀνάστασις · *anastasis*

A standing up again. Martha speaks of it as a day. Jesus speaks of it as Himself.

Deeply Moved

ἐμβριμάομαι · *embrimaomai*

To snort with anger, used of horses. Indignation, not quiet sadness.

Wept

δακρύω · *dakryō*

To shed tears. A different word from the loud wailing of the mourners.

Unbind

λύω · *lyō*

To loose or set free. The task Jesus hands to the people standing by.

> *You can be both full of faith, hope, and trust, yet sorrowful and grieving.*

iii. Lazarus, Come Out

JOHN 11:38–53

> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."
>
> JOHN 11:43–44, ESV

He tells them to move the stone and Martha hesitates, with a reasonable excuse. We do the same when we sense we should apologize, confess, or speak, and it feels too risky. Hesitation is normal. Do not let it become disobedience. They move the stone, and He raises the dead.

And He does it with a command, not a prayer, the same voice that spoke life into being in Genesis. To watch someone pass from death to life is to see the glory of God. Chapter three says we must be born again, and chapter eleven shows what that looks like.

From this day the leaders plan His death. He has traded His life for Lazarus, and for us.

> *We move in obedience, God moves in power.*

The Gospel in the Story

- We are dead and bound *11:17*
- We hear His word *11:43*
- We come out alive, still bound *11:44*
- His people help unbind us *11:44*

Restoration is communal. Believers are meant to help each other take the grave clothes off, not put them back on, and to make it easier to finish the race.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where has God delayed, and what have you concluded about His love because of it?
2. Is there a doctrine you hold for the future that you do not expect to matter today?
3. Are you more like Martha or Mary when things go wrong?
4. Who is grieving that you have been avoiding because you do not know what to say?
5. Whose grave clothes could you help remove, and who is helping with yours?

House of Worship

Three Friends, Three Kinds of Worship, and One Table

John 12:1–11

Six days before the Passover, in a house in Bethany, one sister serves, another pours out perfume, and their brother simply sits alive at the table, and no one criticizes anyone else's way of honoring Jesus.

i. Luke 10 or John 12

John 12:1–3

> So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.
> John 12:2, ESV

Look at what each one is doing. Martha is serving. Mary is at His feet. Lazarus is reclining, living his new life. It is the same scene as Luke 10, with one difference. There, Martha was angry that Mary was not helping. Here, Martha is again the only one serving, and she does not mind.

All three are worshiping, and it looks different for each. That was the problem in Luke 10: Martha wanted Mary's worship to look like her own. The church does this constantly. We inspect each other's worship against our preferences. That person dances. That person just stands there. That person only serves. That gathering is too wild, or too tame. And when others do not measure up, we look down on them or get angry.

In John 12 everyone is saying the same thing, that Jesus is worthy, and saying it differently. They are united by the object of their worship, not the method. No one is entitled to think their worship is more mature than another Christian's.

> *Most Christians live in Luke 10, but need to live in John 12.*

ii. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

John 12:3–8

> Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
> John 12:3, ESV

Mary gives affection and time. Her love is tangible, a feeling and not only a concept. Martha gives service and, very likely, the gift itself. The perfume was worth three hundred denarii. Two unmarried women do not save that. It was probably their inheritance, and the house is called Martha's. Yet when her sister pours it out, Martha does not object.

Lazarus gives nothing but his life. He is resting, and his being alive is the testimony. Every breath is a response to the voice that called him out.

> *Some are saying it with their song, and some with their serving.*

Background

John marks his story by the feasts, and this is the last one. In six days Jesus will be arrested.

Passover remembered the night in Egypt when a spotless lamb was killed and its blood put on the doorposts, so that judgment passed over the house. Everything about it points to Him.

He spends His final week with friends. This is the third time we meet this family: Luke 10, where Martha resents Mary, then the tomb in John 11, and now this dinner.

Words to Know

Nard

νάρδος · *nardos*

A costly perfumed oil imported from the east. A pound of it was worth about a year's wages.

Anointed

ἀλείφω · *aleiphō*

To rub with oil. An act of honor, and here a preparation for burial.

Served

διακονέω · *diakoneō*

To wait at table. The same word Luke uses of Martha, without the complaint.

Fragrance

ὀσμή · *osmē*

A scent. John remembers that it filled the whole house.

iii. The Complete Worshiper

ROMANS 12:1

> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
> ROMANS 12:1, ESV

This is a picture of the church, and it is also a picture of the Christian. The goal is not to choose one of the three and call it your type. Most of us major in one form of worship, minor in another, and ignore the third. Maturity is all three.

So be like Mary. Have time at home when He gets your whole attention, in prayer and in His Word, and let yourself feel something for Him. Be like Martha. Serve the body you belong to, because to serve His body is to serve Him, and give sacrificially, as one who stewards all of it rather than tithing a tenth of what is yours. And be like Lazarus. Live what you say you believe.

> *We often major, minor, and ignore.*

Three Ways to Worship

- Mary *affection and time*
- Martha *serving and giving*
- Lazarus *living and resting*

Judas objects that the money should have gone to the poor. John tells us he did not care about the poor. Criticism of someone else's worship is not always what it claims to be.

Questions for Reflection

1. Whose way of worshiping do you quietly judge? What standard are you using?
2. Which do you major in: affection, service, or simply living it?
3. Which one do you ignore?
4. When did Jesus last have your undivided attention?
5. What would costly giving look like for you, the kind others might call a waste?

The Triumphal Entry

A King on a Donkey, a Seed in the Ground, and the Judgment of the World

John 12:12–50

The crowd welcomes Jesus as the king who will give them what they want, and He answers by telling them He is about to die, because the cross is at once the world's salvation and its judgment.

i. Hosanna

John 12:12–19

> So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"
>
> John 12:13, ESV

We sing hosanna as praise, but it is a cry. It means save now, we beg You. And the palms show what kind of saving they have in mind. This is the moment, they think, of victory for the nation over its oppressors.

So as long as Jesus looks ready to give them everything they ever wanted, they are glad to call Him King. They have misunderstood salvation. And when He turns out not to be what they ordered, hosanna becomes crucify Him.

> *They are happy to declare Him King, until He refuses to bend to their will.*

ii. Unless a Grain of Wheat Dies

John 12:20–36

> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.
>
> John 12:24, ESV

No death, no fruit. And then He says that whoever serves Him must follow Him. That is more than following His teachings, though it includes them. It is walking where He walks: suffering with Him, and serving people who can give nothing back. Sometimes it looks like turning over tables and sometimes like staying silent. Sometimes it is being mislabeled and misunderstood with Him. It is always death to our own will.

His soul is troubled, and He prays, Father, glorify Your name. A voice answers from heaven, and some say it thundered. Everyone hears it. Not everyone discerns it. Hearing God speak does not guarantee you know what He said.

Then He tells them He will be lifted up, and the crowd that believed because of Lazarus stops believing. Misunderstand the ways of God, and when He works in a way you do not like, you are as likely as anyone to move from hosanna to crucify Him. That is why theology matters.

> *The two biggest threats to your faith are sin and ignorance.*

Background

Word about Lazarus has spread. The crowd coming to Jerusalem for the feast goes out to meet Jesus because of that sign.

