

Come, Meet Jesus

A study of the
Gospel according to John

Joani Ross & Katie Buchanan
Published bybut God Ministry



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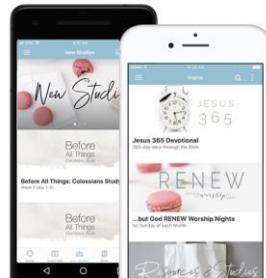
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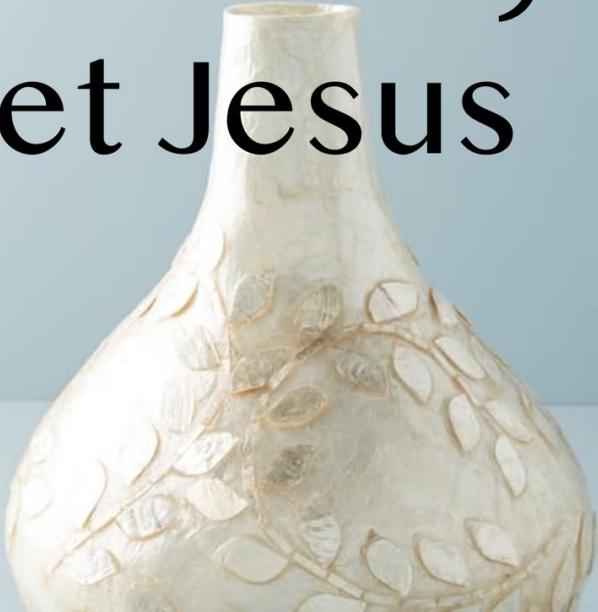
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Come, Meet Jesus

A white ceramic vase with gold leaf patterns, set against a light blue background. The vase has a bulbous body and a narrow neck, decorated with intricate gold leaf designs that resemble leaves or floral motifs.

For videos and other resources to complement your study of John, visit:
www.butGodMinistry.com/ComeMeetJesus

Some of the commentary is taken from our Jesus 365 devotional through the Bible in a year. Visit www.butGodMinistry.com/Jesus365



Welcome

Welcome! I'm so glad you are here. I genuinely mean it. I have some incredibly good news for you. Yes, you! You, who have never opened a Bible and aren't sure what you believe. You, who have been to church your whole life. You, who once thought you knew Jesus but now aren't sure.

This book is for you.

Come, meet Jesus.

Together we will look through the Gospel written by John, someone who personally spent time with Jesus while He walked on earth over 2,000 years ago. Someone who hung out with Jesus, learned from Jesus, ate with Jesus, watched Jesus teach and heal and pray. Someone who witnessed Jesus in the mundane and in the miraculous. Someone who saw Jesus die...and then saw Him resurrected. Someone who was THERE on the front row, face-to-face with Jesus.

Commentators, often attributing Augustine, say of John, "it is a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim." Whether you are simply exploring or you are sold out for Jesus, you can join us in experiencing Him new as presented in John's Gospel account. No background knowledge is needed on your part at all. In fact, I ask that you jump into the pool with a blank canvas and experience Jesus with fresh vision.

My fervent prayer is that this deep dive into these words breathed out by God and written by John will ignite a flame within you to love God – or love Him even more, or in a new way. And that this love will manifest in extraordinary ways, partnering with the Holy Spirit to blow your mind with His miraculous power to do immeasurably more than ALL you ask or imagine in His name for His glory (Ephesians 3:20).

It all starts with knowing Him. As Jen Wilken says, "The heart cannot love what the mind does not know." Let's seek to KNOW.

Come, let me introduce (or reintroduce) you to Jesus as told by His friend and disciple, John.





7

SEVEN SIGNS &
SEVEN "I AM"
STATEMENTS

John frequently uses a series of sevens in his account of the Gospel. In the Bible, seven represents **completion and fulfillment**. As you read through John, pay attention to the sevens you see.

To get you started, below are seven signs (or miracles) Jesus performs and seven "I Am" statements Jesus makes in John's Gospel account. These signs and statements are included by John to point to who Jesus is and what He came to earth to do.

1. Changing water into wine (2:1-11)
2. Healing the royal official's son (4:46-54)
3. Healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14)
5. Walking on water (6:16-21)
6. Healing the man born blind (9:1-7)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45)



I Am...

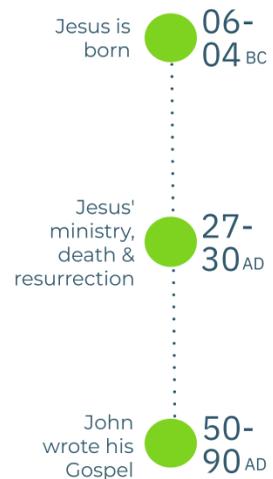
1. "I am the bread of life." (6:35, 41, 48, 51)
2. "I am the light of the world." (8:12)
3. "I am the door of the sheep." (10:7,9)
4. "I am the good shepherd." (10:11,14)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life." (11:25)
6. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (14:6)
7. "I am the true vine." (15:1, 5)



John's Gospel

John is one of four writers that included an account of Jesus' life on earth preserved in the Bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). He was a disciple **hand-picked by Jesus** to follow and learn from Him. He is counted as an apostle – a chosen messenger – someone called and sent out to tell what they have heard and seen and been taught.

John **knew Jesus up close and personal**. His account isn't second hand. He was there. His words are trustworthy. He not only saw Jesus minister, live life, perform miracles, he saw Jesus brutally tortured and crucified. He saw the hostility toward Jesus and those who followed him. But he also saw Jesus risen from the dead. And despite the continued persecution by both his fellow Jewish people and the cultural and political structure of his day, he believed all that Jesus said and carried the message of who Jesus is to his death. He saw and he believed. REALLY BELIEVED. If not, he would have abandoned Jesus shortly after his departure and chalked Jesus' life up to another good man and good teacher. But that isn't the Jesus He knew and this account we are about to read is **John's plea for us to see and know Jesus as he did**. John's testimony is powerful and something worthy of study.



Where the other three gospels focus more on a historical narrative account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, John focuses more on the deity of Jesus as the SON OF GOD (and as we will read, God himself). John includes seven SIGNS and seven I AM statements that all point to who Jesus is and what he came to do. John's gospel was the last of the four written and wasn't intended to restate what had already been recorded, but instead to look at it all from a new lens.

To give you a sense for the timelines, it is generally believed that Jesus was born between 6 BC and 4 BC. His ministry, death and resurrection occurred between AD 27-30. John wrote his gospel account between AD 50-90.

The purpose of John's gospel is stated by him in John 20:31, "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."

...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. John 20:31

Wherever you currently are on this journey to explore who Jesus is, I pray you have an open heart and mind to perhaps believe for the first time, or in a new way, that Jesus IS the Christ. The Son of God. And in doing so, have new life in His name. God, let it be so of all of us.

So what...

What does “Gospel” mean? (it’s okay if you have to look it up)

In what ways does the fact that John knew Jesus personally add to his Gospel account?

Why do you think God’s inspired compiled story to us (the Bible) includes four Gospel accounts telling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

Before we get further in the study, spend time writing out what you currently know to be true about Jesus.

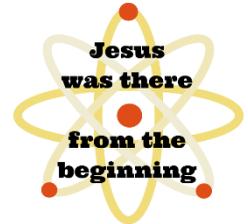


The Beginning

In the beginning was the Word...John 1:1a

Three words start John's account of Jesus to us, "In the beginning."
The same three words that open the Bible in Genesis 1:1. John takes us back to the very beginning. Before anything was created or set in motion.

John tells us that in the beginning was the **Word**. What in the world? We will get there in a few verses, but here's a spoiler alert...the Word is how John initially refers to Jesus.



So the very first things we learn about Jesus from John are: **He was the Word, and he was there in the beginning.**

Word is translated from the Greek word logos, which means "word," "reason," or "plan." John is making a connection to both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) here; to both believers and non-believers.

For ancient Jews, the "Word" had the weight of the fullness of God. Genesis 1 tells us that **God created the world with his word**. He **spoke** the world into existence. God's **word** later in the Bible speaks to Abraham, the beginning of a people set apart by God to establish His kingdom. Throughout the Old Testament, God **speaks His words** to the Jewish people through prophets with instructions, warnings, prophecies, and promises.

λόγος
Greek Logos

...the divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning.

To the intellectual Greek philosophers, **logos** represented the orderliness of what set the world in motion and maintained it. Britannica defines it as, "**the divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning.**" The Greeks may not have believed in the One God of the Bible, but they believed there was order and reason in the world...logos.

The use of Logos/Word in John's opening sentence had weighty meaning to both Jews and non-Jews. John is essentially saying, *hey, you know that Word – that logos, that power and thing and idea you have been talking about and clinging to...let me tell you about **HIM**.*

So what...

Did you always understand that Jesus was there from the beginning, rather than entering the world as that infant in Bethlehem?

What are your thoughts on John introducing us to Jesus as THE WORD?

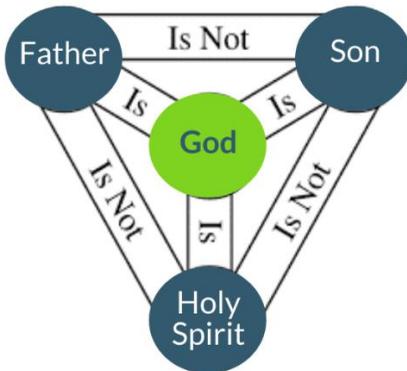
Why is it important up front to establish that Jesus is the LOGOS?

3

With God & God

...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. John 1:1b-2

John continues to tell us about this Word/Logos. He wants us to know that in the beginning **the Word (Jesus) was both WITH God and he WAS God**. Take a second to process that. It's a lot to take in.



WITH and WAS. In our finite understanding, it doesn't make sense being both with and was. But as Christians, we believe in what we call the Trinity. We believe there is **ONE God in three unique people...God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit**. The three are equally God, yet distinct and separate from one another at the same time.

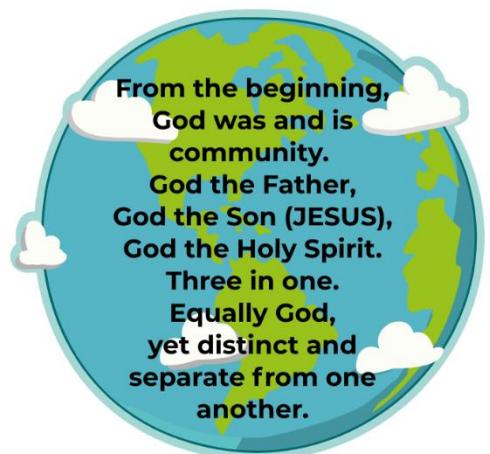
I know...that is a hard thing to wrap your head around. Trust me, I get it. You don't have to have it all figured out yet (or ever!). If God were that easy for us to comprehend and

understand, he wouldn't be much of a God, would he? So for now, just tuck that nugget into your brain and sit tight as we unpack more about who Jesus is.

In these first two sentences from John, we can take away that Jesus was there from the beginning...before anything existed. He was with God. And He WAS God.

Before John begins to tell us what it was like to walk with Jesus, he wants us to know that **Jesus IS God and Jesus was WITH God from the beginning**.

You may not be able to fully grasp the depth of what this all means. That is ok! Just know that **this Jesus who came to earth was unlike anyone else**.



So what...

AW Tozer says, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Why do you think this is so important? What do you think of when you think about God? What attribute is the most striking to you? Why do you think you are drawn to it?

C.S. Lewis says, "How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us." What do you think God thinks about you?

Spend some time thinking about the Trinity – ONE God in THREE unique people. What images come to mind? What do you think the purpose of each of the three persons is? (it is okay if you have to do a little research)

Why do you think this (the trinity, community, three persons, etc.) is an important attribute of God?



All Things Made Through Him

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:3-5



Life and Light



The light that is Jesus shines in the darkness. Without Jesus, we are in the dark. But darkness can never overcome the light.

John tells us **ALL THINGS were made through him (the Word, Jesus)**. He further clarifies that without Him was not anything made that was made. In other words, **nothing** was made without Jesus. Some commentators describe it as Jesus being the **agent of creation**.

Jesus, God the Son, was not a created being. In fact, He was part of creation. He was there from the beginning and all things were created through Him.

Another apostle, Paul, says it like this in his letter to an early church plant in Colossae, “For by him [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together”. (Colossians 1:16-17)

The Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – worked in unison to create everything. As One God in three unique persons, they were there from the beginning and set it all in motion. Again, this is part of John wanting us to know before he gets into stories *about* Jesus, that Jesus is unlike anyone else in presence and power. He isn’t just another human being to be admired and followed.

John continues with two things that are in Jesus: **LIGHT and LIFE**.

David Guzik points out, “The Word is the source of all life – not only biological life, but the very principle of life. The ancient Greek word translated life is zoe, which means ‘the life principle,’ not bios, which is mere biological life.”

The light that is Jesus shines in the darkness. Without Jesus, we are in the dark. But darkness can never overcome the light.

We’ve all experienced darkness and dark times in life. But in Jesus, we have a light that can shine in the darkness and defeat the darkness. In Jesus, there is life and freedom and a clear vision to see what is good and true.

So what...

Think about John's description of Jesus as LIGHT and LIFE. What do you think each means and how does Jesus represent both?

Think about the opposite of each – darkness and death. Hell is basically the absence of God, the absence of anything good. Imagine what life would be like in perpetual darkness and lack of any goodness. What would things look like? How would people interact with one another?

Look up these verses and reflect on Jesus and light: Micah 7:8, Psalm 119:05, 1 John 1:5-9, Matthew 4:16, John 9:5, John 8:12, Revelation 21:23.

What do you see as the relationship between light and truth? How do you think Jesus represents this?

5

The Witness

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. John 1:6-8

John takes a little detour from his prelude to who Jesus is and introduces us to another John. You may have heard of him referred to as John the Baptist (named this because he was baptizing people when Jesus enters the scene).

In Luke's gospel account, we learn that John the Baptist was actually Jesus' cousin. Before he was even conceived, an angel told his father, Zechariah, what his son's mission on earth would be (Luke 1:8-17). John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth (Luke 1:39-41). Though John and Jesus were cousins, they didn't grow up together. We don't even know if they personally met each other outside of the womb. We are told in Luke 1:80 that John "was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel."



*that all
might believe
through Him*

The writer, John, tells us that this **John the Baptist was the one prophesied about and sent by God with a purpose: to bear witness about the light (Jesus)**. He further tells us the reason for bearing witness about Jesus...so that ALL might believe through him.

All.

As you journey through John's account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, know that you are a part of this ALL.

God sent other people into the world – followers and the apostles like our writer John and this John the Baptists that came to bear witness – to help us with our belief and understanding about who Jesus is. And God even told these people hundreds of years beforehand that this was coming. It takes faith to believe...but God gives us assurances along the way. He wants ALL of us to believe and to be reconciled to Him and to spend eternity with Him.

So what...

John bears witness about Jesus so that ALL may believe. Think about that word...ALL. Who is included? Excluded? Look up Matthew 18:12-14. How important is the ALL to Jesus?

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." I've heard it said before that faith is believing something to be true; hope is believing that it is good. Do you have faith and hope for that which you can't see?

Why do you think faith and hope matter? Why not just let us see everything in full right now?



Children of God

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:9-13

Well documented and respected Jewish historians, such as Josephus, wrote about John the Baptist. He was a real person whose presence was prophesied about and preserved hundreds of years before he or Jesus were born.

John's gospel account isn't some conjured up fantastical story, it is a **true and trustworthy eyewitness testimony**. As Christians, we believe that the writings preserved in the Bible were all inspired by God. They are truth that can be relied upon.

In this passage, John tells us about the witness of John the Baptist who is telling those following him that **the true light – Jesus, the light which gives light to everyone – was coming into the world.**

In other words, the world was not about to get another Word *from* God; the world was about to get THE WORD *of* God...God Himself.



John tells us that this Light that came into the world (Jesus) was not recognized by the world, even though He created them. Even His own people, the Jewish nation set apart by God, did not receive Him.

The Jewish people had been waiting a very long time for the Messiah (the one who would save the Jewish people and restore them) to come. We can sometimes become complacent in our waiting. We build new lives, seek new "saviors." When the one they had been waiting for came onto the scene, they didn't receive Him. They had become comfortable in the waiting. The Jewish leaders they looked up to had become comfortable in their power and positions of authority.

But John doesn't stop with those who didn't receive Jesus. He goes on to say that **others DID receive Him and believe Him, and to those He gave the right to become children of God. Heirs to the eternal throne and kingdom.**

As we journey through John's account of Jesus, which camp will we find ourselves in? Will we receive the light? Will we ultimately be counted among those called children of God?

I pray we all will. Even if you are struggling with belief, stick with me...

So what...

What does it mean to be a CHILD of GOD?

Think about a family inheritance. You get something you haven't earned, all based on your relationship. What does it look like to be in God's FAMILY?

Why do you think God's plan included some of His own people not recognizing who Jesus was? What does this say about people in general? If Jesus returned while you were still alive on earth, would you recognize Him?



The Word Became Flesh

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:14-16

The Word that was with God and was God, that was there from the beginning of everything, that wasn't created but instead created everything....**the Word became flesh.**

Jesus left heaven, strapped on flesh, and became one of us to live among us. All the holiness squeezed into skin. Flesh temporarily constraining glory that eyes couldn't otherwise take in.



The
WORD...

...became
flesh...



...and dwelt
among us.



John tells us He **DWELT among us**. Closer. Personal. Interacting in mundane daily life. The original word dwelt is translated "pitched a tent" or "tabernacled." The Word – Jesus – stepped out of heaven and pitched a tent here on earth. It's a temporary dwelling. He won't be here long. Only about 33 years. He is coming with an assignment.

The use of the word "dwelt" would have great significance to the Jewish people who studied – even memorized – the Old Testament accounts of their ancestors. When God, working through Moses, freed the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt, He gave them very specific details about a tabernacle they were to construct. It was a portable place of worship where God's presence would reside and meet with them. Now God Himself came and "tabernacled" with them in human form.

All other religions require followers to work and strive to try to reach their god; to try to be good enough. **Christianity is different. God came down to us.** It isn't about us being "good enough" to reach Him. Instead, He came into the messiness of life here and made a way for us to be with Him. Instead of us working to climb our way to Him, he reaches down and pulls us to Him. Unlike other religions, it isn't about anything we do. It is about what He did for us.

He loves us that much. He loves YOU that much. ABUNDANT GRACE.

That God the Son would come to earth as one of us is mind-blowing. God is so big and mysterious and unfathomable, but **in Jesus, we have a visible expression of the invisible.** He comes in a form and language we can understand. We can see how God chooses to spend His time, how He lives in the ordinary and extraordinary, what He says, how He interacts with humanity...all in a way we can grasp. We get a glimpse of what God looks like and how much He loves us. Jesus – Son of God – God in the flesh.

As we journey through John's gospel account, keep in mind who Jesus is. In Him, we see God.

So what...

What does it mean for Jesus to be FULLY GOD and FULLY MAN?

What do you think it was like for John and those around him to experience Jesus in the flesh; the full gravity of personally knowing Him?

Contrast the perfection of heaven with the corruption of earth? What do you think it was like for Jesus to leave heaven for earth? What does that say about His love for us?

Find a quiet place and put on a worship song. Close your eyes and spend time thinking about the tangible person of Jesus. What does He sound like, look like, feel like?