They wave palm branches, a symbol of victory and national strength since the Maccabean revolt, and they shout hosanna from Psalm 118.

Jesus rides in on a young donkey, as Zechariah 9 said the king would. A king on a donkey came in peace. Revelation pictures His return on a horse.

Words to Know

Hosanna

ὡσαννά · *hōsanna*

From the Hebrew for save now. A plea before it is a word of praise.

Grain

κόκκος · *kokkos*

A single seed. Alone until it is buried, and fruitful only after.

Lifted Up

ὑψόω · *hypsoō*

To raise high or exalt. John uses one word for the cross and for the glory.

Ruler

ἄρχων · *archōn*

A prince or chief. Jesus' title for Satan, who is cast out at the cross.

iii. The Judgment of This World

JOHN 12:31–50

> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.
> JOHN 12:31–32, ESV

He says He came to save the world, not to judge it. But to say the world needs saving is already a verdict on it. The cross brings the judgment of the last day into the middle of history: rendered now, carried out in full later.

It judges the world, the whole organized system of rebellion. Religious leaders reject their Messiah, the state executes the Son of God, and the crowd chooses darkness. Left to ourselves, we crucify glory. It judges sin, which is not overlooked at the cross but condemned there, in Christ, in our place. And it judges Satan. Before the cross he accuses with legal standing. After it, the record of debt has been nailed up and canceled. He still tempts and deceives, but he cannot prosecute.

Pilate questions Him, the council condemns Him, and the crowd mocks Him. The world thinks it is judging Jesus.

> *The cross is the eviction notice.*

What the Cross Judges

- The world *its systems exposed*
- Sin *condemned in Christ*
- Satan *the accuser loses his case*

The proof that his grip is broken is the gospel going to every nation. Men and women from every tribe believe. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

Questions for Reflection

1. When you ask God to save you, what are you usually asking Him to save you from?
2. What would have to happen for your hosanna to turn?
3. What in you needs to fall into the ground and die before there is fruit?
4. Is there something God has said that you heard only as thunder?
5. Which accusation do you keep answering that the cross has already settled?

Loving Your Enemies

A Basin, a Towel, and a Betrayer at the Table

John 13:1–30

On His last night, knowing exactly who is about to betray Him, Jesus kneels and washes that man's feet with the rest, and shows what it means to love an enemy.

i. The Real War

John 13:1–2

> During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.
>
> John 13:2–4, ESV

John is not blaming Satan for Judas's sin. The language is influence, not force. Satan does not make anyone sin, and he does not need to plant something new. He works with what is already there. James says each person is tempted when he is lured by his own desire.

So two things are true. We do not get to blame the devil for our sin. And there is a real spiritual battle going on behind what we can see, around us and within us. A mature believer takes part in it: fasting, praying, holding to Scripture, and staying planted among God's people. Later, when Judas takes the bread, John says Satan entered him. The thought has become a choice.

> *We don't get to blame the devil for our sin.*

ii. Bathed and Washed

John 13:3–11

> Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."
>
> John 13:10, ESV

This is the kind of God we serve. Everyone expected a conquering king, and He takes the place of a household servant. At the last meal with His friends, when He might have rested before the storm, He gets His hands dirty.

And He explains it. When you are born again you have been bathed. The decisive cleansing has happened. But you walk through a world that is not clean and you pick things up. You will sin and be sinned against. The remedy is not to be bathed again. You do not stop being born again because you failed. You need your feet washed, which is confession and restored fellowship. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive.

> *You don't need to be bathed again. You just need your feet washed.*

Background

The pace of the book changes here. The first eleven chapters cover about three years. Chapters thirteen through seventeen cover one evening.

It is the night before the cross. Jesus spends it with His friends, sharing a meal, preparing them for what is coming, and praying for them.

Read it with a question in mind. If you had one day left, who would you spend it with, what would you say, and what would no longer seem urgent?

Words to Know

To the End

εἰς τέλος · *eis telos*

To the finish, and to the fullest extent. Both meanings are in view.

Bathed

λούω · *louō*

To wash the whole body. The once for all cleansing of the new birth.

Wash

νίπτω · *niptō*

To wash a part, such as hands or feet. The repeated cleansing a believer still needs.

Betray

παραδίδωμι · *paradidōmi*

To hand over. Used of Judas, and elsewhere of the Father giving up the Son.

iii. Loving Judas

JOHN 13:18–30

> So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.
> JOHN 13:30, ESV

Jesus knew Judas would betray Him and served him anyway. He knew Judas was an enemy and welcomed him. Christians love their enemies because Jesus both taught it and did it, and the truest worship is imitation.

Two cautions about who counts. You decide who is an enemy, not them. And people are almost never the real enemy, since we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Then there are three biblical ways to love one. You can serve them, as Joseph, Daniel, and Jesus did. You can leave them, as Paul and Barnabas parted without making each other the villain. Or, where a person is unsafe and will not change, you can set a boundary, as David finally fled from Saul.

None of the three is more spiritual than the others. Love is not defined by access. It is a heart that refuses revenge, wants the other's good, and leaves justice with God.

> *Celebrate what you can, condemn what you must, forgive, and let go.*

Three Ways to Love an Enemy

- Serve them *create proximity*
- Leave them *create distance*
- Block them *create boundaries*

No one at the table suspected Judas, even when Jesus handed him the bread. If you were once deceived by someone who looked the part, you are in good company. That is what sheep's clothing is for.

Questions for Reflection

1. If this were your last day, what would stop mattering? Why does it matter now?
2. Where have you blamed the enemy for something that began with your own desire?
3. Do you treat every failure as if you needed to be saved again?
4. Who comes to mind as an enemy? Which of the three responses fits?
5. Can you refuse revenge and want their good, whatever distance is wise?

Loving the Brethren

A New Commandment and the Difference Between Judas and Peter

John 13:31–38

With the betrayer gone, Jesus gives the ones who remain a command that raises the standard of love from how you treat yourself to how He has treated you.

i. A New Commandment

John 13:31–35

> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
> John 13:34–35, ESV

Loving your neighbor as yourself is the golden rule. This goes far beyond it. Both the subject and the standard have changed. The subject is one another, the fellow believer. The standard is no longer as you love yourself, which would be too cheap, but as I have loved you.

Feel the weight of that. Jesus cares so much about the Christian next to you that He requires you to love them the way He loved you. To love any believer in a lesser way is to go against the heart of God.

> *Not as you love yourself. That would be too cheap.*

ii. Not Every Wound Is From a Judas

John 13:36–38

> Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."
> John 13:38, ESV

When you think of your enemies, you may think of Christians. If so, reconsider the category. It is no accident that Peter's denial is recorded beside Judas's betrayal. Both abandon Jesus and both hurt Him. But one is an enemy and the other is immature. One is a wolf and the other is weak. One hates Jesus and the other loves Him.

What we often do is take someone who belongs with Peter and file them under Judas. To be sure, the pain a Christian causes can be the worst kind, because they knew better and were supposed to represent Him. For some it came from a pastor who abused an authority he never understood. But our experience with people cannot overrule the Word of God.