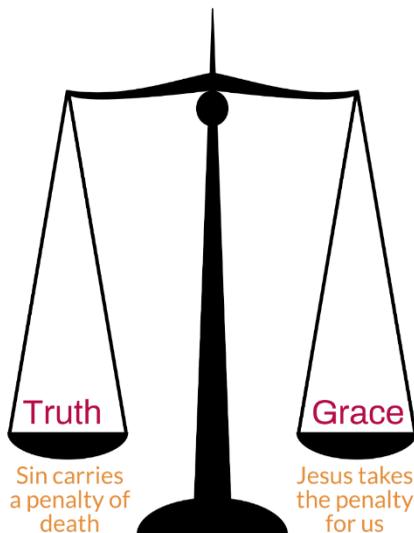
Grace and Truth

¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. John 1:17-18

John tells us that while the law (God's commandments on how to live) was given through Moses (a revered figure called by God to lead the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt), grace and truth came through Jesus.

For roughly 1,500 years, the Jewish people had been trying to adhere to the law. Something no one could ever do perfectly. We are utterly unable to save ourselves. As hard as we might try, the reality is, we are flawed and sinful people dating back to the disobedience of the first humans – Adam & Eve – in the garden.

John tells us Jesus comes **full of GRACE and TRUTH**.



Grace: Unearned or undeserving kindness and favor. Receiving something priceless we don't deserve, didn't earn, and couldn't get on our own.

Truth: That which is, has been, or shall be. True state of facts or things.

Scholar G. Campbell Morgan says, "God is grace and truth. Not one without the other. Not the other apart from the one. In His government there can be no lowering of the simple and severe standard of truth, and there is no departure from the purpose and possession of grace."

Grace without truth corrupts and leads to a false license to keep sinning. Truth without grace condemns and fosters legalism.

Jesus came to show us how both coexist. He shows us in how He lives, and He shows us in how He dies. **Truth:** sin carries a penalty of death. **Grace:** Jesus takes that penalty for us. A convergence to come on the cross.

Come, meet Jesus, who comes **fully God and fully human**; who comes **full of grace and full of truth**.

So what...

Look back over the definitions of grace and truth. Recap both in your own words.

Play out a scenario of grace without truth.

Play out a scenario of truth without grace.

Why does sin have to carry a penalty (vs. just letting it go or looking the other way)? What does that say about God being a just God? Why is it important that He is a God of justice?



Make Straight the Way of the Lord

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²² 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?” ²³ 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.”

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. John 1:19-28

The Jewish religious leaders hear about this John the Baptist and the growing following he is gaining among their people. They go and check him out for themselves, full of questions about who he is and what authority he has to elicit such a response from people.

They ask if he is Elijah. Elijah was a prophet around 850 years earlier. 2 Kings 2:11 tells us that Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. Some of the Jewish people thought perhaps he would return.

John the Baptist says, no, he is not Elijah.

A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’

Isaiah
700 years earlier

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

Malachi
400 years earlier

The religious leaders then ask if he was another prophet. God had raised up prophets he used to speak to the Jewish people. One of the prophets, Isaiah, lived about 700 years before John and Jesus were born. He prophesied, **“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’”** (Isaiah 40:3). Another prophet, Malachi, was the last prophet to speak to the Jewish people (about 400 years before John and Jesus were born). Part of Malachi’s words from God included, **“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.** And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, **behold, he is coming,** says the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 3:1)

The Jewish people had been in a long season of silence with no new prophets after Malachi. They wonder if perhaps John the Baptist is a prophet.

John the Baptist says, no, he is not a prophet. But HE IS the one the prophets Isaiah and Malachi spoke of. **The messenger who would pave the way for the long-awaited Savior who was coming into the world.**

Humbly and on mission, John the Baptist tells the Jewish leaders and the people that one is coming after him of much greater importance.

So what...

What do you think it means to “prepare the way”? Why do you think God’s plan included John coming to prepare the way for the Messiah?

What can you glean so far about the character of John the Baptist from this passage?

Look in Luke’s Gospel account where he reaches back further in his introductions of John the Baptist (Luke 5:5-80). How does this add to your understanding of who John the Baptist is?



Behold, the Lamb of God

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." 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.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." John 1:29-34

With no mention of the first 30 years of His human life, at last the person of Jesus enters the scene in John's Gospel account. Jesus approaches John the Baptist who says, "**Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**"

John the Baptist doesn't only say **who Jesus is**, but he also tells **what He will do**.

For hundreds of years, the Jewish people had been adhering to a system of sacrifices to atone for sins. Sin was (and is) a big deal to God. It separates us from Him and His holiness. God is a just God and sin must be paid for. It can't go unchecked and unpunished. Animals were killed and blood was shed to cover sins. But it was always temporary and was repeated year after year.

Jesus came to change that. **He came to BE the lamb to be sacrificed, his blood shed to cover all sin once and for all.** Hearing this declaration from John the Baptist was a sober reminder of how Jesus' human life on earth would come to an end.

As a side note, in addition to the image of the lamb to describe Jesus, He is often also referred to as the Lion of Judah. Joel Ryan points out, "The Lion and the Lamb are two images and names for God used in Scripture that describe aspects of Jesus Christ. The attributes of Jesus are as powerful and majestic as a lion and innocent as a sacrificial lamb."

John the Baptist also provides testimony of what he heard and saw when Jesus came to be baptized by him. The Holy Spirit (one of the three persons of the Trinity) descended from heaven like a dove and rested on Jesus. In Matthew's gospel account, he describes the scene this way: "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)

Something incredible happens - witnessed by John and those present - at the moment of Jesus' baptism...

- The heavens were opened.
- The Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Jesus (God the Son).
- A voice from heaven – God the Father – said, “this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”



The trinity reunited again...the Father (in word), the Son, and the Holy Spirit converging. It's go time. The beginning of Jesus' ministry.

John the Baptist doesn't leave any room for confusion about who Jesus is, stating, “And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the **Son of God.**”

So what...

What do you think is the significance of John the Baptist introducing Jesus as “the lamb of God”? How do you think Jesus and those hearing it reacted to this introduction?

Find some quiet time this week to get alone, close your eyes, and imagine what it would be like to be at Jesus' baptism...hearing God speak....seeing the Spirit descend on Him. Jesus was a real person and this was a real event. Imagine the sights, sounds, smells, emotions. What is the scene like in your mind?

How do you see this as a shift from RELIGION to RELATIONSHIP? If you have time this week, pull up “Make Room” by Community Music on YouTube or Spotify to listen to and reflect on.

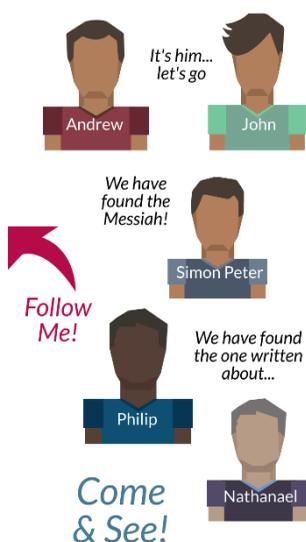
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Calling Disciples

³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” John 1:35-48

John, the gospel writer, shares some insights on how he and some of the others became disciples (followers and students) of Jesus.



Andrew and another disciple (many commentators believe this was **John**, the writer of this gospel) were disciples of John the Baptist and **personally observed John saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God.”** Seeing this and realizing Jesus was the one they had been waiting for, they began to follow Jesus.

Andrew then went to find his brother, Simon Peter, telling him, “we have found the Messiah” and **taking him to Jesus.**

The next day **Jesus traveled to Galilee and found Philip**, saying to him, “Follow me.”

Philip then went to find his friend, Nathanael, and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael was initially skeptical, but Philip said, “Come and see.” Nathanael went.

Jesus isn't about formulas, he is about relationships. **Jesus is the only way to eternal life, but there are many ways to meet Jesus.** We may arrive there is different ways, but we get to the same place. We may have different testimonies, but we land at the same destination.

With John and Andrew, they were watching and waiting. They were followers of John the Baptist and when John pointed them to Jesus, they went and followed him. Simon Peter was led to Jesus by his brother, Andrew. Philip was personally confronted by Jesus. Nathanael was introduced to Jesus by his friend, Philip, and though he was skeptical, he went to see for himself.

Jesus says, "Come and see." We are saved by faith in the work of Jesus, but we don't have to rely on faith to meet Him. He invites us to come and see for ourselves; to get to know Him. And in building this foundation, we can know Him and believe Him.

How will you discover Jesus? And when you do meet him, will you be like Andrew and Philip and invite those you love to come and see Jesus for themselves?

So what...

Which disciple path do you resonate with (if any)? Are you pursuing Jesus? Are you watching and waiting? Are you bringing people to Jesus, inviting them to come and see? Are you seeking more information and knowledge...wanting to see for yourself?

Does our faith welcome skepticism?

What does it mean to FOLLOW Jesus?



Greater Things

⁴⁹Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And 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 1:49-51

Nathanael, one of Jesus' new disciples, declares who Jesus is... **the Son of God...the King of Israel**. The Christ (Messiah, Savior) the Jewish people had heard prophesied about for hundreds of years was to be a great king. The prophet Isaiah said, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

Jesus told Nathanael he saw him under the fig tree. Commentators said that "under the fig tree" was a phrase Rabbis used to describe meditation on the Scriptures. **Jesus sees us when we are seeking him.**

Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see even greater things. He will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man (which is a name referring to Jesus).

This would bring to mind a familiar story to the Jewish people of their ancestor Jacob. In Genesis 28:10-17, Jacob is fleeing for his life because he had deceived his brother to receive the family blessing. On his way out of town, he lays down and has a dream. There is a ladder from heaven to earth and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. The Lord stood above it and renewed blessings and promises made to Jacob's family.

Now to Nathanael **Jesus is saying he is the ladder from heaven to earth**. As the life of Jesus on earth unfolds, Nathanael will see that Jesus is the way we can reach heaven. **We may have different ways of meeting Jesus, but Jesus is the ONLY way to eternal life.**



Like Nathanael, may Jesus SEE US seeking HIM. And may we SEE even greater things as we grow closer to Him.

So what...

Spend some time thinking about the idea that there are many ways to meet Jesus, but Jesus is the only way to meet the Father / have eternal life. Does this give you comfort and security, or make you uncomfortable?

What part of the Isaiah 9:6 prophecy of Jesus most resonates with you? Why is that?

Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see “greater things.” What greater things do you think Jesus is referring to?



Water to Wine

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ 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 2:1-10

John tells us Jesus and some of His followers are at a wedding. Crisis ensues. The wine runs out. Major social faux pas. “They have no wine,” the mother of Jesus says to Him.

Though He has not yet performed any miracles that we know of, Mary (the mother of Jesus) knows He can do something about this. We know so little about the childhood and early adulthood of Jesus. What had his mother seen? How long she must have been waiting for what the angel revealed to her thirty years earlier (Luke 1:26-35) to come to pass.

“Woman, what does this have to do with me? **My hour has not yet come,**” Jesus replies. Not disrespectfully, but matter-of-factly. His mother does not fully know, but **Jesus knows, that “His hour” will involve His suffering and bloodshed.**

One might think that is the end of the discussion. Not Mary. She turns to the servants and says, **“Do whatever he tells you.”** Words to live by, right?!



Tucked in the corner of the room are six stone water jars used for Jewish rights of purification; ceremonial cleaning according to the law. Jesus instructs them to fill the jars with water. The men aren’t sure how this will help with the wine situation, but they obey. They go all in, filling them to the brim...and they wait to see what Jesus will do with it.

Jesus tells the men to draw some water out and take it to the master of the feast. Again, it doesn’t make sense, but again, they do what He tells them. I picture the scene...the men holding their

breath, all eyes are glued to the master as the ladle reaches his lips. They know it is only water in the jars. They filled them with their own hands. What will he say?

“You have kept the good wine until now,” the master of the feast proclaims. Exhale. Shame diverted. Not only wine but the BEST wine.

Just as miraculously as Jesus transformed the water to wine, He could have filled the water jugs. But **Jesus lets us – ordinary people – take part in miracles** if we will simply follow Him and obey. The question is, will we “do whatever He tells us”?

So what...

Reflect on the purpose and significance of Jesus performing this first miracle. Put yourself in the place of some of the people present. What do you think the servants thought? The disciples? Mary, Jesus’ mother? The master of the feast? The bride and groom?

How hard is it for you to do things that don’t make sense or seem logical? Are you able to obey/submit without understanding? How do you discern obedience to God vs. your own desires or even temptations from the enemy?

Jesus was an invited guest at this wedding. In what ways does this miracle expand your thinking about what could happen if we INVITED Jesus into our life?



The 1st of His Signs

¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. ¹²After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. John 2:11-12

If you were Jesus, how would you announce your ministry? Would you hold a huge press conference? Start big...raise someone from the dead? Peel back your flesh to reveal the brightness of your glory? Turn water into wine?



John calls the miraculous transformation of water to wine at the wedding, “**the first of His signs**” that **manifested His glory**. It might seem a strange way to begin the unfolding of who He is, but it is a beautiful picture of what Jesus is here for and what He will do.

Signs aren’t in themselves the thing, but they **point to the thing**. And this sign points to what Jesus came to do.

The jars for ceremonial washing were continuously emptied and filled. Emptied and filled. Washing that is **repeated over and over again**. It is never complete. Jesus came to change that. Before the miracle, He told His mother it wasn’t His hour, but it won’t be long before it will be His hour. Spoiler alert: the night before His death, He will raise a cup of wine with His disciples and tell them, “this is the cup of my blood shed for you.” He will willingly go to the cross and turn the constant re-cleansing into a one-time restoration. A cleansing not with water, but **with His blood**.

A problem we can’t solve on our own, Jesus comes to solve for us. The cleansing of sins we can’t accomplish on our own, no matter how many times we wash, Jesus came to take care of once and for all with His blood. But His bloodshed isn’t the end of it, on the third day, He will rise from the dead. Death will be defeated.

Water to wine. Old to new. Never enough to never again.

This, **the first of His signs**.

Buckle up. We are in for a wild ride with Jesus.



So what...

What is the significance of signs?

How does this first sign point to who Jesus is and what He came to do?

Despite witnessing so many signs and miracles, why is it still so hard for people to believe?

The miracles John shares in his Gospel account were depicted as signs to point to Jesus. Now that Jesus has come and completed His heavenly work, do you think miracles still happen today? If yes, what do you think their purpose is? If no, what do you think the reason is?



Irreverence in the House of God

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. John 2:13-25

For roughly 1,500 years the Jewish people had been celebrating a feast called **Passover**. It was a celebration to commemorate a time when they were slaves in Egypt and death passed over them.



God had sent Moses to lead the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. The problem was Pharaoh would not easily let his free labor go, which resulted in a series of ten plagues tormenting the Egyptian people for Pharaoh's unwillingness to obey God's command. The last plague was brutal. The firstborn male of every Egyptian household would die. Through Moses, **God commanded the Israelites to slaughter a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts. The homes with the blood of the lamb would be passed over and their firstborn sons would not die.** With this final deadly plague, Pharaoh relents and lets the Israelites go with Moses (Exodus chapters 11 & 12).



As a Jewish boy, Jesus would grow up traveling to Jerusalem each year with thousands of other Jewish families to celebrate Passover. It was a busy, exciting, and holy time in the city. But it had also become a place of commerce over time. When Jesus visits Jerusalem He finds that those with stewardship over the holy temple had **replaced worship with worldliness and wealth-generation**. The outer courts – the only space where Gentiles could come experience God and pray – **had become a place of commerce and extortion instead of communion with God**.

Jesus came to restore. And on His way to the cross to cleanse us with His blood, He stops at the temple to cleanse God's temporary dwelling place. The holy place of God had taken on the look, feel, and attitude of the culture and environment, leaving little room for worship. **Jesus had no choice but to clean house.**

The observing Jews are baffled and ask what sign or authority he has to do this. **Jesus gives a glimpse into the future – his death and resurrection – saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** They didn't understand what he was saying at the time, but they would look back and remember it after his death and resurrection.

So what...

As God, Jesus is Love (1 John 4:8) and according to 1 Corinthians 13:5, “love is not EASILY angered.” Jesus is constantly misunderstood, criticized, and opposed, but we don't see these things making Him angry. He stays focused on His mission. Why do you think we see Jesus angry here?

In what ways does Jesus in this encounter differ from Jesus at the wedding in Cana?

So, what about us? As believers, we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). How is our temple looking? Have we squeezed out space for worship and communion with God and replaced it with worldly things? Do we need to clean house to make room for God?



Born Again

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. John 3:1-15

As descendants of Abraham, the Jewish people believed that their bloodline assured them salvation. But Jesus shatters this assertion. It isn't a family line that saves us.

Nicodemus, a respected Jewish leader, sees all that Jesus is doing and he comes to Jesus with questions. Jesus tells him that it isn't Jewish genealogy that secures salvation, but rather a rebirth. It isn't just a tweak here and there, but instead a **radical transformation**.

Jesus refers to himself as the “**Son of Man**” and the one who has “**descended from Heaven**.” Jesus wants this religious leader to know His word is authoritative and trustworthy.



Jesus takes Nicodemus back to an event of his ancestors recorded in Numbers 21. The constant grumbling and sinning of the Israelites in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, despite God's provisions, result in snakes prowling around... biting... killing. Imagine the terror with each strike as the poison makes its way through the bodies. Families, desperate for a way to keep loved ones alive, cry out to their leader, Moses, to seek God on their behalf to remove the deadly serpents.

The news quickly spreads that Moses is up to something. At God's direction, he constructs a bronze snake and places it atop a wooden pole. Look to the

pole, they say, to the snake on the top. **Looking up to the wooden pole would keep those bitten by the snakes from death.**

God doesn't remove the dangerous serpents, but He does provide a way for the Israelites to live despite being bitten. They are to look to the wooden pole.

It was a foreshadowing of Jesus who will hang on a wooden pole shedding blood for our grumblings and sins. When we are bitten by the temptation of sin – by the lure of the serpent, Satan, and our sinful desires – we can look up at Jesus on the cross.



When we look up to Jesus – believe in him – we too can live, despite the poisonous bites of sin in our lives.

Healing comes from the work of Jesus, dying on the cross for our sins.

So what...

Why was it easier for the Jews in the account from Numbers to look to a snake on a pole to save them than for the current Jews to look to Jesus?

In verse 8, Jesus says the wind blows where it wishes, you hear the sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes. He equates this with **everyone who is born of the Spirit**. What do you think this means? Can we control the wind? Do we understand what it is going to do or how it works? How does the wind metaphor relate to the Spirit and being born again?

Nicodemus was very confused by Jesus saying he had to be born again to see the kingdom of God. How might the idea of "birth" contributed to his confusion (in the general sense and in keeping in mind the Jewish people felt it was their heritage as a chosen people of God that would save them)? What do you think it means to be born again? Why is this an important truth to embrace?



Whoever Believes in Him

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever

does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." John 3:16-21

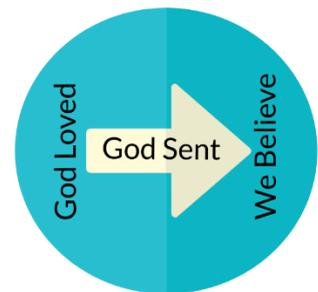
No matter how new you are to Bible study, you have likely seen or heard John 3:16. It is a beautiful and succinct summary of the Gospel... God so loved the world, THAT he gave HIS only Son, THAT WHOEVER believes in him should NOT perish but HAVE eternal life. God loved, God sent, God saves.

Did you catch the order there? **First God loved and God sent his Son, THEN we believe.** God acts first.