> *Not everyone who hurts you is a Judas. Sometimes they are a Peter.*

Background

Judas has left the room. Jesus is alone with His own, and the first thing He gives them is a commandment.

They already knew two. Love God with everything, and love your neighbor as yourself. Both come from the Old Testament, and Jesus had refused to separate them.

What He says now is different, and it is immediately followed by Peter promising to die for Him and being told he will deny Him three times before morning.

Words to Know

New
καινός · *kainos*
New in kind, not merely recent. A command of a different quality.

Commandment
ἐντολή · *entolē*
An order or charge. Not a suggestion offered to the especially devoted.

Love
ἀγαπάω · *agapaō*
To love by choice and action, seeking another's good at cost to yourself.

Disciple
μαθητής · *mathētēs*
A learner, an apprentice. Recognized, Jesus says, by this one mark.

iii. What This Love Is Tied To

1 John 3:14

> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.
> 1 John 3:14, ESV

It is tied to the gospel. As I have loved you assumes you know how much that is, and we struggle to love other believers when we forget how much we have been forgiven. It is tied to our love for Jesus. Christ is the head and the church is His body, and you cannot love the head and hate the body. I love Jesus but not the church is a contradiction.

It is tied to assurance, since John writes that we know we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. And it is tied to our witness, because this is how the world will know.

So how do you love a Peter? With your words, which should be honoring, honest, and humble. With your heart, wanting for them what Christ wants and being quick to forgive. And without demanding justice now. For Peter, justice was already carried out at the cross.

> *You can't love the head and hate the body.*

Judas and Peter

- An enemy *immature*
- Maligned the truth *misunderstood it*
- Decisively evil *merely a coward*
- A wolf *weak*
- Hated Jesus *loved Jesus*

To love a brother or sister is to seek their ultimate good in Christ, from a posture of mercy in your heart, truth in your words, and wisdom in your boundaries.

Questions for Reflection

1. How has Jesus loved you? Be specific. That is the standard.
2. Which believer have you filed as a Judas who may be a Peter?
3. Have you let a painful experience with Christians overrule what Christ commands?
4. Do you say you love Jesus while holding His church at arm's length?
5. Toward that person, do you want justice or mercy?

The Illusion of Strength, the Reality of Hope

Peter's Pain, Peter's Pride, and a Place Being Prepared

John 13:36–14:4

Peter hears that Jesus is leaving and answers with a promise he cannot keep, and Jesus responds first with the truth about Peter and then with a promise of His own.

i. Peter's Pain

John 13:36

> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward."
> John 13:36, ESV

Jesus has just given a new commandment, and Peter is still on the sentence before it. He is so caught up in the bad news that he cannot hear the instruction.

Sit in it with him. This is his best friend, his teacher, and his God. When no one would give Peter the time of day, Jesus did. He was not noble or influential, and Jesus chose him. Peter has spent the most important years of his life following this man, and now he is told he cannot follow where He is going. He has no idea yet that the Spirit will come and that Jesus will be with him always. All he knows is that the future he left everything for is about to break.

Read his denial with that in view. It is when the sand castle is knocked down that you find out who you are.

> *Peter is so caught up in the bad news that he can't hear the instruction.*

ii. Peter's Overconfidence

John 13:37–38

> Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."
> John 13:37, ESV

His answer to grief is pride. He explains to Jesus that He has underestimated the great Simon Peter. He has cast out demons and walked into Jerusalem beside Jesus while crowds waved palms, and he has bought the lie of himself. He let his success, his zeal, and his reputation muddy the water on who he really was.

Scripture warns against it constantly. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Peter spent years opposing the pride of the Pharisees and did not notice his own. They were proud of their knowledge. He was proud of his courage and his closeness to Jesus.

Jesus loves him too much to leave him there, so He tells him the truth. And pride makes you do foolish things to prop up the illusion. Hours later Peter will swing a sword at a man's head. We are meant to walk with a limp, not a strut.

> *He is the hand, and we are the glove.*

Background

A useful way to read the Gospels is to follow one person's story from beginning to end, and then read the letters that person wrote. Themes carry over. This study follows Peter.

Jesus has just said He is going away and has given the new commandment. Peter does not respond to the commandment at all.

What he does say leads to one of the most painful predictions in the Gospels, and then, without a pause, to one of the most comforting promises.

Words to Know

Follow

ἀκολουθέω · *akoloutheō*

To go behind, to accompany. The word of Peter's first call, and of his last.

Deny

ἀρνέομαι · *arneomai*

To disown, to say you have no connection. What Peter swears he would never do.

Troubled

ταράσσω · *tarassō*

To stir up, as water is stirred. Used of Jesus' own soul in the chapters before.

Rooms

μονή · *monē*

A dwelling, a place to stay. From the verb for abiding that runs through this Gospel.

iii. My Father's House

JOHN 14:1–4

> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
> JOHN 14:2–3, ESV

Having told Peter the worst about himself, Jesus says, let not your hearts be troubled. The picture is a wedding. A price was paid for the bride, and the couple were counted as married before they lived together. The groom then went to add a place onto his father's house, and when it was ready he came back for her.

Christ paid the price at the cross. The church is now betrothed to Him. He has gone to prepare the place, and He will return for His bride. That is where the Christian life ends: dwelling with God, a people who have freely chosen Him as He freely chose them.

But do not wait for that day to be with Him. He wants your company in the ordinary things of an ordinary week.

> *He wants fellowship and communion with you now.*

The Wedding Behind the Promise

- A price is paid *the cross*
- The couple is betrothed *the church now*
- The groom prepares a place *the Father's house*
- He returns for his bride *His coming*
- The feast begins *Revelation 19:9*

Every good thing we do, every wrong we refrain from, every gift we have, and every person we help is God working through us. We are not strong. We are weak, and that is not bad news.

Questions for Reflection

1. What instruction might you be missing because you are fixed on bad news?
2. When has a future you were counting on fallen apart? What did it reveal?
3. Where are you most confident in your own strength or devotion?
4. What have you done to prop up an image of yourself?
5. How would this week change if you treated His company as available now?

I Am the Way

One Road, a Clear Answer, and What It Means to Ask in His Name

John 14:5–14

Thomas asks for directions and Jesus gives him a Person, which tells us that the goal of the Christian life is not a place but the Father, and that there is only one road to Him.

i. The Way to the Father

John 14:5–6

> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
> John 14:6, ESV

We usually read this as Jesus being the only way to heaven. That is not wrong, but it is incomplete. He says no one comes to the Father. The culmination of the Christian life is not reaching a destination. It is reaching a Person. You do not want heaven because it is pleasant. You want it because it is the family home. Some believers are reconciled to the Father in their theology and not in practice.

And if Jesus is the only way, nothing else is. Not morality, not religious activity, not sincerity, not any other teacher or path to enlightenment. None of them deals with the actual problem, which is sin. Sin requires atonement, and Jesus alone offers it. He does not merely show the way to God. He is the one mediator who gives access.

> *It isn't to be in heaven. It's to be with the Father.*

ii. Clear on Purpose

John 14:7–11

> Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
> John 14:9, ESV

Notice how He says it. He does not call Himself one path among many, or the best one. Our culture values ambiguity and hears clear language as hostile, so we hedge and leave people to interpret us. But a doctor who knows the cure and will not say it plainly lets people die. Say what you mean and mean what you say, with honesty, honor, and humility.