Christianity isn't about us pulling it all together or checking everything off a list first, it is about God initiating and doing the work. We simply believe and accept the gift of the work of Jesus on our behalf.

So, what does it mean to BELIEVE in? David Guzik sums it up this way, "**Believes in** means much more than intellectual awareness or agreement. It means to **trust in, to rely on, and to cling to.**" Several times in the Bible we see that even Satan and his evil spirits "believe" in God and can even quote Scripture. But it is factual / academic belief rather than a trust, submission, reliance, hope kind of belief.

John tells us that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but **so the world could be saved through Him.** Sin is a big deal to God. Without intervention, we are condemned because of our sin. When Jesus returns to earth, there will be judgement and payment required for sin. God is a just God and can't look away from sin. But this passage tells us that



Jesus did not come to condemn us...

Condemn:

Express complete disapproval;
Sentence to a particular punishment, especially death

...but instead to save us!

Save:

Deliver from sin;
Rescue and deliver from danger or harm.
Deliverance; to be delivered.

God did not at this time send His Son into the world to condemn us, but INSTEAD, to SAVE US. The purpose for Jesus coming... for the Word becoming flesh... was to save us, and He does this by dying on the cross to take the penalty and punishment for our sins.

This naturally brings up a question: If all we have to do is believe in what Jesus did for us to have our sin penalty paid for and spend eternity in Heaven, why do some people not put their trust in Him? John reminds us we have a choice. **We can choose the light or we can choose darkness.** And sadly, many of us choose darkness. We reject the work of Jesus and moral living and we chose to go our own way. We enjoy or ignore our sins and opt to deal with the consequences later. We put ourselves in charge of saving us instead of Jesus. The problem is, we can't save ourselves. We can't defeat sin on our own. We need a rescuer, and Jesus came to be that for us.

So what...

Look at Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew 8:28-32, and James 2:19. What does this say about the devil and his belief in God?

What is the difference between intellectual belief in something or someone and trust / reliance / hope / submission belief in something or someone? Where do you see yourself when it comes to belief in Jesus?

Think about the idea of light always being there, even when we don't see it. What causes light to not be seen?

What does it mean to love darkness rather than the light? What does it look like to live in darkness? On the spectrum of full light and full darkness, where do you find yourself?



Jesus is the Reward

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. John 3:22-36

The **disciples of John the Baptist are going through this identity crisis**. They love the Lord. They have been part of John's ministry for some time now. People are coming from all over, repenting, and being baptized. The ministry is popular and thriving.

But then Jesus comes. It is joyful at first as they hear their beloved teacher announce that Jesus is the Messiah they have been waiting for. They witness the Holy Spirit descending on Him and the voice of God speak as Jesus is baptized by John. They are part of something big and beautiful.

Until their (John the Baptist and his followers) crowds start to decrease. The attention disappears. People are flocking to Jesus instead of them. The growth in Jesus' followers are coming at the expense of John's and they aren't quite sure what to make of it.

They still love the Lord; they are still all in, but somewhere along the way, **they have tangled up their role with the true reward**. John, their teacher, tries to re-shift their focus upward...the One they have been preparing the way for has come. **Jesus is to be glorified, not us**.

Sometimes our role or assignment or passion can become our "god" and even our work



for Jesus can take the place of Jesus in our heart. Jon Bloom says, “We must remember that **our role is not our reward. Jesus is our reward.** Roles will begin and they will end. **And the only way for us to end well is if in our heart Jesus has increased and we have decreased.”**

John the Baptist has such a solid understanding of who he is and who Jesus is. The shift of followers from John to Jesus not only doesn’t rattle John, he is happy about it. It was his plan all along. **Jesus is the one to be glorified and followed.** In all of our work FOR Jesus, we must always remember that it is ABOUT Jesus. He must increase. We must decrease. And that is a good thing, even for – especially for – us.

So what...

Practically what does it look like for Jesus to INCREASE? How does that look in our lives?

Practically what does it look like for us to DECREASE? How does that look in our lives?

In our culture of self-love, self-promotion, self-care, and self-branding, how does what John is proclaiming differ from what the world today is telling us? How do you and people you know tend to react to the idea of “decreasing”?

19

Samaritan Woman

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the

field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ 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.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) John 4:1-9

There's an important set up to this next Jesus encounter. Jesus is leaving Judea and heading to Galilee. In merely looking at a map, it would make sense that He "had to pass through Samaria." It's on the way. The closest route.



But that wasn't the normal route a Jewish person would take. They would go out of their way to avoid Samaria, even if it meant crossing rivers and traveling over mountains. Crazy, right? Ancient Israel was a divided kingdom, with Samaria being part of the Northern Kingdom that was conquered by Assyria around 721 BC. At that time, many of the Jewish people living in the Northern Kingdom were exiled out of the land and Samaria became an important Assyrian region. Some Jews were left behind and instead of holding fast to their Jewish beliefs and observances, they took on the religious practices of the dominant culture around them. Over time, these Samaritans were despised by the Jewish people as being half-Jew and half-Gentile (non-Jew). Fast forward 700 years when Jesus is walking the earth, and the division and hatred are deeply

embedded. As a people who considered themselves "clean" and "holy", the Jewish people avoided these Samaritans they believed abandoned their heritage and set-apartness that was so valued.

All that to say, it is more than a passing comment that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria." It wasn't about the closest, most common route. **He had to come...there was a divine appointment that day.**

And if Samaritans were avoided, a Samaritan woman was even more so. But in this passage, we meet a Samaritan woman. Another interesting detail in this story is the time of day we meet this woman coming to get water from the well....the sixth hour. This would be the middle of the day, around noon. At first glance, this may not seem like a big deal either, but it is also not the norm. Normally the women in the community would come to the well together in the morning when it was cooler. But this woman comes in the heat of the day. Alone.

What must she have been thinking when she sees Jesus at the well as she approaches? A Jewish man; a teacher. One she assumes will have utter disdain for her and validate all of her feelings of being unloved and unworthy.

But instead, Jesus asks her for a drink.



So what...

What is the significance of the sixth hour in this story? What is the Samaritan woman's current situation? Paint a picture of her life in Samaria.

Why do you think John records that Jesus "had to go through Samaria" when that wouldn't be the normal route?

How is Jesus breaking barriers and going against cultural norms here? What does this tell us about Jesus?

In the Bible we are told that Jesus gives rest to the weary (Matthew 11:28), but here we see that He was weary (John 4:6). What does this tell us about Jesus and His encounters with people?



Living Water

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him. John 4:10-30

The already out of the ordinary encounter gets even more confusing for the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus tells her that **if she knew** who was asking her for a drink, she would **ask Him** for a drink instead and receive **LIVING WATER**.

Her response is essentially that he doesn't have a bucket. She gets to the practical. The well is deep. How is he to get this water he speaks of? And who does he think he is saying that any water he has could be better than the water from this well of their ancestor, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, Jacob?

Jesus tells her that drinking water from this well doesn't prevent you from being thirsty again. It satisfies for a while, but doesn't eliminate the thirst that will come again. He says the water that He gives becomes a **spring of water IN US that wells up to eternal life**. A very different kind of refreshment.



Never thirst again, she thinks. Never walk to this blasted well again. Never carry the heavy jug miles back home. She is in. She doesn't know what He is talking about, but the sound of never thirsting again is awfully appealing.

But then Jesus gets personal. "Go, call your husband, and come here," He says to her after she expresses interest in the water He offers. He knows she needs more than physical water. **He knows she needs to acknowledge her need for the spiritual water He offers**. He gets right to the heart of the matter.

"I have no husband," she quickly responds. The truth is, she had five previous husbands, and the man she is with now is not her husband. It's part of her shameful past and shameful present. This is her life. Almost in sync with her reflection, Jesus speaks it all out loud. He knows. He knows of the husbands. He knows of her current living situation. He knows she is a Samaritan, a woman, a sinner and He is still speaking to her. And the kindness with which He speaks...she has never experienced anything like it.



Jesus knows everything about you. Your past. Your sin. Your shame. Where you hide. What you fear...

...and He loves you. He offers you living water and eternal life.

Jesus isn't distracted or diverted by her response about disputed places of worship between their people. He explains that the time is coming – now; here even – when the Father will be worshiped in spirit and truth. **He is looking for such people to worship.**

The Samaritan woman doesn't understand, but she knows who can. "I know the Messiah is coming...He will tell us all things," she says.

"I who speak to you am he," Jesus replies, revealing Himself to this woman.

She hears noises as the disciples return. Her heart must be pounding. She sees now. The Messiah. Here. Speaking to her; loving her. A Savior for even her; especially her. She drops all pretense, prejudice, push-back, preconceived notions, pride. She drops the water jar and runs as fast as she can back home. **"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"** She can't keep such incredible news to herself.



Jesus wants to offer us living water too. Do we see a Messiah or a match for religious debate? Do we see a Savior or no bucket, focusing on circumstances our limited eyes can see? Come, see...

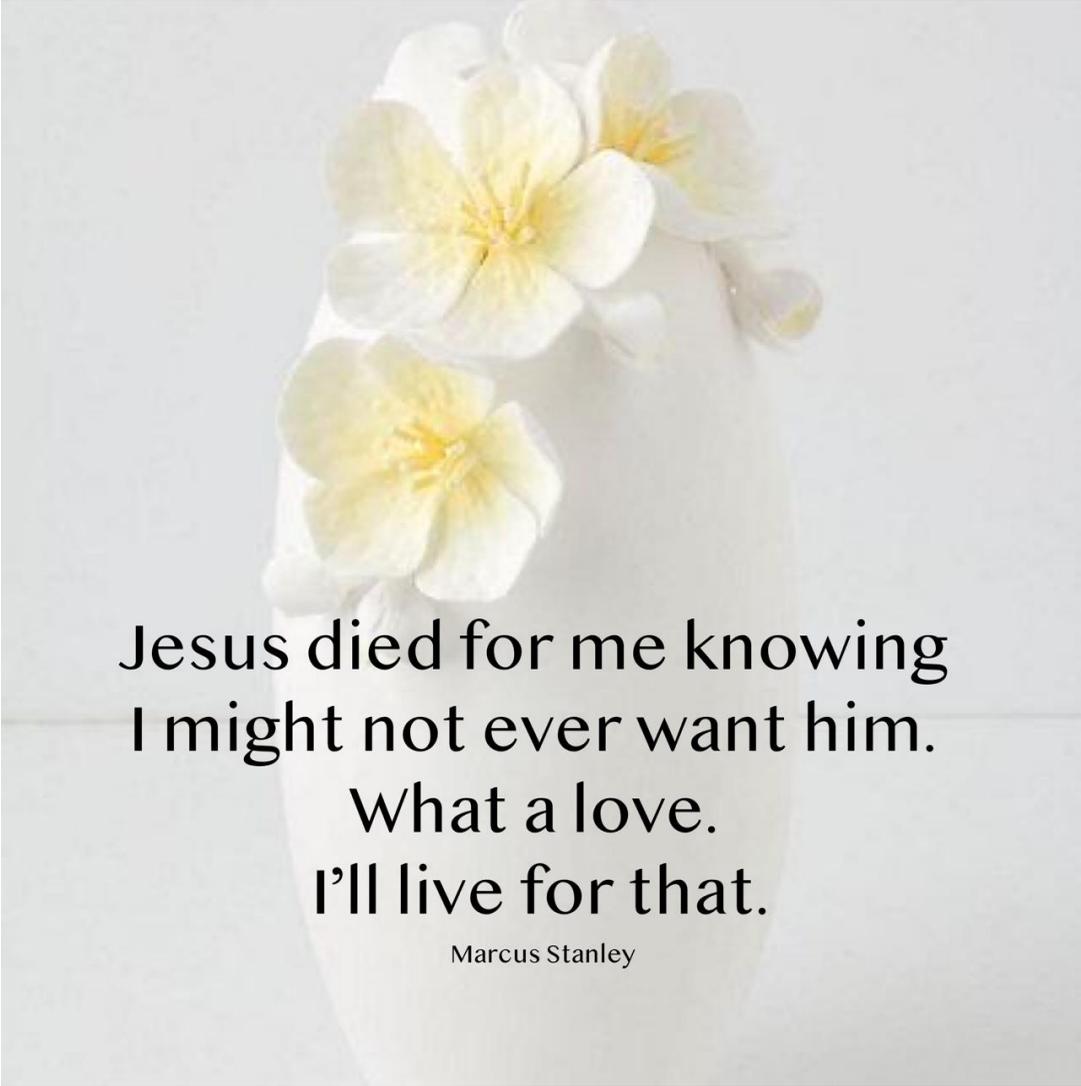
So what...

The Samaritan woman was shamed and shunned by her culture. How would people today react/respond to someone like this woman? How would people think about her? Treat her?

How does Jesus respond to this woman? How is this different than how the world would respond? What do we learn about the character and nature of Jesus?

Compare and contrast Nicodemus (John 3:1-15) and the Samaritan woman...their social status, their current life situation, their daily life, their encounter with Jesus (who approached who, the conversation, etc.), the outcome from their Jesus encounter.

How would you describe the “Living Water”? Why do you think Jesus used these words?



Jesus died for me knowing
I might not ever want him.
What a love.
I'll live for that.

Marcus Stanley



The Harvest

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” ³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” ³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his

work. ³⁵ Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” John 4:31-42



Lift your eyes.
The harvest is ripe & ready.
Don't wait. Get to work!
The work will be rewarded.
The reward will be eternal.
All the workers will rejoice.

The disciples return to the well with food and urge Jesus to eat, but He has more important things on His mind after this encounter with the Samaritan woman.

Yes, food is important, but Jesus wants them to know there are even more important things. As food is required to live, even more so is stepping into God's will to be a part of accomplishing His work. Nothing is more satisfying.

There is a harvest out there; an abundance of good fruit and new seeds to be planted. Jesus warns not to look out in the field of our lives and think that there is plenty of time to wait on the harvest. Instead, He says “lift your eyes.” Come, see. The harvest is ready. Others had a part to play in our harvest, and in turn we have a part to play in other peoples' callings to accomplish the work God has prepared for them. And in whatever season – the sowing or the reaping – we can rejoice together. This is true community.

So, what is this calling, this work, this harvest, this reward? John continues, bringing it back to the Samaritan woman. **Many in the town BELEVED in Jesus because of the woman's testimony.** A shunned outcast, once hiding in shame and walking alone, transformed into the harvester of many who now believe. All because of an encounter with Jesus. She felt seen and loved. She was brave enough to go and tell others. And others were open enough to listen, and then to come and see for themselves.

Whatever seasons and fields we find ourselves in today, there are seeds to be planted and a bountiful harvest to be gathered. There are good things God has prepared for us to walk in and to accomplish for His kingdom. **Don't miss it.** Don't waste your time or your life in fear, shame, unbelief, doubt. Lift your eyes to see. The harvest is ready.

So what...

Look back at verse 34. How does Jesus describe his "food"? What do you think this means? Why use the word "food"?

How was the Samaritan woman both a reaper and a sower?

Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Using the harvest metaphor, think through each of the following:

What "field" are you in right now in your life?

What "season" of life do you find yourself in?

What "seeds" are you planting, watering, tending to?

What "harvest" might be ready for you to reap?

What "rewards" (in your life and the life of others) might come from the harvest?



The 2nd Sign: Healing the Official's Son

⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) ⁴⁵ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee. John 4:43-54

Jesus wasn't rushed in his unprecedented visit to Samaria. He stayed two days before traveling back to Cana in Galilee, the site of His first miracle. Meanwhile, about 20 miles away, an official (other translations call this man a royal official, government official, or nobleman) in Capernaum hears Jesus is in Galilee. Like the locals, this royal man had heard all of the things Jesus had done back in Jerusalem. This man's son is sick and he hopes Jesus is the answer he is looking for. He asks Jesus to come and heal his dying son.



Jesus challenges the man – and us – as to whether we only believe in Him because of signs and wonders. **Belief and faith in Jesus must be deeper to be lasting.** In the Old Testament, many of the Jewish people saw incredible signs from God, but still turned away from Him time and time again.

The man is not deterred, asking again for Jesus to come and heal his son. Jesus simply says, "Go; your son will live." **With nothing but Jesus' word, the man believes and goes.** His belief is followed by the miraculous...he learns his son was healed the exact moment Jesus spoke it. This royal, noble government official took Jesus at His word and experienced the miraculous.



Jesus doesn't discriminate. Our financial, cultural, or social status doesn't matter to Him. This man wasn't Jewish. This man worked for the government oppressing the Jewish people. But this man **believed**, humbled himself before Jesus, acknowledged Jesus' power, and then experienced the **miraculous**.

So what...

Do you believe the word of Jesus or do you typically seek signs and wonders? If Jesus came back tomorrow, would you believe it was Him? What would it take for you to believe?

We are told by John in verse 54 that this was the 2nd sign. John's Gospel contains seven signs that point to who Jesus is. How does this sign point to who Jesus is and what He came to do?

What similarities and differences do you see in the first two "signs" – the turning water into wine and this account of the official's son being healed?

Look again at this passage. How does this interaction (the approach, the posture, the intentions, the response from Jesus, etc.) compare/contrast with the Samaritan woman and the people in her village? How does it differ from the religious leaders?



The 3rd Sign: Healing the Paralyzed Man

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ 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?” ⁷ 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.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹² They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. John 5:1-15

Thirty-eight years lying on a mat, unable to walk. Imagine the things that mat has seen. Though this man is desperate to get off the mat, the mat has likely become quite comfortable to him in a sick sort of way. It is almost part of him now...his identity; who he is. He despises the mat and clings to the mat at the same time.

“Do you want to get well?” That is the question Jesus asks.

Of course! The impulse reaction must have been. But then he starts thinking about life up from the mat. Unknown. Scary. Unpredictable. Perhaps he starts to wonder if the misery of the mat is preferred to the messy unknown. He likely wonders if he will make it apart from the mat. I wonder if he rationalizes that laying by the pool and living off of scraps and handouts isn’t so bad. The real truth is, it seems so impossible for him to get off the mat.

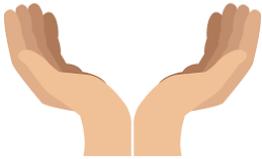
“I have no one to help me...” “If I could just...” “If only...” The questions likely roll through this man’s mind.

The thing that put him on the mat isn’t in his head. It is real. It is hard. It is painful. He has been trying to get off the mat for So. Many. Years. He knows what it takes to get off the mat, and he knows he doesn’t have it. He’s long given up, but yet he keeps at it nonetheless.

Jesus essentially says, *are you willing to try something else?* To loosen the grip on the familiar and what you think you need to get well? Jesus comes to show us another way.

Still on the mat, the man shifts his eyes from the “magic” pool – the thing he thought could heal him, but only left him in the same miserable place – to the eyes of Jesus.

And at once he knows he is healed.



Louie Giglio says, “Every day we hold on to something with a clenched fist is a day we miss the possibility of God putting something amazing in our hands. When we let go, we don’t lose out.”

What keeps us stuck on our metaphorical mat? Things that keep us hanging out in circles that bring us down instead of lift us up. Things that make us feel unsatisfied, rather than grateful. Things that make us hate things about ourselves instead of realizing God can’t wait to use them for a purpose designed for us. Things that make us keep going back to what we know we shouldn’t do...what we know doesn’t work.

What are we looking to as the “magic” pool...the “if only” and “what if” we think is the answer? What if we slowly unclenched our cramped hands from around the edges of the mat and looked instead to Jesus?

And when we turn to Jesus, then we get the power we need to get off our mat. We can do the impossible. We can walk in freedom and healing. We can be who God created us to be.