Philip then asks for a direct revelation of God, and Jesus is almost surprised. He is not merely representing God. He is revealing Him perfectly. Look at Jesus and you see God's holiness, compassion, justice, mercy, and joy. And if the claim is hard to accept, He says, look at the works. John calls them signs because they point to who He is.

> *Clarity is not cruelty. Clarity is kindness.*

Background

Jesus has told the disciples He is going to prepare a place and that they know the way. Thomas says what the rest are thinking: they do not even know where He is going.

The answer is the best known of the seven I am statements, and one of the least ambiguous sentences Jesus ever spoke.

Philip follows with a request to see the Father, and Jesus closes with two promises that have been badly misused: greater works, and asking in His name.

Words to Know

Way
ὁδός · *hodos*
A road or path that leads somewhere. The phrase is emphatic: I myself am the way.

Mediator
μεσίτης · *mesitēs*
A go-between who reconciles two parties. Paul says there is one.

Greater
μείζων · *meizōn*
Larger in extent or magnitude. Greater in reach, not more spectacular.

Name
ὄνομα · *onoma*
A person's authority and character. To act in a name is to act on that person's behalf.

iii. Greater Works, and Asking in His Name

John 14:12–14

> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
>
> John 14:12–13, ESV

This verse has been used to promise believers more spectacular miracles than Jesus performed. Be honest about that. He turned water into wine, stilled storms, fed thousands, and raised the dead. No one has surpassed it. Two questions clear up most confusion: what does the word mean, and how has the church understood it? Greater here is greater in scope. In His earthly ministry Jesus stayed within one small region. After He goes to the Father, the gospel goes to the world.

The promise about prayer is misused the same way, as a blank check for health, money, and success. To act in someone's name was to act with their authority and approval. God condemned prophets who spoke lies in His name. So praying in Jesus' name is praying in line with His will, mission, and character. John says it himself later: if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes wait, and sometimes no.

> *"In my name" is not a magic phrase.*

Roads That Do Not Reach Him

- Morality *does not atone*
- Religious activity *does not atone*
- Sincerity *can be sincerely wrong*
- Self-improvement *does not atone*
- Any other name *1 Timothy 2:5*

If you have been standing on the promise of prayer for something that has not come, and were told the problem was your faith, hear this. It was never about the amount of your faith. It is about His will.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you want heaven mostly as a place, or as the place where the Father is?
2. Which other road do you quietly rely on to feel right with God?
3. Where are you being vague when clarity would be the kinder thing?
4. What do you learn about the Father by looking at how Jesus treats people?
5. What would change in your prayers if they were shaped by His priorities?

The Introduction of the Holy Spirit

Another Helper, the Spirit of Truth, and a New Dwelling Place

John 14:15–31

Jesus is leaving, and He promises His friends that they will not be left alone, in the first clear teaching He gives on who the Holy Spirit is and why He comes.

i. What They Already Believed

Ezekiel 36:27

> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.
> Ezekiel 36:27, ESV

The disciples already had a framework. In their Scriptures the Spirit of the Lord was the presence and power of God. He came upon a select few to equip them for a task, as with Samson and Saul, and He could depart, as He did from Saul. The prophets spoke of being filled with Him.

There were also promises: Joel's word that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and the new covenant promise to put His Spirit within His people. But those belonged, in their minds, to the end of the age. So their picture was of a Spirit given temporarily, selectively, and for a job, not clearly a distinct Person, and not living in all of God's people. They will have to set that aside to hear what Jesus says next.

> *The Spirit hasn't been absent, but He hasn't been explained.*

ii. Another Helper

John 14:15–18

> If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.
> John 14:15–17, ESV

Another means another of the same kind. Jesus is leaving, and He is sending a Helper who is like Him. And notice what the help is for. The context is keeping His commandments, a phrase He repeats five times in this address, and the commandment He has just given is to love one another as He has loved them. The Spirit is introduced as the one who helps you do that.

He will also be with you forever. This is not the old pattern of a temporary gift for a task. He stays.

> *You won't be alone. I will not leave you as orphans.*

Background

Until now in John the Spirit has been mentioned but not explained. This is where that changes.

It helps to set aside what you think you know. Churches tend either to emphasize the Spirit or to avoid Him, and both habits produce conclusions that Scripture does not.

Notice what is absent. In the two chapters that follow there is no reference to signs and wonders. Those come later. Jesus begins with the foundation.

Words to Know

Helper

παράκλητος · *paraklētos*

One called alongside. Advocate, counselor, comforter. No single English word covers it.

Another

ἄλλος · *allos*

Another of the same kind. The Spirit is the sort of helper Jesus Himself has been.

Dwells

μένω · *menō*

To remain or abide. He does not visit. He stays.

Orphans

ὀρφανός · *orphanos*

The bereaved, those left without a parent. What Jesus promises they will not be.

iii. The Spirit of Truth, in You

JOHN 14:17–31

> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.
> JOHN 14:26, ESV

His second title is the Spirit of truth. Jesus could have said the Spirit of power, and later He will. He starts with truth because that is the governing thought. Begin with experiences of power instead, and you will end up abusing it, mismanaging it, and misleading people with it. One warning sign is a person who operates in every gift and is not honest. The disciples are about to face confusion, lies, and competing voices, and His answer to all of it is the Spirit of truth.

And He will be in you. They knew God's presence as dwelling in the temple. Now they are told they will be the temple. That is true of every believer in every tradition. No group has a corner on Him.

Some of us say we refuse to put the Spirit in a box. But it is possible to take Him out of a box and put Him in a cage, by making room for Him to do only the things that impress us.

> *An attraction to see rather than an authority to submit to.*

Then and Now

- Given for a time *with you forever*
- Given to a few *to every believer*
- Given for a task *to help you love*
- Power and presence *a Person*
- In the temple *in you*

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. He says it on the night of His arrest, to men who are about to scatter. It does not depend on the circumstances.

Questions for Reflection

1. What did your background teach you about the Holy Spirit, by emphasis or by silence?
2. Do you think of the Spirit first as power or first as truth? What follows from that?
3. Where do you need His help to love another believer?
4. Is there an area where you have gifts without honesty?
5. What does it mean for an ordinary day that He dwells in you and stays?

The Dwelling Place of God

From Eden to the Temple to You

John 14:17, 26

When Jesus says the Spirit will be in you, He is using the language of the temple, and that makes every believer both the place where God lives and the priest responsible for it.

i. Priests and Presence

Exodus 25:8

> And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.
> Exodus 25:8, ESV

In the Old Testament God gave His people a series of dwelling places. First came the tabernacle of Moses, a tent that could be carried through the wilderness. David pitched a tent for the ark in Jerusalem. Solomon built the temple his father had planned, and Babylon destroyed it. After the exile it was rebuilt under Zerubbabel, later expanded by Herod, and that is the temple Jesus knew.

All of them had the same purpose. They were a place on earth where God would live with His people, where they could come near and where atonement was made. And all of them had priests, who had two duties. They ministered, caring for the place of God's presence. And they guarded, watching what came in, so that nothing unclean entered.