Then we pick our mat up and carry it instead of letting it carry us. We carry it not to shame us, but to remind us from where we have come. It becomes a tool for our testimony.

And in the same power that got us up off the mat, we never lay back down on that dirty, smelly, wretched, battered mat.



So what...

What are you clinging to these days...things that are keeping you from true healing/restoration and following God with your whole heart? What things are holding you back from the things God has for you? What are your “if I could just _____” or “If only I _____”? What “magic pool” are you looking to for wholeness? What would it take to loosen your grip?

How would your life change if you weren't afraid to “get off your mat”? What would you do if you weren't afraid of the unknown or of failing? What would it look like if you decided to try things His way; to relentlessly follow Jesus?

Reread verse 14. What “worse” things related to sin might Jesus be thinking about?

Commentators point out that this is the 3rd miracle – the 3rd sign – John includes in his Gospel account. What do you think this sign represents about who Jesus is? How does it differ from the second sign? Note that both are healing miracles. Out of all the many miracles Jesus performed, why do you think John selects this one as representative?

Spend some quite time with God reflecting on what you have been trying to do about these things in your own power. Now decide to look to Jesus. Talk to Him about how to help you see the circumstances and solutions through His eyes.



Every day we hold on
to something with
a clinched fist
is a day we miss the possibility
of God putting
something amazing in
our hands.
When we let go, we
don't lose out.

Louie Giglio



Judgment

¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

¹⁸ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ 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.

²⁵ “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:16-29

The Jewish leaders who witnessed Jesus heal the man on the mat who had been sick for 38 years can't celebrate the healing. They are so stuck on the fact that Jesus did it on the **Sabbath**, a day that was set aside by God for rest; a day the Jewish people had piled so many legalistic “rules” onto, making it anything but restful.

They are even more **outraged that Jesus is calling God His Father** and making Himself equal to God. Their religion and religious rituals are blinding them from a holy relationship right in front of them. The anger and hatred ran deep. These same people so outraged by a healing on the Sabbath are seeking to kill the Messiah they had been waiting for but couldn't see. It's a gut check to examine what we are focusing on and what we are looking for. Is it Jesus or is it our ideas of how things should go down?

The Sabbath was about rest and renewal and reconnecting with the Creator who also rested on the seventh day of creation. God's creation work was complete in six days, but here Jesus reminds us that God is still working.

We learn a few more things about Jesus. **He does only what He sees God the Father doing.** He is so in sync with the Father; in full community, unity, and submission. When He heals on the Sabbath, He isn't breaking any of God's laws. It would be impossible for Him to do so. We also learn that God the Father has given Jesus authority to judge. And we learn that Jesus is to be honored, and in honoring Jesus (God the Son), God the Father is honored. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. Whoever hears Jesus' word and believes will have eternal life.

A time is coming when judgment will take place. Justice will be served. And as sinful people, we will all be guilty, however, the sentencing will be different. For those of us who believe in the work of Jesus to pay for our sins with His blood, the sentence will be a beautiful, eternal life. However, for those who chose to reject Jesus and handle things on their own, the sentence will be eternal damnation. The absence of goodness, peace, and love. It will be an existence of sinful nature ruling the day. Torment and torture continuously.

What will your judgment sentencing look like?

So what...

What does this passage say about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son? How do we see that they are One God?

Close your eyes and imagine an existence free of any hint of sin...full of peace and joy and fullness. What do you see?

Now imagine an existence where human nature and sin rule the day...pride, bitterness, unending striving, envy, hatred, anger, discontentment, dissatisfaction, and chaos. What do you see?

Why do you think clinging so tightly to religious rules, rituals, and traditions were part of what kept the religious leaders from recognizing Jesus? How might this apply to us today?



Witness Testimony

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. ³¹ If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” John 5:30-47



“A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”
Deuteronomy 19:15-19



In the Old Testament laws established and followed by the Jewish people, the idea of **witnesses** was a big one. Part of truth and justice was having a claim against someone verified by not only one, but two or more witnesses. And the crime for bearing false witness (or untrue accusation or testimony) against someone was severe.

Jesus is basically saying, *don't take my word for it alone. There are witnesses to who I am and what I came to do.* He goes onto provide them with four witnesses:

The testimony of John the Baptist – these people questioning Jesus knew about John the Baptist and his followers. They had seen and heard what John said about Jesus...that He was the Messiah, the Lamb of God sent to take away the sins of the world.

The testimony of the works of Jesus Himself – Jesus was fulfilling prophecy, healing, and teaching truth. John calls the miracles of Jesus “signs.” These miracles aren't what Jesus came to do alone; instead, they pointed as a witness to who He was and what He would do.

The testimony of God the Father – When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, God spoke, “this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

The testimony of the Scriptures – Jesus points out that these religious leaders love the Scriptures, they believe the Scriptures, they search the Scriptures for eternal life. What they don’t see is that these Scriptures all point to Jesus as the One spoken about; the Messiah, Christ, Savior they have been longingly waiting for. Even the words of their beloved Moses pointed to Jesus, but they refused to believe because it didn’t fit their narrative or lifestyle.

Theologian William Barclay says, “They read it not to search for God but to find arguments to support their own positions. They did not really love God; they loved their own ideas about him.” In other words, if their study of His word was truly out of a love for God and to know Him, they would have seen that Jesus was who He said He was.

Jesus says that despite all of the proof points they had to believe, they refused to do so. They were stubborn and their hearts were hard. Pridefully, they cared more about getting glory from one another – their status and position – than the only glory that matters.

So what...

At the beginning of the passage, Jesus says He only does the will of the Father. Why is this significant?

The religious leaders were seeking after their own will. They were not looking for evidence to support who Jesus was, but instead looking for evidence against Him. Whose will do you seek? What is your “seeking” posture?

Where do you try to seek glory? In your accomplishments? In accolades and admiration from other people? In your achievements and successes? In the long run, how satisfying and sustaining is this type of glory?



The 4th Sign: Feeding 5,000

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 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?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” John 6:1-14

This miracle is recounted in all four Gospels (Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and here in John 6). The word of Jesus and His healing so many begins to spread and crowds begin to follow in large masses. Jesus goes up on a mountain with His disciples and sees the crowds approaching. He turns to Phillip and asks where they can buy bread to feed all these people. John tells us that Jesus says this **to test him** because He already knew what He would do.

Let’s pause here to think about that. Jesus already knew the answer to the question He asked Philip. Jesus was testing Philip. Why? It is important to keep in mind the difference between testing and tempting. Testing is different than tempting. The Bible tells us God does not tempt us (James 1:13). The devil and our sinful desires tempt us. Tempting is hoping for failure. **Testing is hoping for success. It is to cause us to pause and process; to confirm and strengthen us.**

Jesus didn’t just want to perform a miracle, He wanted Philip and the disciples to learn from it...**to see beyond the miracle to who He is.** To learn to trust Him and His power; to believe in Him. Philip responds with the natural, worldly answer, quickly doing the calculation in his head and pointing out they don’t have the food or the two hundred denarii (more than 6 months wages) to buy the bread that would be required to feed over 5,000 people. After all of the miracles he had witnessed, he still sought a worldly answer to a seemingly impossible situation. Anyone relate? (raising my hand!)

Andrew points to a small boy who has five barley loaves and two fish. Enough for a family maybe, but not the thousands that have gathered. *How in the world can such a small portion solve this enormous problem*, they likely murmur among themselves.

Jesus says, "Bring them to me."



Jesus orders the people to sit on the grass. This isn't going to be a quick charity buffet line. They are going to sit, eat, enjoy each other's company.

Jesus takes the five loaves and the two fish, looks up to heaven, and says a blessing. **He gives thanks... before the miracle.** We tend to think of gratitude as something that comes after the provision, but Jesus shows us that gratitude comes before the miracle too. Gratitude releases the miracle.

Jesus invites His friends to be part of this holy provision. The disciples GET TO distribute the bread and fish. Not only does everyone eat until they are satisfied, but there are also leftovers. Can you even imagine what the disciples must have been thinking as they kept reaching into their basket and food kept coming out?!

The little surrendered to Jesus has produced abundance. Jesus shows us that no amount is too small if we bring it to Him. He will take what we have, invite us to be part of the miracle, and turn it into abundance.

You only have a tiny fraction of what you need? Remember past provisions and bring it to Jesus!

Chuck Swindoll says, "The size of a challenge should never be measured by what we have to offer. It will never be enough. Furthermore, provision is God's responsibility, not ours. We are merely called to commit what we have - even if it's no more than a sack lunch."

We can focus our attention and energy on our limited resources and seemingly impossible circumstances, or we can GIVE THANKS and bring our little to Jesus. He can't wait to take us along on the miraculous ride, accomplishing things that would be impossible on our own. And in His provision from our little, we know it is ONLY JESUS. It is a test to make our faith stronger. Our fear weaker.



So what...

Compare and contrast Philip and Andrew's responses to Jesus.

John tells us Jesus was testing Philip. What was the test? Why test him?

What in your life feels impossible right now? What small portions can you bring to Jesus?

What is the significance of leftovers?

This is the 4th sign recorded in John's gospel. What does this sign say about who Jesus is and what He came to do? Why do you think this particular miracle was included in all four of the gospels?

Write down three things/gifts you have (even if they seem small) that you can give to God to multiply into something for His kingdom.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

You have only a fraction
of what you need?
Remember past provisions
& **bring it**
to Jesus



- Jesus



5th Sign (Walking on Water) + 1st "I AM" (Bread of Life)

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

²² On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:15-40

Bellies full, leftovers gathered, and crowds amazed by Jesus. Sounds like a successful path for a leader, right? But Jesus knows that the instinct of the people would be to force Him into the mold of what they thought their savior should look like. They imagine a worldly king ruling over a worldly military and political kingdom. **It is so much bigger than that**, but they can't yet see it. Jesus retreats to be alone. Here on earth with the most important mission and assignment, **Jesus takes time to slow down and be alone with God the Father**. Why is this so hard for us when this is what fuels even Jesus?

The disciples go ahead to the next location via boat. And no biggie, Jesus catches up to them via foot...on the water. You see, when we are putting our hope in the Lord and stepping into His call on our lives, He will be our provider. There are no earthy obstacles in His way. He will give us what we need and get us where we need to be.



The crowds continue to follow Him. At this point, they are all in. Or so they think.

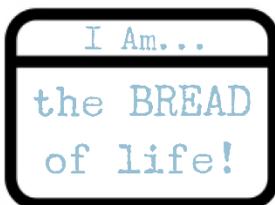
Jesus calls them out. He knows what they are seeking, but it isn't who He is. At least not all – or the most important parts – of who He is. Yes, He is a provider. Yes, He is a healer. THIS is who they want to follow. The man with the miracles and baskets of bread. But these things will fade away. It is not that they are wrong, it is that there is more – it is deeper, fuller, and more satisfying. **He wants them to know He is so much more than the miracles themselves.**

Jesus tells them this bread – even miraculous bread; even the manna their ancestors received daily from God in the wilderness – will not ultimately satisfy. The bread will digest. The day will pass. They will be hungry yet again.

He wants them to be crystal clear about who and what they are following. Jesus – His body; His being – is the bread of life.

Confused still, they ask what they must do to be doing the works of God. In essence saying, “show us the formula so that we may follow it and never be hungry.”

Jesus again seeks to clarify... **It is not in the doing; it is in the believing.** In His flesh, sent from heaven, is the bread of life. Upon this, they must eat.



I AM the bread of life. This is the first of seven “I AM” statements John record to demonstrate who Jesus is. As we need bread to nourish and sustain us, so also we need Jesus. Daily.

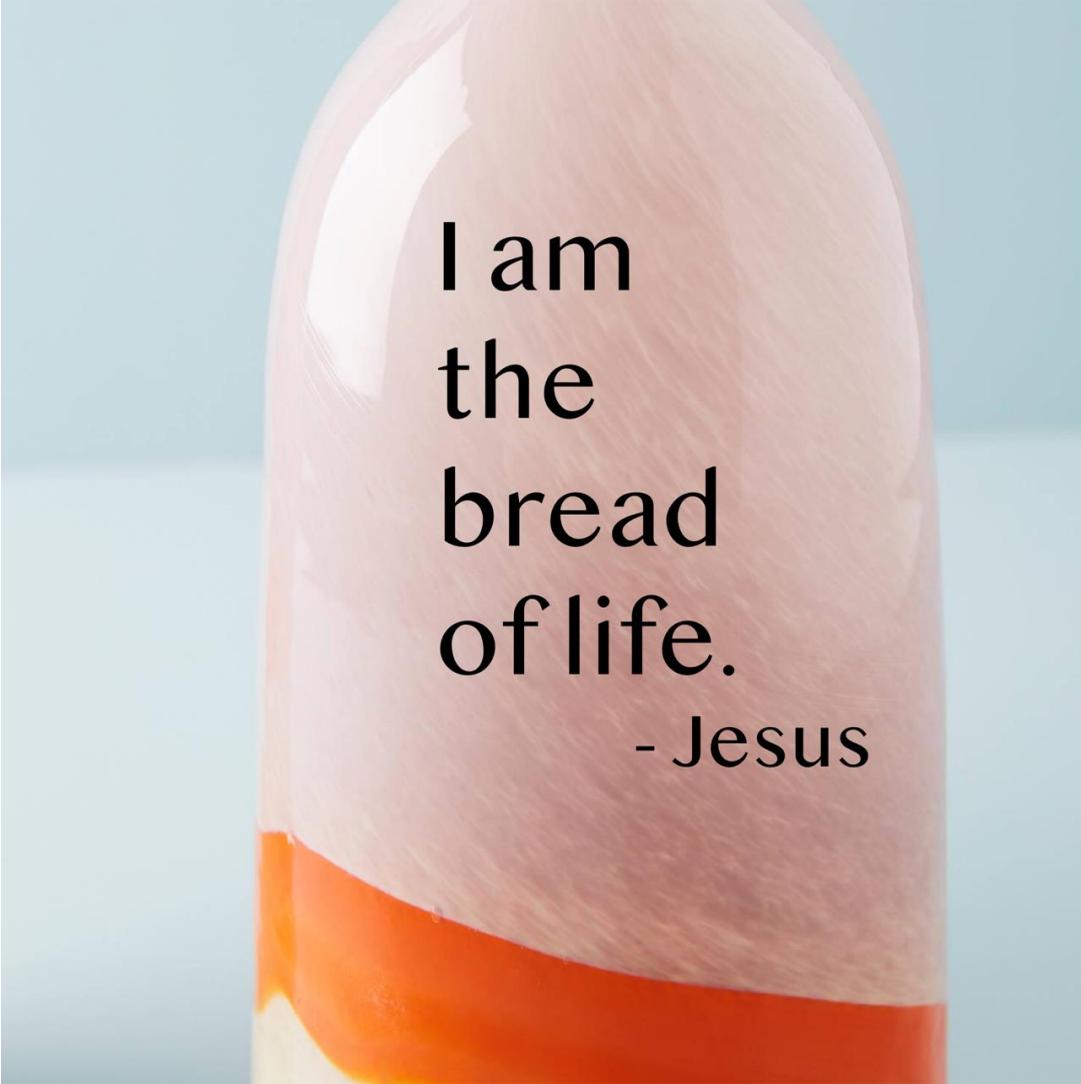
So what...

The miracle of walking on water is the 5th of the seven signs recorded by John. In what ways does this sign point to who Jesus is?

Why do you think most people follow Jesus today? What are they seeking?

This passage also contains the first of seven "I AM" statements by Jesus. What does it mean that Jesus is the BREAD OF LIFE? What does it mean when He says that we will never hunger or thirst again when we come to Him?

What does Jesus say we must do to have eternal life (John 6:40)? Practically, what does this look like in our lives today?



I am
the
bread
of life.

- Jesus



To Stay or Go

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. John 6:41-71

These words being spoken by Jesus don't sit well with the religious establishment or even the common Jews following Him. They know this man. They know where He is from. They know His father and mother. Who does He think He is claiming to be the bread of life?

Jesus tells us another important truth about Himself and God the Father. **It is God who pursues us and draws us to Himself.** If you don't know Jesus or are unsure, take the time to lean into the draw of God. Spend time with Him. Tell Him you want to meet Him and know Him. Don't let the distractions of life keep you from Him.

With all of the grumbling, **Jesus doesn't try to clear up misunderstandings or even make His message more appealing to the masses.** Instead, He doubles down. He talks about eating flesh and drinking blood. I can't blame them for being baffled as they try to understand it from their limited vantage point.

"This is a hard saying," the chorus, once passionately chasing after Him, cry out. "Who can listen to it," they shout as one by one they walk away.

Thousands reduced to handfuls. But Jesus isn't about numbers; He is about truth and followers who know what they are getting into.

"Do you want to go away as well?" Jesus asks the Twelve remaining.

Speaking for the group, Peter responds, "**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," Peter continues.

Life is hard. Some things in the Bible are hard to understand. Some of the words feel uncomfortable, demanding, convicting, confusing. **Many want what Jesus offers, but not on His terms.** The idea of taking up our cross and following Him is not what we had in mind. The idea of surrendering to Him rubs our ego the wrong way. The idea of Him as the only way to eternal life goes against our worldly reason.

But to whom else would we go? We might think we want to have some control over saving ourselves...but do we really? It is impossible!

We might think we want a God who never punishes or expects hard things from us...but do we really? We crave a just God who can make all wrongs right.

We might think we want a God who looks the other way on sin – after all, the world tells us it is a personal decision; no one else's business....but do we really? That only leads to suffering and bondage, not freedom.

We might wonder if God really exists; if it is all just a big cosmic accident...but do we really? Our souls desire purpose and order.

If we walk away from Jesus, we will be walking *toward* something else. But anything else will always come up short and let us down.