> *They had priests, and they had presence.*

ii. The First Temple

Genesis 2:15

> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
> Genesis 2:15, ESV

Now go back before any of those buildings. God plants a garden, places the man in it, and walks with him there. The two verbs in that verse, to work and to keep, are the same pair used in Numbers for the duties of the priests: to serve and to guard. G. K. Beale, in The Temple and the Church's Mission, argues that Eden was the first sanctuary and that the later temples were modeled on it.

If so, Adam and Eve were not only the first people. They were the first priests, set in the place where God lived with humanity, to keep fellowship with Him and to guard it from what did not belong. And guard it from what? From the one who came in from outside with a lie.

> *Adam didn't guard the dwelling place of God.*

Background

Jesus has called the Spirit the Helper and the Spirit of truth. Then He adds a phrase the disciples could not have heard lightly: He dwells with you and will be in you.

To feel the weight of it you have to know where God had lived until then. So this study goes back through the temple, and behind the temple to the garden.

Jesus has not yet mentioned gifts or power. He is still laying the foundation, and this part of it is about responsibility.

Words to Know

Temple
ναός · *naos*
The sanctuary itself, the inner dwelling, as distinct from the whole temple grounds.

Dwells
οἰκέω · *oikeō*
To live in a house. Paul's word for what the Spirit does in the believer.

Priesthood
ἱεράτευμα · *hierateuma*
A body of priests. Peter applies it to all of God's people together.

Grieve
λυπέω · *lypeō*
To cause sorrow. Only a person can be grieved, and only by someone near.

iii. You Are the Temple, and the Priest

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
> 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, ESV

So hear what Jesus is saying. The presence of God is moving from a room in a building to a people. Peter calls believers living stones being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. Paul asks the Corinthians whether they know they are God's temple. Your body is the temple and you are the priest, and your job is to do what Adam did not: to minister and to guard.

That is why sin is more than rule breaking. It defiles the place where God lives, and Paul says it grieves the Spirit. He is not only watching you. He is in you. Start with gifts and experiences and skip this, and you become a Christian whose character cannot carry the weight of the gifting.

And you are not left to manage it alone. The Helper will teach you and bring to mind what Jesus said. In a moment of temptation, when His words surface, that is the Spirit. Follow the leading.

> *What I engage with, He engages with.*

Where God Has Dwelt

- The garden *Genesis 2*
- The tabernacle *Exodus 40*
- Solomon's temple *1 Kings 8*
- The second temple *Ezra 6*
- His people *1 Corinthians 3:16*

There is one thing you can name and claim with confidence. You can ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember the Word of God and to teach you His ways, and expect that He will.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does it change your view of your body and mind to call them a temple?
2. What have you allowed in that a priest would have turned away at the door?
3. What does ministering to God's presence look like on an ordinary day?
4. When has a word of Jesus come to mind at the moment you needed it? What did you do?
5. Is there an area where your gifts have outgrown your character?

The True Vine

Why Fruit Matters More Than Gifts, and How It Grows

John 15:1–17

Jesus calls Himself the vine and His people the branches, and says the Father is glorified by one thing above all others, which is that we bear much fruit.

i. Gifts and Fruit

Galatians 5:22–23

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
> Galatians 5:22–23, ESV

The most important thing to measure in your life is your fruit. Not income, influence, or ability. We tend to think the Spirit-filled person is the one with a striking gift, rather than the one who has peace in tragedy and patience when wronged. The church holds conferences on prophecy. It is hard to think of one on gentleness.

So we judge maturity by gifting. God used me, therefore God approves of me. Paul says otherwise: tongues, prophecy, and mountain-moving faith without love amount to nothing. Jesus says many will tell Him they prophesied and worked miracles, and He will not know them. He says you will know a false prophet by fruit, not by gifts.

Gifts can be seen from a distance. Fruit cannot. Like the fig tree in Mark 11, a life can be full of leaves and have nothing on it up close.

> *Gifts are deceptive, fruit is telling.*

ii. Abide in Me

John 15:1–5

> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
> John 15:4–5, ESV

The vine feeds the branches and holds them together. So often we detach ourselves and then try to produce fruit, which is foolish. How do you abide? Three ways.

Unveiled communion: come to Him honestly, with confession and truth. Uninterrupted fellowship: stay with Him through the day, turning your inner conversation toward Him. Unwavering assembly: belong to a church, meaning an actual gathering of believers around the Word, prayer, and the table, under the care of qualified elders. To be in Jesus is to be in His body. Hebrews tells us not to neglect meeting together.

> *The branch has one job. Stay connected to the vine.*

Background

Still on the last night, Jesus adds another stone to the foundation of what His followers should understand about life in the Spirit.

The picture is a vineyard. He is the vine, the Father is the vinedresser, the disciples are the branches, and the fruit is what the Spirit produces in them.

Paul later uses the same word and lists what it is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Words to Know

Vine

ἄμπελος · *ampelos*

A grapevine. In the Old Testament a picture of Israel. Jesus calls Himself the true one.

Vinedresser

γεωργός · *geōrgos*

A farmer, one who works the ground. The Father tends each branch personally.

Prunes

καθαίρω · *kathairō*

To clean or clear away. The same root as clean in the next verse.

Fruit

καρπός · *karpos*

What a living plant produces by nature. It cannot be manufactured, only grown.

iii. Pruned to Bear More

John 15:2, 6–17

> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.
> John 15:8, ESV

Jesus speaks of two kinds of branch. One bears nothing and is taken away, which shows it was never truly joined to the vine. The other bears fruit and is pruned so that it bears more. In practice, you learn to love well, and then God in His sovereignty allows a harder person into your life.

The promise that follows, ask whatever you wish, is again not a blank check. It has two conditions: if you abide in Me, and if My words abide in you. Those two ensure you are asking for what He wants rather than what you want.

And notice what glorifies the Father. Not that you preach well, or prophesy, or give your life to missions. That you bear much fruit. Then He restates the commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

> *If you do bear fruit you will be pruned, which feels an awful lot like being cut off.*

Three Ways to Abide

- Unveiled communion *come honestly*
- Uninterrupted fellowship *pray without ceasing*
- Unwavering assembly *Hebrews 10:25*

Take the nine one at a time and ask how you are doing. Love, including enemies. Joy in pain. Peace when it is hard. Patience at home. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control.

Questions for Reflection

1. By what do you usually measure your own spiritual health?
2. Which of the nine is most evident in you? Which is least?
3. Who is close enough to you to see your fruit and not only your gifts?
4. Which of the three ways of abiding is weakest for you right now?
5. Is there something in your life that feels like being cut off and may be pruning?

If They Persecuted Me

The World's Hatred, the Religious Hand, and the Witness of the Spirit

John 15:18–16:4

Having told His friends to love one another, Jesus tells them plainly that they will be hated, and that the hatred will come from people convinced they are serving God.

i. A Servant and His Master

John 15:18–25

> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.
> John 15:20, ESV

Jesus does not say if. He says the world hated Him first, and that His followers should expect the same for the same reason: they no longer belong to it. He chose them out of it.