On this side of heaven, we will never have all the answers or understand the fullness of a big God, but to whom else would we go? Truth is truth, and truth is life. **Where else would we go?**

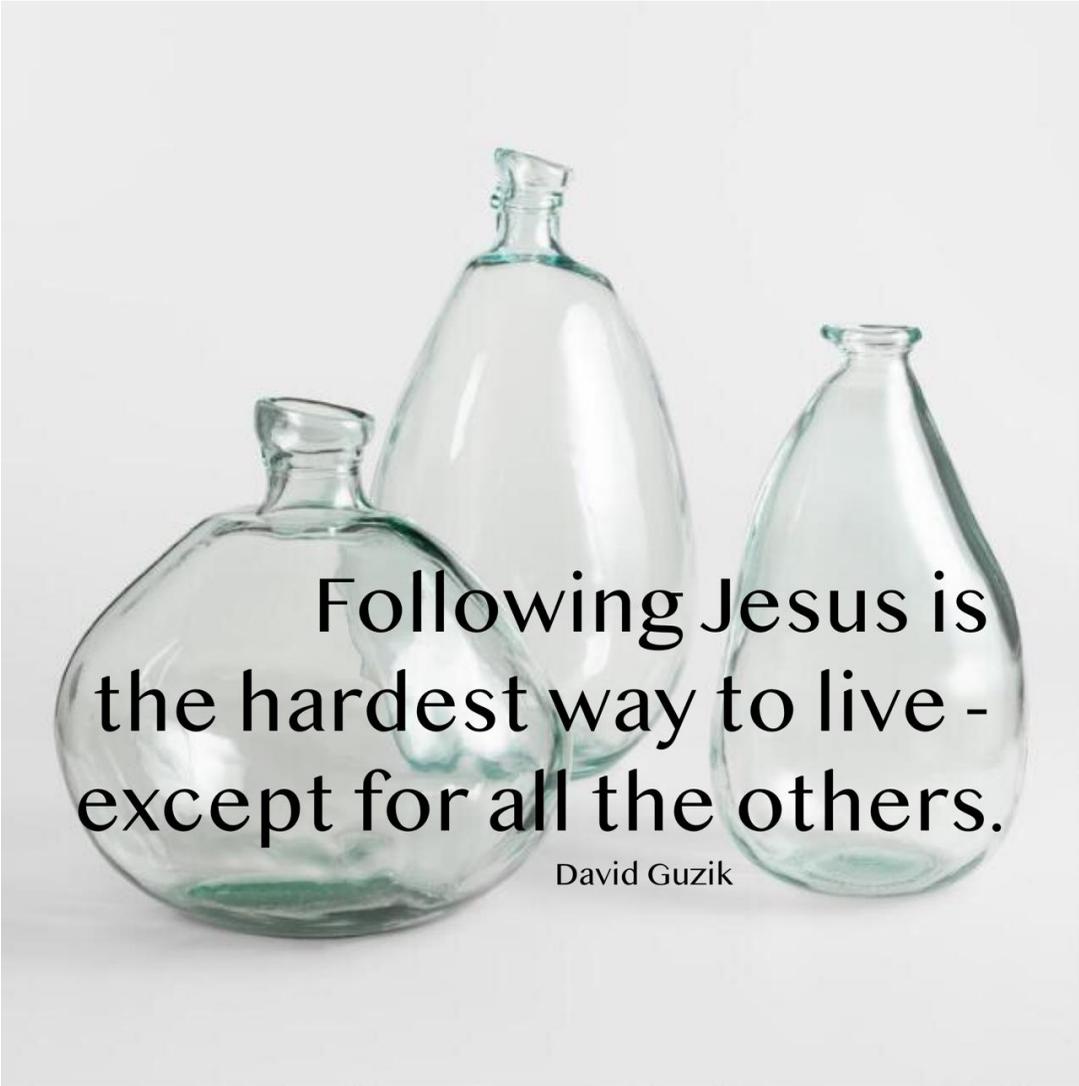
So what...

How can our limited view of people or circumstances keep us from seeing something bigger, more purposeful, more beautiful?

How is Jesus different than the typical leader? Why do you think some people are so quick to walk away from Jesus? What makes others stick around?

How do you generally react when things don't make sense to you and God doesn't seem to do things the way you think He should?

Look back at Peter's response to Jesus when He asks if they want to walk away from Him as well. Peter doesn't answer with an enthusiastic affirmative. Instead, how does Peter respond? In what ways can you relate to Peter's response? Where else, and to whom else, do people go? Where does it ultimately lead them?

Three empty glass bottles of different shapes and sizes are arranged on a light surface. The bottle on the left is the largest and has a rounded, bulbous body. The bottle in the middle is the tallest and has a more slender, elongated body. The bottle on the right is the smallest and has a teardrop shape. All three bottles have narrow necks and are completely empty.

**Following Jesus is
the hardest way to live -
except for all the others.**

David Guzik



Doubters

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. ² Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. ³ So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing." ⁴ For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him. ⁶ Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. ⁸ You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" ¹² And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." ¹³ Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

¹⁴ About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. ¹⁵ The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" ¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. ¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. ¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" ²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" ²¹ Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³ If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." John 7:1-24

Jesus is performing miracles and speaking truth. **He is simultaneously adored and despised, depending on who you talk to.** The religious leaders are threatened by His following and claims to be God. His hard to understand words are turning some away. We see here that even His brothers didn't believe Him. (Could you even imagine Jesus being your brother???)

You can't be famous if you hide like this! If you're so great, prove it to the world, Jesus' skeptical brothers prod Him to go to Judea to the masses.

The parents of Jesus received incredible promises about their son prior to His birth. No doubt they also saw incredible hints of who He was as He was growing up. He had a calling, and He was exceptional. After all, He was God!

How would parents today respond? Enroll Him immediately in a highly selective & competitive gifted program? Hire private trainers to hone His skills? Contact the best PR firm to craft His image? Reach out to the acclaimed consultant? No doubt make sure He had polished Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok accounts. Ensure the world knows just how special He is!

But this isn't at all how Jesus lived. Nearly all of His life from birth to roughly age 30 are unknown; undocumented. **His childhood was uneventful** from the world's standards. He doesn't rush things. He spends quality time with people. He retreats to be alone and pray. He withdraws from attention and praise. He again speaks of His time not yet fully coming (as He did when His mother asked Him to perform a miracle at the wedding in Cana). **He is patient and purposeful**. He doesn't seek the spotlight.

Privately Jesus goes up to the feast alone. And privately the Jewish people whisper among themselves about who they speculate Him to be. A good man? A trouble-maker? Yet **for FEAR of the Jews**, no one spoke openly about Him. How often do we let fear keep us from openly speaking about Jesus.

Jesus again asserts His authority from God to teach...a teaching like none other, in which hearers of it marvel. But they can only see Jesus through their human lens, dampening their belief. To them, He is just an ordinary guy. A carpenter's son. Uneducated in these things. How can He possibly teach the way He does?

Friends, when we are doing **God's work, for God's glory**, no human limitations can stop us. We need to have an open heart, open mind, and eyes wide open to see all that God has for us. The Jewish people were judging Jesus as a sinner, paranoid, and unqualified. Jesus reminds them (and us) to not judge by mere appearances. We are so much more than can be seen through worldly eyes, and God's ways are so much bigger.

So what...

What do you think the relationship between Jesus and His brothers were like? Why do you think it is so hard to see God-ordained things in people we are closest to?

Why do you think Jesus said He wasn't going to the feast and His time had not yet fully come (even though He ended up going to the feast and even teaching there)? What did Jesus mean when He said, "your time is always here"?

What does it mean to judge "rightly"? Do you often judge by appearances alone? When has this gotten you in trouble? How should we judge instead (if at all)?



Who is this man, Jesus?

²⁵ Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? ²⁷ But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” ²⁸ So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. ²⁹ I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.” ³⁰ So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. ³³ Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”

³⁷ 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. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some of the people said, “This really is the Prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?” ⁴⁶ The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!” ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” ⁵² They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” John 7:25-52

The people continue to debate the person of Jesus. Who is He? What is He here for? Some believe His claims and others vehemently oppose Him.

Those in the crowd point out that the religious leaders are seeking to kill him, but here Jesus is...out in public, teaching, and no one is doing anything to Him. They begin to wonder if maybe the authorities know something they don't. Maybe they know He is the Christ.

As with the Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks to the crowd about the living water He offers. In retrospect, John shares that Jesus is speaking of the Spirit that was to come to believers after Jesus' resurrection.

The people continue to remain conflicted and divided. The questions continue. The Scriptures tell where the Christ will come from (Bethlehem), but they recall Jesus is from Nazareth in Galilee. **The know where he grew up, but they don't know where He came from.** He actually was born in Bethlehem. And He came from Heaven, where He has been for all time. They were right to search Scripture to confirm what Jesus was saying, but they were wrong in their verdict. They didn't have all of the information or eyes to see.

The Jewish people are baffled and torn. They aren't sure what to make of this seemingly common man who speaks with such authority and performs so many incredible miracles.

Though many desired to arrest Him, no one laid a hand on Him. John tells us it is because **His hour had not yet come.** Jesus coming to earth to live and teach and die and then rise again was plan A from the beginning. The hour had been ordained and **nothing would happen until its due time.** You can't mess up God's plan!

Did you catch who speaks up? Nicodemus. He was one of them...a Pharisee. He was the one who came to Jesus by night seeking more information about who He was (John 3:1-15). We are sometimes quick to draw lines in the sand...that ALL the religious leaders of the day opposed Jesus. But here we see Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, wrestling with who Jesus is and not ready to write Him off so quickly.

Not unlike today, as varied as the groups of people encountering Jesus, so too the opinions about who He is. Some are quick to believe. Some quick to condemn. But many are not quite sure as they continue seeking to know and understand.

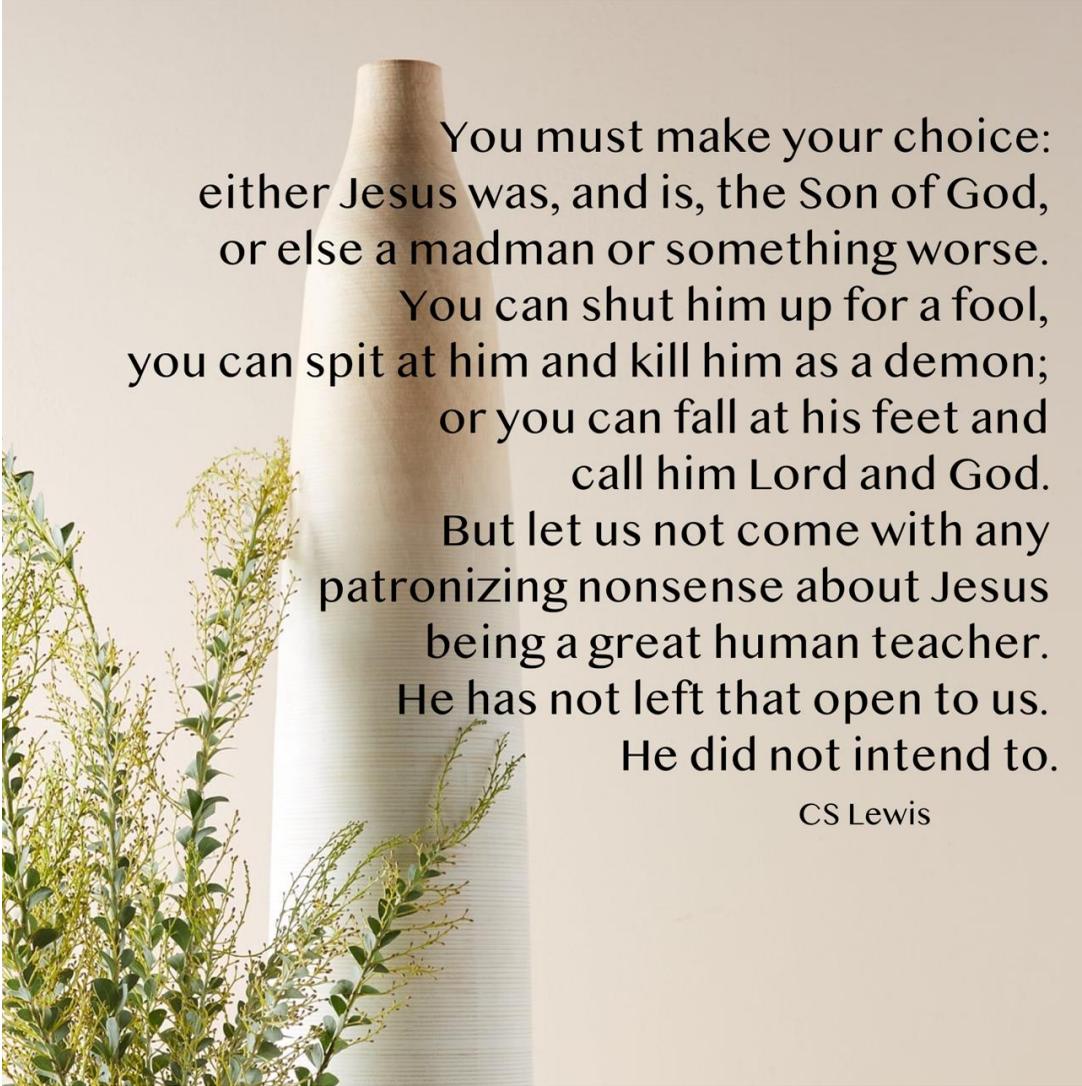
Wherever you find yourself, don't give up on Jesus. Keep seeking. Keep listening. Keep an open heart and mind. He is who He says He is. He is the Christ; the One who came to take away the sins of the world. My sins. And yours.

So what...

Look back in the passage at verse 39. What does this say about the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? What does it mean that Jesus was not yet glorified? What had to happen before the Holy Spirit could be given to us as believers?

What does it mean to be sovereign? How does Jesus show us that God is sovereign?

Do you believe we can't mess up God's plan? How does this make you feel? What freedom does this give you?



You must make your choice:
either Jesus was, and is, the Son of God,
or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool,
you can spit at him and kill him as a demon;
or you can fall at his feet and
call him Lord and God.

But let us not come with any
patronizing nonsense about Jesus
being a great human teacher.
He has not left that open to us.

He did not intend to.

CS Lewis



Go, and Sin No More

⁵³They went each to his own house,

⁸ ¹but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷And 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.” ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” John 7:53-8:11

(Note: the earliest manuscripts do not include these verses)

A new day after dispute and dissent about who Jesus is. A new day of the religious leaders trying to take Jesus down. On this day, it's a new low even for them. They find Him in the temple teaching the crowds. A public place for a public scene.

They bring to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. Caught. In. Adultery. Was she even clothed? Were they planting spies to “catch” her? Where is the man, also an adulterer? Was he in on it too?

The punishment is severe, so they think they have Jesus cornered. Will He follow the law of Moses and stone her or will He ignore her sin? **They are testing Him.**

Rather than acknowledge them, Jesus bends down. In humility. Eye level with the terrified, exposed, shamed, accused woman. Identifying with her. Face to face with Jesus, do you think she is wondering if what has been said about Him is true? Jesus writes with His finger on the sand. Though many over the years have speculated, no one knows what He wrote.

Instead of issuing a verdict, Jesus turns it back on her accusers, saying, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” Back to the sand He goes, again writing on the ground.

One by one, with a new awareness of their own sin, the men walk away. What must it be like to stand accused next to the Son of God? These men, always touting their righteousness, walk away. No longer standing in judgment of this woman they brought to Jesus in humiliation. Her sin is no greater than theirs.

The only people remaining are Jesus and the woman. I wonder if she had allowed herself to breathe yet or if she was still terrified at what Jesus would say and do. "Has no one condemned you?" Jesus asked. "No one, Lord," the woman replies. "**Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.**" A picture of grace. It is enough. It is what set her free, what gave her new life.

Forgiveness over condemnation. Jesus isn't in the business of condemnation; He is in the business of restoration. He knows that price for her sin – for all of our sin – will soon be paid by Him on the cross.

Jesus doesn't approve of her sin or say that it is ok. Instead, He says to go and sin no more. How must His compassion and her spared life have impacted her from this point on? It is a picture of repentance... to stop and turn the other way. **Forgiveness and freedom.** THIS is what following Jesus offers us.

So what...

For fun, what do you think Jesus wrote in the sand (no one knows, so it is just your guess)?

What do you learn about Jesus in this encounter?

Are you surprised the typically self-righteous, finger-pointing religious leaders walked away instead of insisting the woman be stoned? What do you think led to their strong conviction to walk away?

If this had been you, how would you have felt as the encounter unfolded? Being caught / exposed? Being encircled by accusers? Finding yourself face to face with Jesus? Before everyone walked away? After Jesus set you free?



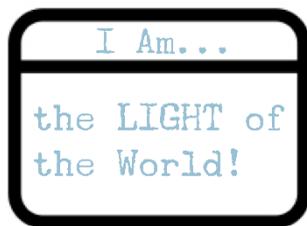
2nd "I AM" - I AM the Light of the World

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ¹³ So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." ¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. ¹⁸ I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." ¹⁹ They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰ These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. John 8:12-20

Here we encounter another I AM statement from Jesus. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Light is part of who He is. Think about the function of light...

Light makes a way for us to see. Jesus allows us to see God in human form.

Light illuminates our path to guide the way. Jesus is the way to Heaven, the eternal home of those who believe in Him.



Light is needed for things to grow, bloom, and produce fruit. Jesus is our light to help us grow and produce good fruit in our life.

Light provides warmth and comfort. Jesus is the prince of peace. He is love. He will provide us with comfort when we rest in Him.

Light brings hidden things into the open. Jesus is full of goodness. There is no evil, no lies, no shame when we put our faith in Jesus.

Darkness can't put out light. Jesus – and those of us who put our faith in Him – will not be overcome by evil.

Light ushers in a new day. When we put our hope in Jesus, we get a fresh start; a clean slate. We get a re-do on life, just like the Samaritan woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery.

So what...

Why do they not know where Jesus came from? Do they not know, or do they just refuse to believe?

What does it mean to judge according to the flesh?

In what ways does God the Father bear witness to Jesus?

This passage includes the 2nd "I AM" statement of Jesus in John's gospel. What does this tell us about who Jesus is and what He came to do?



The Truth Will Set You Free

²¹ So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” ²² So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” ²³ He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” ²⁵ So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” ²⁷ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” ³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him. ³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.” John 8:21-38

A series of exchanges ensue about where Jesus is from and where He is going, met by more confusion among the crowds. Jesus doesn't mince words, telling them they would die in their sins unless they believe that **“I am he.”** The crowd responds with the all familiar question, **“WHO ARE YOU?”**

Seven times in John, Jesus makes an “I am” declaration providing building blocks to who He is. So far, we have seen two: I Am the bread of life and I am the light of the world. As John recounts his time walking with Jesus, he wants us to be able to answer the question, “who are you?”

In Exodus, when Moses was called by God from the burning bush to go speak to Pharaoh (the ruler of Egypt) to let the enslaved Israelites go, Moses asks God who he should say sent him. God replies, **“I am who I am.”** He goes on to say, “Say this to the people of Israel, **‘I AM** has sent me to you.’...this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” (Exodus 3:13-15).

As the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present God who was and is and will be forever, God is **I AM**. Jesus is saying if we believe that “I am he” – that Jesus is God and the One who comes with the power and ability to take away our sins and restore us to God – we will be saved and enjoy eternal life with Him.

Jesus goes on to tell them that when they have lifted up the Son of Man (speaking of His upcoming death and resurrection), then they will know who He is and by what authority (God the Father’s) He has been living and speaking with them. He knows they don’t see it all now, but He wants them to be able to look back on this day and believe.

Jesus tells them the One who sent Him is with Him. He has not left Him alone. What a comforting truth that was to Jesus, and should be to us too. **God will never leave us or forget about us** (Deuteronomy 31:6). Jesus says He ALWAYS does the things that are pleasing to the Father. God the Son and God the Father are always in sync. They are distinct, yet One. Inseparable. United.

We sometimes can think sin represents a freedom...to do what we want, when we want, with whom we want. But the truth is, **sin enslaves us**. It keeps us in bondage. It’s like the dog who digs his way out of the backyard fence put in place, not to withhold from him, but because his owner loves him and wants him to roam free in a safe space. The idea of getting on the other side of the fence seems so freeing to the dog. And at first it is, as he runs fast and sees new dogs and squirrels, but soon finds himself in the cold and dark night, hungry, and dodging dangerous traffic that can kill him.

Sin is the enticing bait the fish eagerly chases, only to find a hook and capture on the other side. It is the counterfeit and it leads to death. Jesus tells us if we abide in His word, we are His disciples. We will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. The work of Jesus to take our sins away sets us free. And Jesus says, **“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”**

So what...

When God says His name is “I AM” what does that mean?

In what ways does sin keeps us in bondage? What does it mean to be truly and fully free?



Abraham Rejoiced in this Day

³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” ⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. John 8:39-59

All this talk by Jesus about the “Father” does nothing to clear things up for the Jews. Many still don't see that it is the God they worship He is referring to. They don't yet have open eyes and open hearts to see that He is the Son of God. Jesus contrasts the father of the world (the devil) with God the Father.

Here's what Jesus tells us about our **enemy, the devil**:

He was **a murderer** from the beginning.

He does not stand in truth. There is **no truth in him**.

His **character is lies**.

He is a liar. The **father of lies**.

The Jewish people question how Jesus can say He – or those who keep His word – will never see death. They point to their beloved prophets and Abraham who died. How can Jesus say He is better than them, the people wonder.

Jesus has something to say about Abraham. **“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”**

Roughly 2,000 years earlier, Abraham was instructed by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years from God’s initial promise of a son. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. Isaac was the unexpected, but long-awaited, long-anticipated, and long-prayed-for son. He was their prized possession straight from God.

God had big plans for Abraham to become the father of a great nation; God’s people. God trusted Abraham and Abraham must trust God. We are told this was a test from God. Testing is different than tempting. The Bible tells us God does not tempt us; the devil tempts us. Remember, tempting is hoping for failure, testing is to confirm and strengthen us. God needed Abraham to trust Him completely. God knows everything. This test wasn’t for God; it was for Abraham. This test would let Abraham know that he fears God and would not withhold his son. He is all in. We can think we know what we will do, but we aren’t certain until we are in that position. God has BIG plans for Abraham.

Abraham takes his beloved son, Isaac, with him to sacrifice. He endures Isaac’s questions about where the lamb for the burnt offering is, responding that God will provide. Abraham doesn’t have all of the details, but he trusts God. He can’t see how all the pieces will fit together, but he believes God is faithful and God can be trusted.

Just as Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, an angel calls from heaven telling him to stop. Up ahead in a thicket Abraham sees a ram caught by his horns. **A substitutionary sacrifice to take the place of Abraham’s son, Isaac.** (See Genesis 22)

The religious leaders Jesus is speaking to would be very familiar with this story passed on from generation to generation. But it was more than a mere event in the lives of their ancestors of long ago. It was a beautiful picture of what God had planned for us. He would be the one to **sacrifice His only Son**. We need only trust. We see a glimpse of the power, relief, freedom of Jesus taking our place. The ram appears to be the sacrifice, just as Jesus appears in the flesh to take our place. A substitution of our sins for His righteousness.

Jesus is basically saying, “Hey, remember when Abraham rejoiced at the substitutionary sacrifice? **Well, that was all a glimpse into an even bigger substitutionary sacrifice for all mankind. And it is about me. I’m here!** I’m the one who will take your place. I’m the one who will be sacrificed so that you can be made right with God for eternity. I’m the one you have been waiting for. In all of your religious pomp and activity, **don’t miss ME.**”

The message is for us too. The Messiah has come. The one who takes away our sins and makes us whole. He loves us just the way we are...in our mess, confusion, disobedience, fear, anxiety...He alone knows how to keep us from staying there. He is the one our hearts long for, but can't quite pinpoint. He is the one to make things right again. Don't miss Him.

Indeed, Abraham saw the day of Jesus in that ram and was glad. He saw the day of Jesus in the eyes of his son; the beginning of the descendants as numerous as the stars that would usher in the birth of the Messiah. He rejoiced that he would again see the day of the Lord.

Where Abraham saw a glimpse of Jesus in the substitutionary ram, the Jewish people now have the One who will save them from death in their midst. But they just can't see it. And instead of believe, they seek to kill Him.

So what...

How does the story of Abraham and Isaac point to Jesus? How does this help you see in a small way what Jesus came to do for you?

What are your thoughts on the difference between testing and tempting? How can we tell the difference in our lives? What are some examples of testing and tempting you have experienced?

In what ways is the devil and the things of the world based on lies?

Look back at verse 54. Why does Jesus say He can't glorify Himself? Why/how is the glory from the Father better?

Whose sin? they ask; who made him blind?

Someone caused this. Blame to find.

I want you to see purpose. You are stuck on cause.

Instead of opportunity, you look for flaws.

Neither sinned. That isn't the lead story.

Through this man, you'll see God's glory.

Watch what my presence in a life can do.

It's not just for him; it's also for you.

Mud from saliva on his eyes anointed.

Now wash in the pool, over there He pointed.

A step of faith the blind man takes.

From his eyes, sight awakes.

Who fixed you? Who made you see?

The man called Jesus; He healed me.

He doesn't understand much. His eyes have been closed.

Only the name of the healer he knows.

That man is not from God they say.

They are focused only on the healing day.

How can this happen? Again, they ask.

More time to ponder who performed such a task.

With each attack, the man's faith grows.

He is starting to see what before he didn't know.

Again, they question how it could be.

I only know I was blind, but now I see.

Calling him a sinner, they cast him out for good.

But Jesus finds him; I suspect he knew Jesus would.

Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Who is He that before Him I may stand?

You have seen Him. It is I speaking to you.

Lord, I believe! Worship ensues.

The Messiah He comes to open our eyes.

He wants us to see fully; to change our lives.

Poem based on John 9:1-41



The 6th Sign: Healing the Blind Man

⁹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”
John 9:1-17

John chapter 8 ends with, “So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” Chapter 9 begins with Jesus passing by and **SEEING a man blind from birth**. When the world seems to pass us by, **Jesus sees**. He sees and knows all of our struggles and sins and weaknesses and needs. He has compassion on us. The disciples also see this blind man, but their line of thinking is different. They ask Jesus who sinned to cause this man to be blind. They assume the suffering of this man is surely brought about by him or his parents. But Jesus flips the cause of his blindness, saying that it was **so the works of God might be displayed in him**. It is a vehicle for God’s glory to shine. The man’s trial will become his greatest blessing...an encounter with Jesus and a miraculous healing.

In the Gospels we hear of many accounts of Jesus healing people. Some with a word, some with a touch, and here with mud he spit on and placed on the man’s eyes. And this miracle required action on the man’s part as he obeyed the command of Jesus to go to the pool of Siloam and wash the mud off his eyes. **Faith + obedience**.

As this man emerges among those who have seen him blind his whole life, they debate who he is and how he is able to see. The man is not yet aware of who it is that healed him. He knows only His name was Jesus, He placed mud on his eyes, told him to wash in Siloam, and in doing so he could now see.

Rather than celebrate a miraculous healing, the confused crowd brings the man to the religious leaders who question him further. They focus on the Sabbath in lieu of the healing. Again they are missing the point. And again the crowds differ in their response to Jesus.

This represents the 6th sign John records in his Gospel account. The man was in darkness and was brought into the light. **He was blind and now he sees.**



So what...

What do you think the significance of this sign is in representing who Jesus is and what He came to do?

Why do you think Jesus uses different methods in His healing?

Do you sometimes believe that things like this man's blindness can be caused by sin? In what ways can your perspective of certain circumstances change, knowing that God might want to use it as a vehicle to display His glory?



Greatest Weakness to Greatest Blessing

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains. John 9:18-41

The religious leaders, still baffled by the blind man’s sudden sight, question the man’s parents. The parents who have watched their child suffer with blindness his entire life defer and deflect the questions from the Pharisees. **They fear being kicked out of their synagogue more than they want to declare the healing power of Jesus.**

Where fear is driving the majority of the characters in this story, the blind man becomes more determined and confident with each question and accusation. He readily admits he doesn’t know much about this man, Jesus, but he does know that **he was blind and now he can see.** His encounter with Jesus changed everything.

Look back over the transition of this man's understanding and proclamations about who Jesus is:

- "the **man** called Jesus" (9:11)
- "he is a **prophet**" (9:17)
- "do you also want to **become his disciple**" (9:27)
- "if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him...if this man were not **from God**, he could do nothing." (9:31, 33)
- "**Lord I believe,**" and then he **worshiped him** (9:38)

Not everyone who encounters Jesus is changed by Him. The religious leaders weren't. Many in the crowds weren't. But this man was.

This man was cast out of the church he grew up in – the biggest fear of his own parents. Jesus hears and finds him. He has something so much better for him. He is going to reveal Himself to the one He healed. Jesus helps this man see that in believing in Him, He will receive an even greater restoration. An eternal restoration. This man's greatest weakness became the pathway for his greatest gift and blessing.

So what...

How can we let cultural perceptions keep us from the really good stuff God has for us (think about these parents afraid of being put out of the synagogue while their child was HEALED)?

Why are some people so profoundly changed by Jesus and others not?

What does "being" vs. "seeing" the experience have to do with it? Look at James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-5. How do you interpret these verses as it relates to "being" (the one in it) vs. "seeing" (an observer of someone else in it)?

Why is our testimony so important? What is your testimony?



3rd & 4th "I AM" – I Am the Door to the Sheep and the Good Shepherd

¹⁰ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

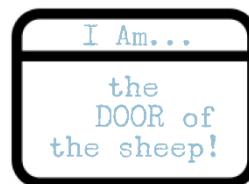
⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

¹⁹ There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" ²¹ Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" John 10:1-21

There is this **ongoing battle between good and evil**; between God's goodness and the evil schemes of the devil (the "thief" as he is referred to in this verse). God has allowed the devil to have this time to prowl around, wreaking havoc, but Satan also knows God keeps His promises and his destructive impact will come to an end. The devil isn't about to waste this limited time he has.

God desires us to have a relationship with Him – to choose the good. But He doesn't force it on us. He is always pursuing us, even when we are fighting it. God has good things in store for us, where the devil is only out for our destruction. Satan wants to pull us into the pit with him.

Jesus is the one talking in this verse, saying He, unlike the devil, came that we might **have life and have it abundantly**. Conversely, the devil is a deceiver, making things that are opposite of God's desire for us look super appealing. He seeks only to **steal, kill and destroy**.



Where Satan is the Father of Lies, Jesus is the **Good Shepherd**. The one who loves His sheep and will lay down His life for them. He is the one who will lead them from harm and guide them to safety.



The truth is, we are bombarded by messages. How do we hear and listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd over all the others? We **NEED** to hear the Shepherd's voice. **It is the only voice that leads to truth and life.**

It is hard to grow up in this crazy social media world. The voices and messages are everywhere, and they are often louder than the Shepherd's voice. They are laced with captivating hooks. They are disguised as enlightened advice and quick fixes. They sound smart and savvy and sexy. They fix our eyes on us instead of God (our pleasure, entitlement, glorification, etc.). But they lead to utter destruction. The result is anxiety that is not from God; seeking validation from every voice except the ONE that is light and life. You can't fill yourself up with something that runs out.

Satan's voice is slowly killing us while we continue to play the game. We are deceived and we in turn deceive. It is madness!

How can we keep from being buried under Satan's voices blasting so loudly we can't hear the sweet sound of the Good Shepherd?

One thing we can do immediately is to begin to recognize whose voice we are hearing and heeding. We can tell by the tone and the impact on us.

God's voice stills, leads, restores, enlightens, encourages, comforts, uplifts, calms, and convicts.

Satan's voice rushes, pushes, frightens, confuses, discourages, worries, compares, obsesses, and condemns. Who needs it!

There are only two paths we can be on. One leads to eternal life and one to utter destruction. It is a daily decision to choose which side we want to follow. The devil works hard to pull us on his team, or at least get us off track. But God's way is the only way to abundant life. Train yourself to listen to His voice and stay on His path.

So what...

In what tangible ways do you see Satan stealing? Killing? Destroying?

What does it mean/look like to truly surrender to the Good Shepherd?

What do the two I AM statements in this passage- the door of the sheep and the good shepherd- say about who Jesus is and what He came for?

Take a minute to close your eyes and be still. Think about the voices you hear as you go through the day. Are they in the "God's voice" or "Satan's voice" category? What are some tangible ways you train yourself to hear the God's voice louder than that of the world/Satan?

Following are some verses to write down and possibly memorize if you are struggling with listening to God's voice:

1 Peter 5:8

Matthew 16:33

2 Timothy 1:7

Philippians 4:6-7

Galatians 5:22-23

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Luke 18:27

Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:8

Ephesians 6:10-12

Satan's
Voice...

Rushes
Pushes
Frightens
Confuses
Discourages
Worries
Compares
Obsesses
Condemns



God's
Voice...

Stills
Leads
Restores
Enlightens
Encourages
Comforts
Uplifts
Calms
Convicts



“I and the Father are One”

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And many believed in him there. John 10:22-42

A new day, but the same confused Jewish followers are probing Jesus, asking who He is, despite the many signs and words spoken by Him. He reminds them again that He has told them, they just don't listen...they don't hear...they don't understand. **Their ears aren't tuned to truth.** But the truth is, He isn't saying what THEY want to hear. And when Jesus plainly says, “I and the Father are one,” they pick up stones to kill Him. His crime in their eyes? Blasphemy. A mere man making himself God.

God's power and sovereignty again rule the day, as Jesus escapes stoning and arrest. It isn't His time. It isn't His way die. That was ordained long ago.

When everything seems to be hopeless, we again see glimmers of hope. Pockets of believers. Jesus goes back to the place where John was baptizing, and because of the witness of John, combined with hearts and ears postured to hear, many believe Him.

In our culture full of doubt, skepticism, power grabs, and desire for control, **let us have open hearts and ears tuned to hear the truth and be counted among those who believe.**

May we be among the sheep who hear His voice, who receive eternal life from the Good Shepherd, never to perish or be snatched from His good and holy hands.

So what...

What is it about Jesus' words that make the religious leaders so incredibly angry and full of rage against Him?

In what ways do we choose to deny Jesus/truth? Why?

How can we discern truth? What will help us recognize the truth from God?

What can we tangibly do each day to serve as a reminder to choose God's side and not fall for the lies of the devil to try to get us off track?



5th I Am – “I AM the Resurrection & Life”

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

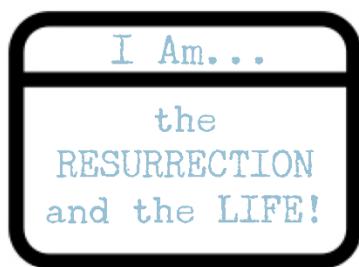
⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” ¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said,

“See how he loved him!”³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” .” John 11:1-37

Beloved friends of Jesus are facing a devastating situation...Lazarus is dying. However, the immediate response of Jesus isn't the one we would expect. We are told that upon hearing the news, “he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” Jesus doesn't immediately go. He loves this family. He has the power to heal. And yet He stays right where He is. It must have been baffling to those around Him. But Jesus has a plan...He always has a perfectly timed plan. And He's not in a rush.



Sometimes we just need to Jesus to tell us plainly what is up. And bonus, He sometimes tells us why. In this instance, with the death of his friend Lazarus, “**so the Son of God may be glorified through it...so that you may believe.**” This thing that is happening...that is about to happen...it's not just for Lazarus or his loved ones; it is for us too.

In Luke's Gospel account (Luke 10:38-42), we meet Mary and Martha. Martha invites Jesus to their house but she was busy and distracted during His visit while Mary sat at His feet, soaking in His presence. Martha was consumed with worldly things while Mary was consumed with her Savior. Martha was a do-er and Mary was a be-er. We see Martha jumping to action here too, as she is the one to greet Jesus. She tells Him if He had only been there – only come sooner – her brother would be alive instead of lying in a tomb. But she doesn't end there. She says she knows that anything He asks, even now, God will answer. He asks if she believes and she confidently replies, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Martha leaves to tell her sister Mary to come to Jesus. Mary falls again at the feet of Jesus, this time with sorrow and tears. Heartbroken, she echoes that if He had only been there, her brother would not have died.

Mary and Martha are devastated over the death of their brother, while simultaneously conflicted over why Jesus did nothing about it when they called for Him nearly a week earlier, in plenty of time to fix things. They had full confidence that Jesus had the power to prevent his death, to heal him...but there Lazarus lays, dead in the tomb.

The humanity of Jesus can't be hidden. He is in the moment with them. Deeply moved, greatly troubled, **He weeps** with these people He loves so very much.

Friends, Jesus knows what is going on in our lives. He knows our pain and suffering. And He is moved and grieved. He weeps with us. But He knows something even bigger. He knows what is to come. He knows something better is on the other side. **He is a God of the impossible.**

So what...

What does this 5th “I AM” statement say about who Jesus is and what He came to do?

Why did Jesus sometimes (often) come and heal immediately, but in this instance wait several days? What is the significance? How might this story have changed in plot and meaning if Jesus came and healed right away?

Do you think the delay – the timing not lining up with how they thought it should go down – caused Mary and Martha to doubt who Jesus was and what He could do?

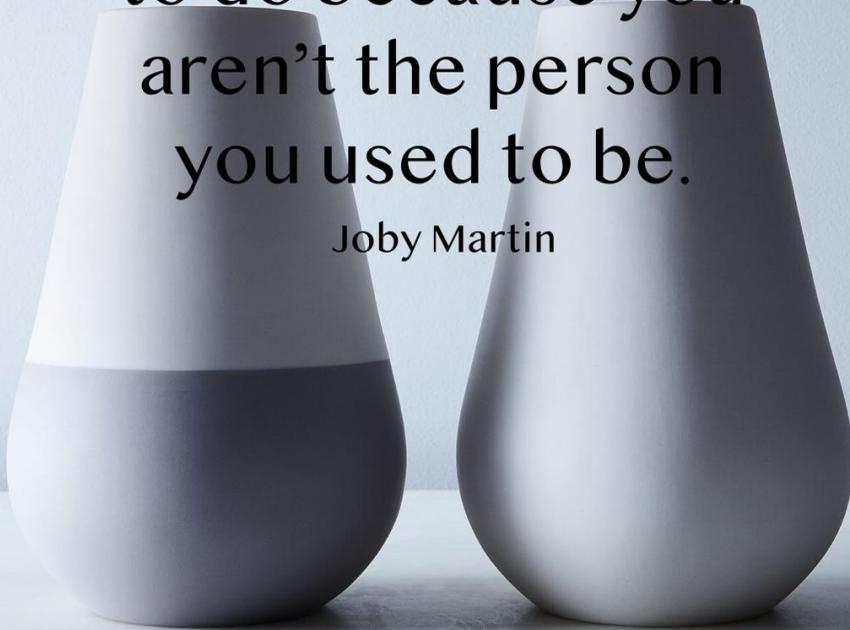
How does it make you feel to know that Jesus weeps with us?

Do you ever let timing of circumstances or a perceived delay in a response to your prayers cause you to doubt who Jesus is and what He can do? What might God be trying to accomplish?

Are you more of a “do-er” or “be-er”? Do you typically want the quick fix versus the better, though perhaps slower in our terms, response/action? If so, what do you think you miss out on in the rushing and doing?

You don't have
to do the things you used
to do because you
aren't the person
you used to be.

Joby Martin





7th Sign – Raising Lazarus from the Dead

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” ⁴⁴ 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.”

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?” ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

John 11:38-57

Jesus’ humanity is so present in this account. We are told again that He was deeply moved as He came to the cave where Lazarus was laid.

These friends of Jesus know His power. They have seen Him perform miracles. But the situation here looks hopeless. For four days the body of Lazarus has been buried in the tomb.

But the power of Jesus doesn't end with healing the sick and casting out demons. While they are worried about the odor after four days, Jesus is about to blow their minds. **Never underestimate the power of Jesus or the purpose of His timing.**

Looking to Heaven, Jesus gives thanks to God for what is to come. **Gratitude before the miracle.** Then looking to the grave, **Jesus cries out with a LOUD voice**, "Lazarus, come out." Sometimes we also need Jesus to yell at us. We are stuck in a pit with the linens of the world covering our eyes and ears. Sometimes it is only at the rock bottom that we are able to look up.



All heads whip toward the tomb. Eyes glued to the entrance. Postures leaning in. Lazarus – still tightly wrapped in burial clothes – hopping out. Could it be?

No longer dead, Lazarus emerges from the tomb he was in for four days. Hands and feet still bound, face still wrapped with cloth. Jesus instructs the men to unbind him; to **take off the burial clothes.**

Pastor Joby Martin says, "Living people don't wear dead people clothes; they don't fit anymore."