And He says it is without excuse. He came, He spoke, and He did works no one else had done. They saw, and they hated both Him and His Father. He quotes the Psalms: they hated me without a cause. So when it comes to you, it is not evidence that something has gone wrong. It is what happens to a servant whose master was treated this way.

> *Persecution in this passage is not primarily secular. It is religious.*

ii. The Religious Hand

John 16:1–3

> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.
> John 16:2, ESV

Look at who He names. The synagogue. People who believe that in opposing you they are worshiping. It is persecution rooted in spiritual blindness, and Jesus gives the cause: they have not known the Father, nor Me.

It was the same with Him. The Pharisees, the chief priests, and the council handed Him over, and for three reasons. He exposed them for who they were. He did not submit to their authority. And He redefined righteousness as something found in Him rather than earned by their behavior.

That last one is still the offense. Any religious system that depends on its own performance will resent a righteousness it cannot take credit for.

> *That is not Rome. That is not pagans. That is the religious community.*

Background

The tone turns. Up to this point on the last night Jesus has spoken of love, of abiding, and of fruit.

Now He prepares the disciples for what following Him will cost. He does it in advance and on purpose, so that when it comes they will remember that He said so.

He has already been living it. The opposition to Him did not come from Rome or from pagans. It came from the leaders of His own people.

Words to Know

Hate
μισέω · *miseō*
To detest, to treat as an enemy. Used seven times in these few verses.

Persecute
διώκω · *diōkō*
To pursue or hunt down. The same word describes what Saul did before he became Paul.

Put Out of the Synagogue
ἀποσυνάγωγος · *aposynagōgos*
Expelled from the community. It already happened to the man born blind.

Service
λατρεία · *latreia*
An act of worship. What the persecutor believes he is offering.

iii. So That You Will Not Fall Away

JOHN 15:26–16:4

> But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.
> JOHN 15:26–27, ESV

Between the two warnings Jesus places a promise. The Helper will come and will bear witness about Him, and so will they. The answer to hatred is not retreat. It is testimony, carried by the Spirit of truth through people who have been with Jesus.

Then He says why He is telling them. I have said all these things to keep you from falling away. Suffering that takes you by surprise can shake your faith. Suffering you were told to expect can confirm it.

There is a harder application too. He exposed the religious leaders, would not bow to their authority, and placed righteousness in Himself. He means to do the same with us.

> *Jesus still does this today. We must allow Him to do this with us.*

Why They Handed Him Over

- He exposed them *for who they were*
- He would not submit *to their authority*
- He redefined righteousness *found in Him*

The same Jesus who was opposed by the religious does this to religious people now. The question is whether we will resist it as they did, or let Him.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you expect following Jesus to cost you anything with other people?
2. Have you been opposed by religious people for doing what was right?
3. Have you ever opposed someone and felt you were serving God by it?
4. Which of the three reasons would be most likely to offend you?
5. What has Jesus told you in advance that should keep you steady now?

The Most Important Prayer Ever Prayed

What Jesus Said Last, and What He Asked the Father For

John 16:16–17:26

Jesus finishes teaching His friends and turns to pray for them, and in that prayer He asks the Father for the very things He has just spent the evening telling them to do.

i. His Last Message

John 16:16–24

> Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.
> John 16:24, ESV

Step back and look at the whole evening. Jesus returns to prayer three times, in chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. Each time it sits beside two other themes, so that the entire address moves in a cycle: love one another, pray in My name, rely on the Holy Spirit, and then around again.

That is His last message. Love one another, which means you do not walk away from each other and you do not become the reason someone else does. Pray in His name, asking according to His will and His nature, and expect to be answered. And depend on the Spirit, who will guide you into all the truth.

> *Don't bail. Don't let the other bail.*

ii. The Father Himself Loves You

John 16:25–33

> In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.
> John 16:26–27, ESV

Many Christians live disconnected from this. They can accept that Jesus loves them and still doubt that the Father does, because they cannot see why He would. We get it wrong more than we get it right. We grow dull, get distracted, and are often ungrateful. What is there to love?

The verse answers it. Because you have loved Me and have believed. He does not love you for what you offer, for getting it right, or because you are gifted or even fruitful. You love the one He loves, and you trust Him.

Earlier Jesus told them that He loves them, why, and how much: greater love has no one than this. The same three are true of the Father. He loves you. Why? Because you love His Son. How much is answered in the prayer.

> *You love and trust Jesus. That's your only redeemable quality.*

Background

This is the end of the long conversation on the last night. Jesus tells the disciples that in a little while they will not see Him, and then in a little while they will.

Their sorrow, He says, will turn to joy the way labor turns to birth. They will be scattered, and He will not be alone, because the Father is with Him.

Then He lifts His eyes and prays. It is the longest prayer of Jesus we have, and it reaches past the men in the room to everyone who would believe through their word.

Words to Know

Tribulation
θλῖψις · *thlipsis*
Pressure, a crushing. What Jesus promises in the world, in the same breath as peace.

Eternal Life
ζωὴ αἰώνιος · *zōē aiōnios*
Life of the age to come. Jesus defines it as knowing the Father and the Son.

Keep
τηρέω · *tēreō*
To guard or watch over. What Jesus did for them, and now asks the Father to do.

Sanctify
ἁγιάζω · *hagiazō*
To set apart as holy. It happens, He says, in the truth, which is the Word.

iii. He Prayed What He Taught

JOHN 17:1–26

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
> JOHN 17:20–21, ESV

Having taught it all, He prays it all. He asks that we would know Him, be kept, be guarded from the evil one, have His joy in full, and be made holy by the truth. More than anything else He asks, four times, that we would be one.

And the standard for that unity is the Trinity. So look at how Father, Son, and Spirit relate. Each seeks the glory of the others. They withhold nothing from one another. They work toward the same end, and the Son defers to the Father's will. If we do not understand how God is one, we will not understand how the church is meant to be.

Then the answer to how much. He prays that the world would know that the Father has loved them even as He loved the Son. That is the measure. And His final request is that we would be with Him where He is.

> *We want to be the answer to His prayer.*

What He Asks for Us

- To know Him *17:3*
- To be kept in His name *17:11*
- To be one *17:11, 21–23*
- To have His joy *17:13*
- To be guarded from the evil one *17:15*
- To be made holy by the truth *17:17*
- To be with Him *17:24*

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. The peace He offers is in Him, not in the absence of trouble.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of the three is weakest in your life: loving, praying, or relying on the Spirit?
2. Do you believe the Father loves you, or only that Jesus does?
3. What do you assume you need to offer before God is pleased with you?
4. How do you treat other believers compared with how Father, Son, and Spirit treat each other?
5. Which of His requests would you most like to see answered in you?

The King Who Surrendered

A Second Garden, a Betrayal, and a Word That Knocks Soldiers Down

John 18:1–9

Jesus is arrested in a garden, by a friend, in a place where they had spent many hours together, and John makes sure we see that at no point is He anything other than in command.

i. Another Garden

John 18:1

> When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.
> John 18:1, ESV

John lays Genesis over his Gospel again and again, and he does it here. The story of humanity begins in a garden, where Adam was meant to guard what God had made and did not. The serpent got in, the man and woman chose their own way, sin was let loose, and they were driven out.