And in the miraculous raising of the dead, some believe....and some run to tattle to the Pharisees. They are utterly at a loss about what to do about this man with such power over even death. One thing they do know, however, is they want Him dead.

Remember Jesus told them that this miracle would take place to display God's glory. Things are bigger than they seem. There is more to the story. It is for us too. We too have experienced death – death to our sins, death to our old ways, death to trying to do the impossible on our own, death to condemnation and shame – when we put our faith in the work of Jesus. We can walk out of that pit of death and bondage, and into a new life of freedom and purpose.

Do we live like it? Are we still walking around in dead people clothes, doing the same things, wallowing in the same weak faith, striving for the same worldly things that disappointed us in the past, prioritizing the same shallow tasks?

When we believe Jesus died and rose for our sins, we don't have to do the things we used to do because we are not the people that we used to be. Not only are we forgiven and free, but we are also now credited with the righteousness of Jesus. When God looks at us, He sees His Son.

Time to shed the burial clothes and walk in the redemptive freedom of Jesus.

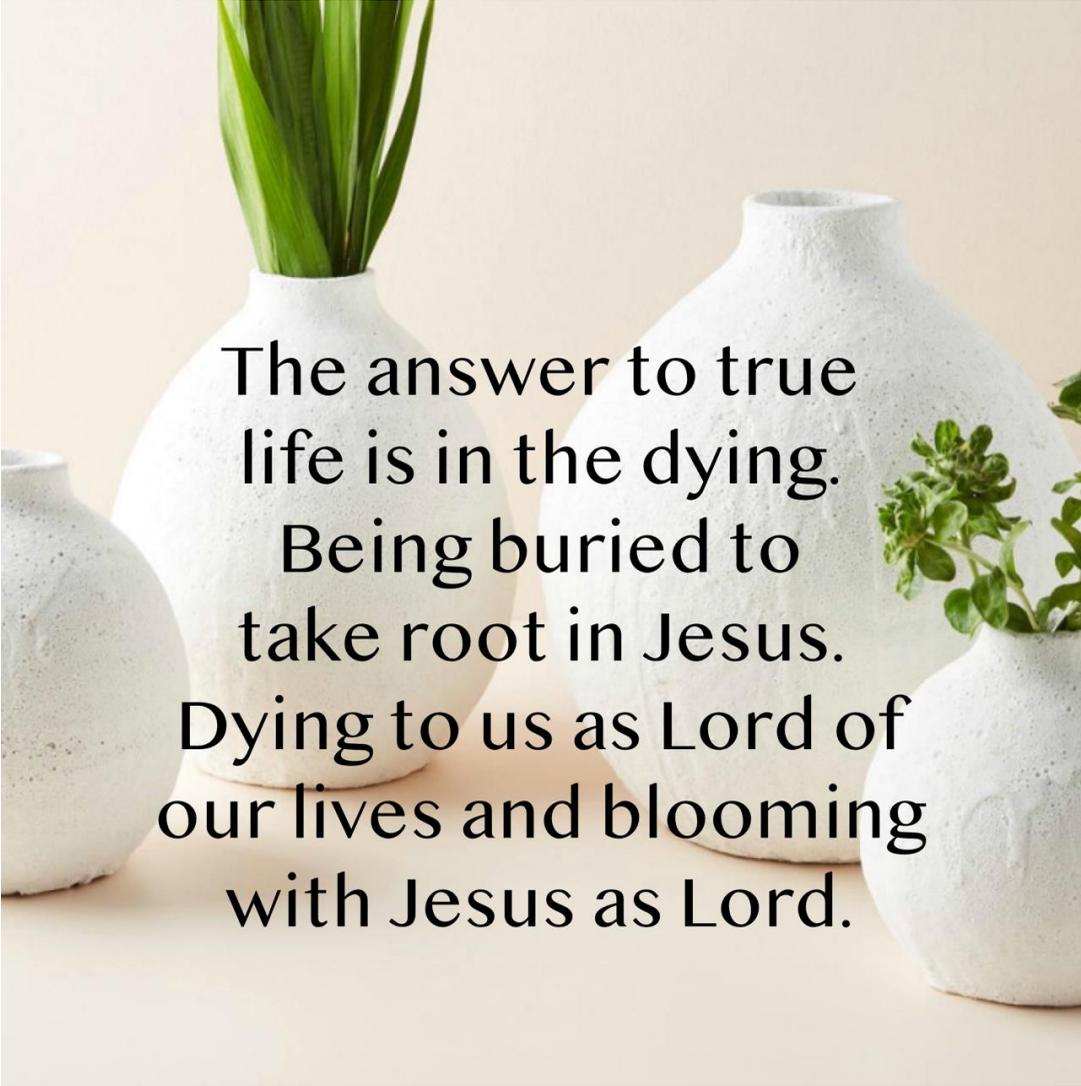
So what...

What in the world do you do when you are dead for four days and find yourself alive? How does your life change? How does your perspective change? How does your faith change? How do your priorities change? Stop for a moment and think about this. Things would never be the same. Where in your life do you find yourself “dead”?

Imagine Jesus saying to you, “ _____ [your name], come out of the grave! Unbind yourself. Take off those dead people clothes...they don't quite suit you anymore!” What things might you need to take off to live the life God has called you to?

What are some practical ways you can shed the burial clothes and walk in freedom?

What is the meaning/significance of this as the 7th and final sign/miracle John presented in his Gospel account? What does it point to in displaying who Jesus is?



The answer to true
life is in the dying.
Being buried to
take root in Jesus.
Dying to us as Lord of
our lives and blooming
with Jesus as Lord.



Humble, Extravagant Worship

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³Mary 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. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ⁶He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

⁹When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. John 12:1-11

Jesus, fresh off of the extraordinary miracle, joins in the ordinary of a meal. Lazarus, fresh off of an extraordinary resurrection, joins in the ordinary reclining with Jesus at a table. Can you even imagine the scene? The conversations? The deep connection?

Again we see Martha serving while **Mary worships**. Where washing the feet of a guest would be common, there was nothing common about pouring a pound of expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. John says the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. Take a second to breathe in the scene.

Commentator David Guzik points out three things related to this display of love and worship:

- It was a **humble gift**. She is at His feet pouring out the most expensive thing she likely owned.
- It was an **extravagant gift**. Not just a drop, but a pound. Judas says 300 denarii worth, a full year's wages.
- She was **unselfconscious**. She let her hair down, something taboo at the time, and wiped His feet with her hair. She did not care about the murmurs or stares. She was worshipping her Lord and Savior.

To Mary, Jesus was worth it.



Humble
Extravagant
Unselfconscious
Worship



Oils and perfumes were used on bodies at burial. Here Mary pours them out on the feet of Jesus in advance of His death right around the corner. Her nearness and openness to Him gave her great insight, though she likely didn't realize it at the time.

Meanwhile Judas is watching, criticizing, questioning. We will soon see that his outward following can hardly mask his inward sin and looming betrayal.

Per usual, the religious leaders catch wind of this little get together and vow once again to kill Jesus...and Lazarus too. Far too many were beginning to believe and they had to be stopped. Despite sign after sign, they grow further from truth and surrender to THE ONE they have been waiting for.

So what...

Put yourself in this scene of Jesus eating a common meal with this man He just raised from the dead. What does the conversation sound like in your mind?

To Mary, Jesus was worth potential humiliation and extravagance. How would you serve and worship if you knew no one was watching? Would you do more or less? What is Jesus worth to you?

How can we be humble and extravagant in our worship of Jesus?

Examine Judas' response to Mary's pouring ointment on the feet of Jesus. What were his motives? Where do you see similar dialogs today in your life?



Palm Sunday

¹²The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So 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!” ¹⁴And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is

written,

¹⁵“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Truly, 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. ²⁵Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. John 12:12-26



Momentum is growing and crowds are gathering. The word on the street is Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. The people greet him with palm branches, crying out, “Hosanna! Save us. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.” But what they are after is a political savior, not a spiritual savior. They want to return to the powerful glory days of Israel under King David and King Solomon. Meanwhile, Jesus finds a donkey and sits on it. Prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. Humility, not military might. He knows these fickle crowds crying in worship will soon be crying, “crucify him.”

We are told the disciples don't understand all of this at the time, but after Jesus had risen, they will look back and remember.

Though they don't see now, they soon will. **Hold very near the things God is showing you.** You may not understand now, but at the perfect time it will be revealed to you.

Jesus says that **the hour has come**. Up to this point we have repeatedly seen instances of Jesus saying or demonstrating that the hour has NOT YET come.

Jesus says that only by a seed “dying” or being buried in the ground – willing to transform – will it grow and bear fruit. Remaining just a seed, it sits alone and unproductive, not fulfilling the purpose of its creation.

Jesus is saying that unless we are willing to lose our life, we will never keep it for eternity. **As long as we cling to ourselves as our own lord, we lose.**

And think about it...we are terrible lords. On our own, we are just unplanted seeds being carried away by the latest gust of wind. Unfulfilled, stuck in a cycle of striving, comparison, envy, pride, dissatisfaction. Wondering why nothing is growing.

The answer to true life is in the dying. Being buried to take root in Jesus. Dying to us as lord of our lives and blooming with Jesus as Lord.

It seems terrifying and unknown and counter-cultural, so we cling to what we know, chasing the fake bright lights and bling that are the devil’s crafty distortion of the true light.

The upside-down kingdom of God is so different than the world we live in. The world that tells us to love and protect our life, even if it means stepping on everyone else to get there. The world tells us people should serve us...we deserve it. But God says, lose your life to gain it. Bury your seed. Serve others. Love others more than yourself. And in this, we find a full life and fulfillment.

So what...

What might God be showing you (in things you are seeing or circumstances you find yourself in) that the meaning may not yet be fully revealed?

Think about the seed analogy...how it must die to transform and to bloom into what it was created to do. How can you relate this to your life? What things must die to bloom?

This passage is also called the “Triumphal Entry” and it is in all of the gospels, told almost the same way. Of all the events of Jesus’ life, why is this one so significant?



Believe

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.”

⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. ⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” John 12:27-50

You can almost feel the tension as Jesus' time on earth is coming to an end. His soul is troubled, but He knows exactly what He came to do. The Father's presence is so near His. They are one. **One soul grieved in unity**. Grieved not for what is to take place, but for those who will refuse to believe and put their faith in Him....and consequently, suffer the eternal consequences. They will chose darkness over light.

We are confronted with one of the most painful realities then and now...

“Nevertheless, many even of the authorities BELIEVED in him, **but for FEAR** of the Pharisees they did NOT confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for **they loved the glory that comes from MAN more than the glory that comes from GOD.**” John 12:43-44

I fear many of us get to the point of belief, but we are stuck there. The glory of man seductively slips its way into first place in our hearts. We're not afraid to be put out of the Jewish synagogue, but we have our own “synagogues” we aren't willing to sacrifice...things we prioritize that are keeping Jesus from His rightful Lordship position in our lives.

As the brother of Jesus reminded us, “You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.” (James 2:19)

Belief is not the same as declaring – confessing – Jesus as your **Lord and Savior**. It is not the same as having an intimate relationship. The devil believes and still remains his own lord and an enemy to Jesus.

What does it look like to have Jesus as the Lord of our lives? He is the ruler, master, authority, and boss. Of. Everything; All. Of. Us. It is yielding our lives to Him. Absolute and total surrender. We are not our own. He is the one we want to obey and impress. His is the voice we want to listen to above all others. We don't do it perfectly but we genuinely want to.

S.M. Zwemer says, “**Unless Jesus is Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.**”

I fear we believe in Jesus, but our hearts are still enamored by the world. And **we can't successfully serve two masters**. We like the idea of Jesus as Savior, but not so much of Jesus as LORD OF OUR LIFE. We love the identity we try to create, copy and portray more than we love the identity given to us by our Creator. We love the purpose we covet more than the greater purpose we were designed for. We love the glory that comes from peers, status, comfort, control, worldly achievement, human accolades more than the glory that comes from God, for God.

God, help us to open our hearts and minds. Help us to be whole hearted and single-minded, chasing after You. **Help us want You more than what the world has to offer.** Help us seek YOUR glory over any lesser, counterfeit, unsatisfying human glory.

So what...

How/why is Jesus so reverent to the Father? What does this mean/show us?

What does it look like in a life today to believe in God (like the devil) but not surrender to Him as Lord and Savior? How can we do more than just believe that a “good” person and teacher named Jesus lived on earth? How can we live out our good confession that Jesus is Lord?

Where is Jesus not the Lord of your life? Money? Relationships? Sex? Possessions? Control?

How do we break free? How do we love God more than the world? How do we move from pure intellectual belief to whole-hearted surrender? How do we make God first?



For they loved the
glory that comes from
man more than the glory
that comes from God.

John 12:44



The Last Supper

13 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ 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, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

John 13:1-20

Jesus knows His hour...the hour of His death on a cross, the hour to do what He came to earth to do, the hour of His earthly suffering, the hour where He pays for our sins...is drawing near. What would your mindset be like? What would you be thinking and doing? Here John tells us that **Jesus is loving His people to the end**. He loves and serves.

Jesus gets up from the table, ties a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash His disciples' feet.

"You shall never wash my feet," Peter declares as Jesus approaches him. He doesn't understand. He can't accept his Lord stooping to such a lowly position.

The pride that kept him from initially being the one to step up among all the others and wash feet is now keeping him from allowing Jesus to serve him in this way.



“If I do not wash you, you have no part with me,” Jesus responds.

“Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head,” Peter swings at breakneck speed in the complete opposite direction, still woefully off track. He is taking what he hears Jesus say and deciding how it should happen.

Peter struggled to just be still, listen, trust, and obey Jesus on many occasions. He was often impulsive. He often reacted based on emotion. He wasn't intending to fight Jesus on this, he just hadn't learned how to surrender. **He still wanted his share of control over how it would all go down.**

I deeply relate to Peter. Like Peter, I really do love Jesus. A lot. But also like Peter, pride keeps me from sacrificially serving others, and pride keeps me from allowing others to serve me. Pride keeps me wanting control of how things should happen instead of fully leaning into Jesus' ways. My will keeps me from sitting still long enough to listen to ALL of what God has to say...instead, my typical M.O. is hearing a few words and running while His voice trails behind until inaudible.

I'm so thankful that God still used Peter—and still uses us – in amazing ways for His glory. Let's fully step into God's plans, God's timing, God's direction. Let's thank Jesus for His patience, persistence, and beautiful example of how to serve and love well.

Jesus leaves them with words that they again won't understand in the moment, but they are words they can look back on to know that He knows all things. His words are trustworthy and true.

So what...

Do you see any of yourself in Peter? Are you quick to try to control the narrative around you? What makes it hard for you to be still, listen, trust, and obey Jesus?

If you could do anything on the last day of your life, what would you do?

What do the actions of Jesus just prior to His death and suffering He knows is coming say about who He is and what He values most?



Betrayal & Abandonment

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” 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 13:21-38

Jesus is well aware of the betrayal and abandonment that is to come from those closest to him. First, He tells that one at the table will soon betray him. Only Jesus and Judas know that it is he.

Why Judas? We are told Satan enters Judas. But don’t let that fool you into thinking Judas was an innocent bystander. We know from John’s gospel account that this same Judas was a lover of money and helped himself regularly to the moneybag (John 12:6). Perhaps Judas rationalized that he had been betrayed by Jesus. He signed up to be part of a political superpower, not a humility and service gig. Perhaps he loved money and power and prestige more than he loved Jesus.

John Piper notes, “**Satan has power where sinful passions hold sway.**”

Deception and greed opened a door in the heart of Judas, and Satan capitalized on it. “The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

George Morrison says, “not only did Judas sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, but he also sold himself.”

Sin will destroy us, but God’s plan will never be destroyed. **The cross meant to kill is our victory.**

It is a powerful reminder not to be deceived by how something appears on the outside. But even more importantly, a reminder to check our hearts and motives frequently. To do whatever it takes to keep our hearts pure and free of welcome invitations for Satan to slither his way in.

“Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don’t drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.” (2 Corinthians 13:5 MSG)

As Jesus is leaving, Peter asks where He is going and emphatically declares that he will lay down his life for Jesus. Peter is speaking out of self-reliance; out of pride and emotion. Always the recipe for disaster. They just had a nice meal. They learned of a new covenant. They are singing hymns. Everything feels good – feels right – at the moment. Peter is pumped and feeling brave. Jesus knows it is a promise Peter can’t keep and tells him so. He is even specific about when the denial will take place: this very night, before the rooster crows.

Oswald Chambers says, “Peter did not wait for God. He predicted in his own mind where the test would come, and it came where he did not expect it... Peter’s statement was honest but ignorant... Jesus had a deeper knowledge of Peter than Peter had of himself. He could not follow Jesus because he did not know himself or his own capabilities well enough. Natural devotion may be enough to attract us to Jesus, to make us feel His irresistible charm, but it will never make us disciples. Natural devotion will deny Jesus, always falling short of what it means to truly follow Him...beware of stopping anywhere short of total surrender to God.”

Jesus is well aware of the intense spiritual battle raging all around. Staying grounded, resisting temptation, facing fears, doing the right thing when it is hard takes more than simply an impassioned promise made in a safe environment.

Around this table of twelve, Jesus knows they will all betray him and abandon Him. One for good and the others for a short time.

Tucked in between these two predictions of betrayal, Jesus gives a new commandment – **to love one another** as He has loved them. He further says that by this – this LOVE – all **people will know that they are His disciple**. This is how people will know we are a Jesus follower. Not by our religious displays, brave actions, or smooth words, but by **how we LOVE**.

So what...

Take time today to do a heart check. Have you strayed from truth and your faith in any area? Are you trying to orchestrate things your way instead of seeking God's way?

Do you struggle hearing that Satan entered Judas? Look up James 1:14-16. What does it say about where evil grows?

Why is it so hard to follow and obey Jesus in our own power?

Why does how we love one another show that we are Jesus' followers? What does it look like to love one another?

A photograph of four vases of different colors (yellow, pink, orange, and light orange) containing various flowers, including white daisies and yellow pom-pom flowers. The vases are arranged in a row, with the yellow vase being the tallest and the pink vase being the shortest. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Satan has
power where sinful
passions hold sway.

John Piper



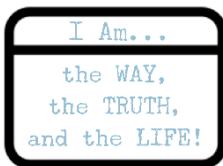
6th "I AM" – the Way, Truth, and Life

¹⁴ "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² 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? ³ 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. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ 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'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² "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. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:1-14

Things are feeling out of control for the disciples at this point. They don't understand all that Jesus is saying and he is speaking of betrayal and abandonment. Ever feel like things are out of control? Jesus tells us to let not our hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe in Him. **Set your thoughts on your eternal home.** A place is saved for you there – prepared for you there, personally by Jesus – if you only believe and put your faith in Him.



Christianity is inclusively exclusive. All are invited. All are welcome. But there is **only ONE way in.** Jesus. In this 6th I AM statement, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.**"

Then Jesus says something a bit mind-blowing. He says that we who believe **will do even greater works than He has done.**

If we believe the Bible is true, then promises such as this one – to do the works that Jesus does, greater works even – are true for us too. And I don't know about you, but it fires me up!

Who is it for? **WHOEVER believes in Jesus**...that is me, and you if you are a believer.

What will we do? **ALSO do the works that Jesus did**...scratch that...**GREATER works** than these.

How? Because Jesus (God the Son) went to God the Father, and in doing so, the **power of God the Holy Spirit comes into us**.