Now we are in a garden again. There, God was betrayed. Here, Jesus is. There, a man rebelled. Here, a man obeys. Adam left unwillingly. Jesus goes out willingly. Paul will later call Him the last Adam, and John is already painting it. One act of the first condemned the world. One act of the second saves it, and those who are born again now trace their line to Him.

> *The first Adam brought the curse. The second Adam bore the curse.*

ii. Betrayed in a Safe Place

John 18:2–3

> Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples.
> John 18:2, ESV

The place is not only significant. It is personal. This was their spot, full of memories and conversations. Judas betrays Jesus where their friendship had grown, the one He had poured into, in the place where He had done the pouring.

Some know exactly what that is like. Perhaps you are a parent who gave everything to a child who has now written you off, and you keep asking where you went wrong. Own what is yours to own. Repent, and make it right where you can. But understand that sometimes it has nothing to do with you. Jesus was the perfect friend, teacher, and mentor, and He was betrayed.

> *The place of intimacy became the place of betrayal.*

Background

The prayer is finished. Jesus leads the disciples out of the city, across the Kidron valley, to a garden He often used.

It is Passover, and the temple has been busy with sacrifice. By long tradition the blood from the altar drained down into the Kidron. The true Lamb crosses that stream on the way to His arrest.

The other Gospels show His agony in the garden. John shows His authority. Both are true.

Words to Know

Garden

κῆπος · *kēpos*

An enclosed plot. John alone calls it a garden, and he will end the story in another.

Band

σπεῖρα · *speira*

A detachment of Roman soldiers, sent with the temple officers to arrest one man.

Seek

ζητέω · *zēteō*

To look for. The first words of Jesus in this Gospel were, what are you seeking?

Let Go

ἀφίημι · *aphiēmi*

To release or send away. Also the ordinary New Testament word for forgive.

iii. I Am He

JOHN 18:4–9

> Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.
> JOHN 18:5–6, ESV

He knows everything that is about to happen, and He steps forward. He does not run, bargain, or appease. All through this Gospel they have tried to seize Him and could not, because it was not His hour. He is not cornered now. It is the appointed time and He walks into it.

In Greek His answer is simply I am, the name from the burning bush, and armed men fall to the ground. So who is in control? Not the soldiers and not Judas.

Then He uses that authority for others: if you seek me, let these men go. We tend to picture Christlikeness as quietness and not defending yourself. Here it is protecting people at your own expense. Sometimes that means shielding, and sometimes it means confronting. He does both.

> *You want to be like Jesus? Be a protector.*

Two Gardens

- Adam betrays God *Judas betrays Jesus*
- Adam rebels *Jesus obeys*
- Adam is driven out *Jesus goes out willingly*
- Adam brings condemnation *Jesus brings redemption*
- Adam brought the curse *Jesus bore it*

God was a perfect parent, and His children rebelled. If you have been betrayed by someone you poured yourself into, you are not being told you did everything right. You are being told you are not alone.

Questions for Reflection

1. Where are you still living as a child of the first Adam rather than the second?
2. Have you been betrayed by someone close, in a place that mattered to you?
3. What in that is yours to own, and what is not?
4. Do you believe that nothing in your life is outside His control, including the worst of it?
5. Who needs you to protect them, and what would it cost you?

Peter and the Charcoal Fire

A Sword, a Doorway, and Three Denials

John 18:10–27

Within a few hours Peter fights when he should have yielded and yields when he should have stood, and John records the detail that will matter later: it happened beside a charcoal fire.

i. Fighting the Will of God

John 18:10–11

> Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"
>
> John 18:10–11, ESV

Christians do fight to protect the vulnerable. But Jesus was not vulnerable. He was in full control. Peter was not protecting anyone. He was proving himself, having just been told he would fail.

Look at what he was fighting. It was God's will for Jesus to be taken, and Peter had been told so more than once, including that night. His theology had no room for it. That is why theology matters: it is the filter through which you see everything that happens to you. He meant well and he was foolish. You cannot prove anything to God, who already knows, and God does not need protecting.

There may be a hard thing in your life that you are rebuking and resisting when God intends for you to walk through it.

> *Not every hard thing in your life is the devil.*

ii. As Far as the Door

John 18:15–16

> Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door.
>
> John 18:15–16, ESV

Peter follows, but only to a point. He was willing to follow Jesus until it was going to cost him. You may know a believer like that. Do not think about them. The most likely person to follow until it costs is you.

So ask it honestly. Am I glad to carry His name until it costs me comfort, or money, or standing with people? Until it requires giving up my own plans, or serving the poor, or living differently and letting go of a sin?

> *Where have you drawn the line?*

Background

Earlier that evening Peter told Jesus he would die for Him. Jesus answered that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed.

Now the soldiers have come. This study follows Peter from the garden to the high priest's courtyard.

It is the low point of his story in John, and not the end of it. There are two more scenes to come, at the tomb and on the shore.

Words to Know

Sword

μάχαιρα · *machaira*

A short blade or large knife. The wrong tool for the moment.

Cup

ποτήριον · *potērion*

A drinking cup, and in the prophets a picture of what God assigns. Jesus will drink it.

Charcoal Fire

ἀνθρακιά · *anthrakia*

A fire of coals. The word appears twice in the New Testament, here and in John 21.

Rooster

ἀλέκτωρ · *alektōr*

A cock. Its crow marked the end of the night, and the fulfillment of what Jesus said.

iii. Beside the Fire

JOHN 18:17–27

> The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.
>
> JOHN 18:17–18, ESV

His first test is a servant girl at a door, and he fails it. Then notice the pattern. He denies once, time passes, and he denies again, and soon after a third time. When you do the wrong thing once, it is easier to do it again.

And notice where. John says it was a charcoal fire. He uses that word only one other time, a few chapters on, when the risen Jesus has breakfast cooking on the shore and asks Peter three times whether he loves Him. The place of failure is deliberately rebuilt as the place of restoration.

So hold a few things together. Peter loves Jesus and still sins against Him. He fails repeatedly and is forgiven. You could be Peter, and so could the person who sinned against you.

> *Peter is weak. Judas is a wolf.*

How Weakness Grows

- Weak moments *become weak seasons*
- Weak seasons *become weak patterns*
- Weak patterns *become a weak conscience*
- A weak conscience *becomes weak faith*

The difference between Peter and Judas is not the size of the failure. It is the direction each one ran afterward. On the third day Peter is running toward the tomb.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are you doing to prove yourself to God or to other people?
2. Is there a hardship you have been rebuking that you may be meant to walk through?
3. Where have you drawn the line on what following Jesus may cost?
4. Is there a wrong thing that has become easier each time?
5. After you fail, which direction do you run?

The Day Everything Changed

An Empty Tomb, a Name Spoken, and Peace Behind Locked Doors

John 20:1–31

On the first day of the week Jesus appears to a grieving woman, to frightened men, and to a disciple who doubts, and each of them is met exactly where they are.

i. Running to the Tomb

John 20:1–10

> So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
> John 20:3–4, ESV

Remember where we left Peter. He fought when he should not have, and then three times in one night denied ever knowing Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, Peter was nowhere to be seen. Imagine the guilt, the shame, and the what-ifs.

Many believers in his position would walk away, unable to face it. Not Peter. His failure was extraordinary, and so was his faith. Coming straight off the worst night of his life, his instinct is to run toward the Lord and not away. He knows forgiveness and grace are found in Jesus, and that if he can only find Him, redemption is a breath away.

> *Be like Peter in your failure. Run to Jesus, don't run away.*

ii. My Lord

John 20:11–18

> Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).
> John 20:16, ESV

The men look in and go home. Mary stays, and she stays out of grief. Jesus had set her free from seven demons. She was at the cross when the others fled, and she is at the tomb now. And listen to what she calls a man she believes is dead: my Lord. In the most painful and disorienting moment of her life, with Jesus acting completely outside what she understood, her history with Him will not let her reach any other conclusion.

Those moments come for everyone. It is all right to break, to weep, and to feel lost for a while. What matters is holding to the confession. And He comes to her so ordinarily that she takes Him for the gardener. He may have been standing there the whole time.

Then He says, go to my brothers. They failed Him, and He calls them family. And He hands the first announcement of the resurrection to a woman with a past, in a world that gave a woman's testimony little weight. No one inventing the story would have written it that way.

> *You can be both full of grief and full of faith.*

Background

Jesus has been crucified and buried. The disciples abandoned Him, and they are now gathered behind locked doors, defeated and disoriented.

He had told them it would happen. They had no category for a crucified Messiah, so they were not looking for a risen one.

When Mary Magdalene finds the stone moved, she does not think resurrection. She thinks the body has been taken.

Words to Know

Rabboni

ῥαββουνί · *rabbouni*

My teacher. An Aramaic form, warmer and more personal than rabbi.

Cling

ἅπτομαι · *haptomai*

To take hold of, to fasten onto. She is holding Him as if He might disappear.

Peace

εἰρήνη · *eirēnē*

Wholeness and well-being, the Hebrew shalom. His first word to the men who left Him.

Breathed

ἐμφυσάω · *emphysaō*

To breathe into. The verb the Greek Old Testament uses when God gives life to Adam.

iii. Peace Be With You

John 20:19–31

> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
>
> John 20:21–22, ESV

The disciples are hiding in fear, and Jesus stands among them. What He gives matches what they lack. They were running from people in fear, and He commissions them to go to people in peace.

He adds that if they forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven. He is not handing them the power to forgive sins. He is giving them authority to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and the confidence to assure the repentant that they are forgiven.

Thomas was absent and will not take their word for it. A week later Jesus returns and offers him His hands and side, and Thomas answers, my Lord and my God. There is room for your doubts if you are open to the truth. And there is a blessing for those who have not seen and have believed.

> *They were afraid, so Jesus gives them peace. They were hiding, so Jesus tells them to go.*

Whom He Meets

- Peter, ashamed *20:3*
- Mary, grieving *20:16*
- The disciples, afraid *20:19*
- Thomas, doubting *20:27*
- Those who have not seen *20:29*

John states his purpose here. These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

Questions for Reflection

1. After your worst failure, did you run toward Jesus or away?
2. Can you call Him Lord when He is acting outside what you understand?
3. Where might He be standing nearby, unrecognized, in something you are grieving?
4. What fear has you behind a locked door, and where is He sending you?
5. What doubt do you need to bring to Him honestly?

Where It All Began

A Night of Fishing, a Breakfast on the Shore, and a Second Call

John 21:1–25

John ends his Gospel not with a commission or an ascension but with breakfast, because the last thing he wants the reader to remember is a man who failed badly being fully restored.

i. I Am Going Fishing

John 21:1–8

> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.
> John 21:3, ESV

They have just been commissioned by the risen Christ and given the Holy Spirit. You might expect them to launch something. Instead they go back to work. It is as if they assumed the plan and the power would play out in everyday life, and that is mostly how the gospel spreads: Christians going to work and making a difference where they are. The idea that ministry is sacred and a job is secular is false.

At dawn a figure on the shore tells them to cast on the other side, and the net fills. When Peter realizes who it is, he does not wait for the boat. The last time he left a boat he was trying to walk on water. This time he is not proving anything. He only wants to get to Jesus. John records more of Peter's failures than the other Gospels, and he does it to show who Peter is: a man who fails often and, when it counts, goes after Jesus with his whole heart.

> *For Christians, all we do is sacred.*

ii. Breakfast by a Charcoal Fire

John 21:9–17

> He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."
> John 21:17, ESV

On the beach there is a charcoal fire. John uses that word in only one other place, the courtyard where Peter denied Jesus three times. It is deliberate. Jesus takes him back to the night of his greatest failure, and at a fire like that one asks him three times whether he loves Him. The denials are being undone one by one.

And notice what each answer is tied to. Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. It is the new commandment once more. If you love Me, you will love My people: feed them, serve them, train them, and protect them. That is not only a pastor's calling. It belongs to every Christian.

> *You cannot claim to love Me and not take care of My people.*

Background

Jesus has risen, appeared to the disciples, given them peace, sent them, and breathed the Spirit on them.

The scene moves north to the Sea of Tiberias, another name for Galilee. Seven of the disciples are together, and Peter announces that he is going fishing.

Luke ends with the ascension and Matthew with the great commission. John, writing later, chose to end here.

Words to Know

Children

παιδία · *paidia*

Little ones, lads. An affectionate greeting called across the water at dawn.

Feed

βόσκω · *boskō*

To pasture, to provide food. The first and third charge given to Peter.

Tend

ποιμαίνω · *poimainō*

To shepherd: to guide, guard, and care for. The second charge.

Love

φιλέω · *phileō*

To love as a friend, with affection. The word Peter uses each time he answers.

iii. Follow Me

JOHN 21:18–25

> Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"
> JOHN 21:22, ESV

Jesus tells Peter that following will cost him his life, and early tradition says it did: that he was crucified, and asked to be turned upside down because he was not worthy to die as his Lord had. He said yes knowing the price. You glorify God the same way in smaller deaths, each time you hold your tongue or choose His desires over yours.

Then come the words follow me, and the scene makes sense. In Luke 5, on Peter's first day, there was an empty night, an instruction about the nets, a great catch, and a call. All of it is here again. Only then Peter said, depart from me, for I am a sinful man. Now his sin sends him toward Jesus.

Peter looks back at John and asks, what about him? The answer is plain. What I do in someone else's life is not your concern.

> *Jesus meets him in the very setting where it all began.*

Luke 5 and John 21

- Peter is fishing *Peter returns to fishing*
- An empty night *an empty night*
- Nets that were breaking *a net that was not torn*
- Depart from me *he swims to Jesus*
- You will be catching men *feed my sheep*

John closes by saying that if everything Jesus did were written down, the world could not hold the books. What he did write is enough to believe, and by believing to have life.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you divide your life into sacred and secular? What would change if you stopped?
2. Where is your charcoal fire, the place of a failure Jesus wants to revisit with you?
3. If He asked you three times whether you love Him, what would you say?
4. Whose care has He placed in your hands?
5. Whose calling are you watching when you should be following your own?

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Soli Deo Gloria