So, lets back up to that greater works thing. Greater than feeding 5,000? Greater than walking on water? Greater than turning water into wine? Greater than healing all manner of disease and illness? Greater than raising the dead?

John calls the miracles of Jesus signs. They pointed to who He was and what He would ultimately do. While He was walking the earth, the work wasn't finished, but when He hung on the cross and breathed His last breath, taking the wrath for all of our sins, IT WAS FINISHED. **It's go time**. Time for some new works, friends. Works that Jesus made way for and we get to be a part of. Works of sharing the Gospel and letting the Holy Spirit take hold of people. Works with an impact that will never run out or die. Eternal healing and raising from the dead. **He doesn't need us, but He ALLOWS us to be part of these greater works**. What a blessing and privilege!

So while I'm guessing we will never match the physical miracles performed by Jesus, they were temporary. The 5,000 were hungry again the next day. The wine eventually ran out. The healed people – even the raised Lazarus – ultimately died. There are greater works than these that Jesus ushered in, and we get to be a part of seeing them explode.

J.C. Ryle says, "**There is no greater work possible than the conversion of a soul.**"

I often look at a loved one who is suffering, and I wish I could grab them, find Jesus on the dusty dirt road by the Jordan River, and touch the hem of his garment so they would be healed. But Jesus is telling us we can do even greater works than this. We can be a part of shining His light and pointing people to an eternal healing and restoration. It is so beautiful and overwhelming. I don't want to miss any part of this incredible charge Jesus has given me.

And in this charge of greater works, Jesus gives us another promise: "**Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

I think many people mistake this for a “name it and claim it” gospel, sometimes for noble things...sometimes for not so noble things. But it is actually in the context of taking the baton Jesus handed to the disciples... who handed it to the early Christians... who handed it on and on until we ran alongside and grabbed it for our leg of the race. He is for us. He sent us the Holy Spirit. He wants to equip us for the race and the good works He prepared in advance for us. It might not always look like we think it should, but He PROMISES, “**I WILL DO IT.**” I believe Him. Do you?

So what...

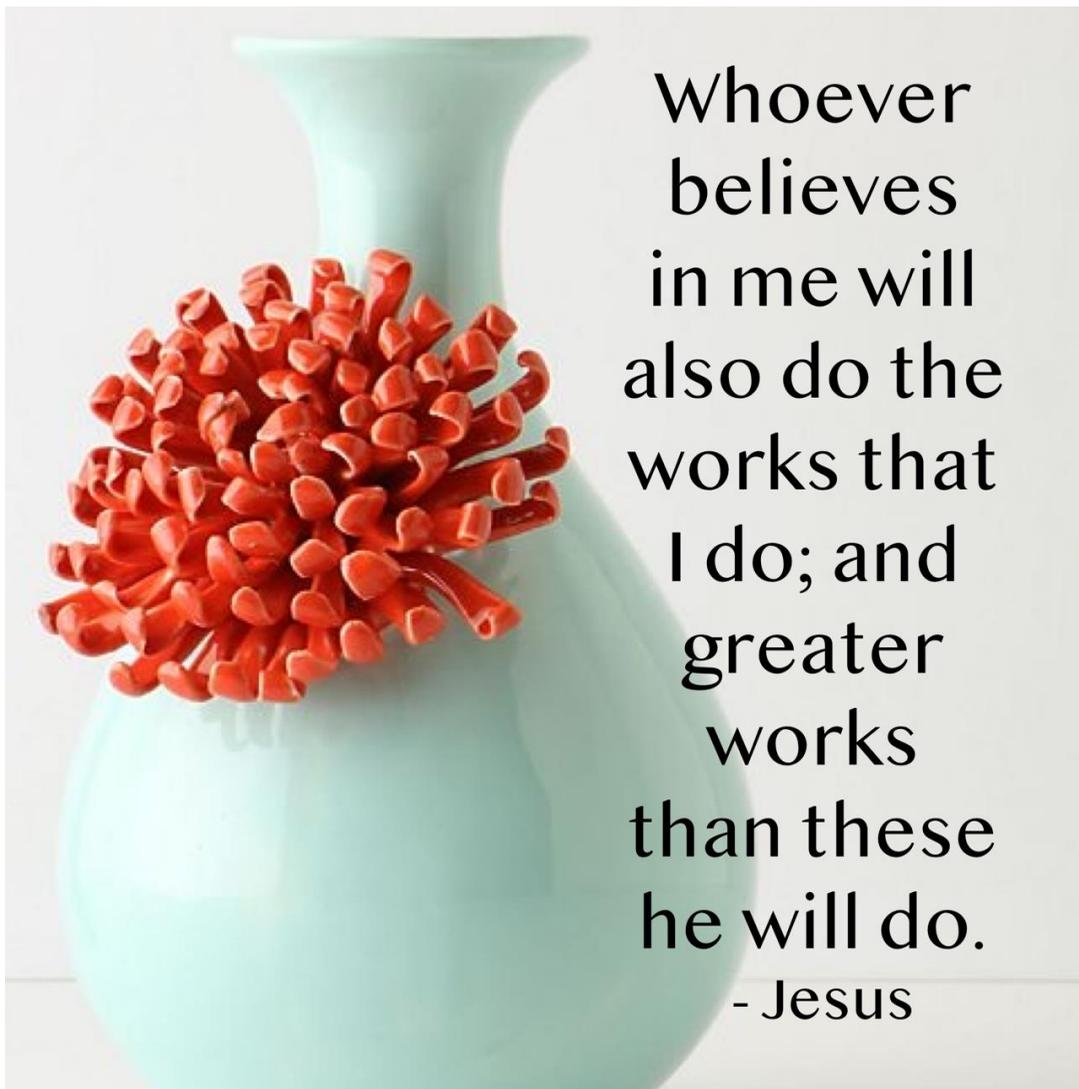
Do you believe that in the power of God you can do the greater works Jesus mentions? How does this happen? What do you think this looks like? Is this exciting to you?

Look way back at John 1:50 when Jesus tells Nathaniel he will SEE greater things. Now look again at John 14:12 where Jesus says we will DO greater things. What does this say about times in our life of SEEING (learning) and times in our life of DOING? Where in your life are you in a “seeing” season? A “doing” season?

How/where have you been sensing God calling you to be available?

What are some “greater works” you have witnessed in your life?

What does this 6th “I AM” statement in this passage say about who Jesus is and what He came to do?





The Power of the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 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. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here. John 14:15-31

The disciples are confused and distressed about some of the things Jesus is saying, along with talk of Him going away. Jesus tells them that **if they love Him, they will keep His commandments**. The problem is, we all know how short we fall in this area. Despite our best intentions and efforts, **we can't keep all of His commandments**. Jesus knows that what He is about to do will pay the price for the times we fall short...past, present, and future...for the disciples He is talking to in person and for all of those to come behind them, us included.

Jesus begins to tell the disciples about a “**Helper**” He will ask the Father to give them. Someone who will be with them forever. A Spirit of truth. A companion. Even here and now, in our earthly flesh, we will be given this incredible power.

This Helper is the **Holy Spirit**. He teaches us all things and brings things to remembrance. Jesus will have much more to say about the Holy Spirit in a bit, but for now, He wants them to rest in this promise.

Jesus again reminds them that His time with them is short. He says the ruler of the world is coming.

Who is the ruler of the world? After all, doesn't Jesus rule over all? God is still sovereign and in control, but sin is still present until it is defeated once and for all by Jesus. Tim Augustyn puts it this way, "The Bible frequently uses 'the world' or 'this world' to refer to the present evil system of opposition to God. So, the Bible never teaches that Satan actually rules over the entire world, but that he is ruler over the current system of sinful opposition to God. In other words, he's leading the rebellion against God."

Jesus states here that Satan has no claim on Him. Everything He does is of His own choice and doing. He willingly left heaven and came to earth to die for our sins. Though it may seem that the devil is in control when we look around at the pain, illness, and suffering in the world, it is only temporary.

As Jesus speaks about going away and going to the Father, He says, "for the Father is greater than I." We know the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit – are all fully God. So, what does Jesus mean here? Does He mean that He is lesser than God the Father? Not at all. He is not referring to His nature, but rather His current position on earth, in earthly form. He is referring to His current role, not the essence of His holy and glorious being. He will soon return to His Heavenly throne. But for now, there is work yet to do on earth.

More to come on the Helper, the Holy Spirit. For now, Jesus closes this part of His discussion with the disciples saying, "Rise, let us go from here."

So what...

In chapter 16, John will share more about what Jesus has to say about the Holy Spirit. For now, what do you know about the Holy Spirit?

What do you think about one of the roles of the Holy Spirit being to teach us all things and bring to our remembrance things Jesus has said? Practically, how do you think the Holy Spirit does this in our lives today?

Jesus mentions keeping His commandments. What were His greatest commandments? How are you doing on keeping them?



7th "I AM" – the True Vine

¹⁵ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another. John 15:1-17

I'm going out on a limb (see what I did there!) to declare that we ALL want to bear fruit. We all want our lives to matter for something bigger than ourselves. We want to make a difference and we want to live a joy-filled life.

Jesus shows us how to get there, but there is a price...though not as high as doing nothing. The shears come out either way.

If we are not bearing fruit, we will ultimately get cut off the vine completely, left to wither, dry up, and die. But even when we are bearing fruit, the shears come out. This time for the purpose of pruning...SO THAT more fruit may be produced. **No matter the size of the harvest, there is always opportunity for more fruit.**

No one escapes the touch of the shears, but the outcome is vastly different.

Pruning takes on different forms depending on what we need in our fruit-bearing journey. And pruning, even with the promise of a beautiful outcome, is just plain hard.

But the alternative is never experiencing the fullness of joy He promises. It is remaining in just-okay-limbo-land...or worse.

Here's some good news: If we commit to the abiding in Him, in His Word, in His commandments, He promises to give us what we ask and need to stay there, to withstand the pruning, and to come out stronger and more fruitful on the other side.

Jesus tells us, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

"These things" Jesus is referring to are the reminders He had just given His followers about abiding in Him. About being the branch fully connected and dependent on the vine, joined in relationship and nourishment. About obeying His commands and soaking in HIS love.



THESE THINGS Jesus tells us **SO THAT His joy may be in us; that our joy may be FULL**. The abiding, connecting, depending, obeying...THESE THINGS lead to JOY. A lasting and fulfilling joy not found in striving, achievements, status, or circumstances. Pastor Jack Wellman describes joy this way: "Joy isn't like happiness which is based upon happenings or whether things are going well or not. No, joy remains even amidst the suffering. Joy is an emotion that is acquired by the anticipation, acquisition or even the expectation of something great or wonderful."

Rick Warren adds, "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."

This life is not easy, that is for sure. But in this passage, Jesus wants us to know that **there is GREAT JOY to be had**. Jesus wants us to be FULL OF JOY, and the way we have this joy is by truly **KNOWING and BEING WITH Him**.

Abiding in God, loving Him, trusting Him, obeying Him, and bearing fruit in His kingdom isn't about adding more checkmarks to a list, but to experience true joy...something our hearts deeply desire.

Jesus is worth it. He not only commands us to love, but demonstrates love in the most extravagant and self-serving way...by laying down His life for us, His friends.

You have been chosen. It is why you are here right now reading this.

Abide in Him. Bear much fruit. Love one another. Imagine the change in your life and in our world if this were our path.

So what...

What do you think the significance of this 7th and final “I AM” statement is to us understanding who Jesus is and what He came to do?

Where are you today? Do you feel cut off? Are you in the middle of a beautiful harvest after a season of pruning (praise God!)? Are you in the midst of the pruning? Are things such a mess you don't even know where you are? Wherever you are, commit to quiet time. Dig in His word. When He speaks, listen and obey...no matter how hard...trust He will be there to help as He promises.

Where in your life do you need to do some of your own pruning?

How do you define joy? Does it differ from Jesus' definition?

How can you abide in love (verse 9)?

Have you found joy in knowing Jesus? How can your life be full of joy even as things are hard and heavy around you?





Hatred from the World

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

²⁶ “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. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

16 “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² 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. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. John 15:18-16:4a

Despite all of the Good News of the Gospel, the hard truth is, **we live in a world hostile toward Christianity**. We can expect opposition and even persecution. And when we encounter this opposition, we can look to Jesus. The world hated Him first. The people He came to save rejected Him then, and still reject Him today.

And while Jesus won't physically be with the disciples anymore, the Holy Spirit will be with them, and with us. He is the Spirit of Truth who will teach us about Jesus.

Jesus wants us to have eyes wide open when we chose to follow Him. Persecution will come not only from those we expect, but from those that may catch us off guard. From people giving the appearance of being on Team Jesus. Jesus wants us to know upfront what will happen, so when it does, we won't fall away thinking the plan has gone all wrong.

Take heart, friends. There is nothing this world can do to you for eternity. **Victory has already been won.**

So what...

Why do you think the world is so hostile toward Jesus and Christianity? What kind of persecution have you witnessed or experienced as a follower of Jesus?

How does hearing Jesus tell us what will happen up front help us endure it?

What would it look like to fight not FOR victory but FROM a place of victory?



The Work of the Holy Spirit

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:4b-15

I don't know about you, but I often wish I could transport in time and walk with Jesus. To hear Him teach, to watch the miracles, to just be near Him and know Him on that physical, personal level. My daughter and I often talk about “movie time” in heaven, where we imagine God pulling out the projector and letting us watch stories from the Bible as they actually played out...or better yet, to transport us to walk side-by-side with Adam when his eyes first opened and God was the first face he saw, Moses when the Red Sea parted, Ruth when she wed Boaz, Esther when she held her breath and walked in to address the king, David when he faced Goliath, Hosea as he faithfully stood by Gomer, Mary when the wise men came and worshipped her newborn son, the woman who had been bleeding 12 years when she was suddenly healed by Jesus, Martha when her brother was raised from the dead, the disciples when the risen Jesus first appeared and breathed on them ...I could go on forever...

Jesus is telling His disciples – and us – **there is something better**. Something that can only come in His absence. The disciples don't get it though. They are sad, confused, afraid, and heartbroken over the idea. What could be better than the personal presence, protection, wisdom, guidance of Jesus Himself?

But Jesus insists. IT WILL BE BETTER.

The better person – the third person of the Trinity; the Holy Spirit – will be a **helper, a guide, a convicter of sin, righteousness, and judgment, a voice of truth**. But the best part...instead of being *with us*, **He will be IN US**. He will be with us always, wherever we find ourselves.

I am terrible with directions. Awful. I can get lost anywhere. Imagine I had a guide. A wonderful person on one of my journeys that I trusted completely. All I had to do was follow him and I would never get lost. However, he could only help me when I was physically with him. But then, what if he implanted his wisdom and sense of directions in me that was a manifestation of himself? He would always tell me where to go. He would alert me if I was going off track. He would even help me when I was confused and teach me things along the way. And when I was weary, he would fill in the gaps for what I needed on the journey. I never had to doubt a thing, he could not steer me wrong; it isn't in his nature. But I had a part to play. I had to make sure he was activated in me. I also had to listen to him. When he told me where to go or what to/not to do, I had to listen. He couldn't physically make me go there. I had to follow his directions.

This is the power of the Holy Spirit available to us. As much as I long to go back in time and physically walk with Jesus, this is a better thing for now. It is my fault if I am not activating Him in my life, or equally detrimental, not listening to Him. If we were chronically directionally-challenged and we had a fool-proof internal guide at our disposal but refused to use it, we would be crazy. **We have so much power available to us and I'm convinced too many of us are not recognizing the value, rendering it idle.**

David Guzik points out, "Look at the disciples before Jesus left. Confused. Thick-headed. Afraid. Selfish and self-centered. Look at them after Jesus left, and after the Helper had come. They are wise, surrendered, bold, and giving. Truly it was 'to your advantage' that Jesus left!"

This. **This is the power I want.** I want to fully activate the Holy Spirit - God inside me - and never get lost again.

So what...

Do you ever imagine what it would be like to transport to one of your favorite Bible stories? Which ones do you want to see/experience? Do you ever wish you could be with Jesus in person? How do you see the Holy Spirit as even better than that?

So how are you with directions? Would you love an implanted GPS for your life? How can you look at the Holy Spirit to be this person in your life?

How have you already seen the Holy Spirit move in your life or someone else's?



“I Have Overcome the World.”

¹⁶ “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” ¹⁷ So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father’?” ¹⁸ So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

²⁵ “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ 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; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you

will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16: 16-33

Are you a little shocked that the disciples are still so confused? Does it kind of blow your mind? I mean, they have been with Jesus almost daily for THREE years...watching Him teach, and lead, and serve. It seems like He is repeating Himself over and over again with the disciples remaining even more at a loss.

Jesus gives them a little glimpse into the emotional roller coaster they will soon encounter. He tells them the world will rejoice, while they weep and lament. He tells them they will scatter and leave Him alone. He knows the cross is before Him. He knows His persecution and crucifixion will be brutal. He knows their hearts will soon be broken and their confusion at new levels.

Though they will all fall away for a time, He assures them He will not be alone. God the Father is right there with Him. And not only that, Jesus tells them their **sorrow will turn to joy**. He likens it to a woman in labor. It is long, hard, and painful. However, once she sees her beautiful child, the suffering is forgotten. The suffering pales in comparison to the joy that is before her.

Jesus wants these friends He dearly loves to not be surprised when they experience moments of sorrow. It is coming. But **they WILL see Jesus again** and **their hearts WILL rejoice!** NO ONE will be able to take their joy from them.

It gets even better. Jesus says that whatever they ask in His name – in other words, in His will – the Father will give it to them. Will give it to us.

Though we may be confused and sorrowful over things going on in our lives and in the world, we can ask God to show us His will and His way. Though we may scatter and fall away during seasons in our lives, God will never leave us or forsake us. As long as we have breath, we can put our faith, trust, and hope in Jesus.

Jesus gives the disciples and us this promise we can count on: **“In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

So what...

At this point, Jesus has told the disciples many times what was going to take place. Why do you think they are still so confused by so much of what He tells them?

Why do you think it is so important that Jesus warns the disciples (and us) about what is to come, and that there will be trouble and sorrow?

At the end of the passage, John quotes the disciples saying that NOW they believe. Why now? Do you truly believe? If not, what will it take for you to believe?



The Hour Has Come

¹⁷ When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶ "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ 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. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:1-26

The time for words is coming to an end. Jesus turns His attention upward, in prayer to His Father.

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” John 17:1

Let’s recap what brought us here. Roughly three years prior to this scene, Jesus, around age 30, began to emerge as someone to keep an eye on. No longer just an ordinary Jewish boy/man in an ordinary Jewish community who was obedient, kind, respectful, but nothing special in the eyes of most. Things changed one day along the Jordan River when He was baptized by the one ordained to pave the way. This day the voice of God spoke while the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The quiet, uneventful, unseen, unnoticed life of God born in human flesh began His public ministry. It was the start of something that now others could observe, though not yet “the hour” the heavens had been eagerly anticipating.

Jesus began to call disciples – students to follow, fellowship, and learn from Him. Several days into His public ministry, Jesus and some of His disciples attend a wedding in Cana. The celebration is joyful... until the wine runs out. The mother of Jesus looks in His direction...I picture that “do something” mom look. Jesus responds, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? **MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME.**” Nevertheless, Jesus performs His first miracle...turning water set aside for ceremonial cleansing into wine. The first of His signs. The things that point to who He is and what He came to do.

Fast forward three years and Jesus is with many of those same disciples. The time that had not yet come at the Cana wedding was upon them. Lifting His EYES UP, Jesus prays, “**Father, THE HOUR HAS COME; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...**”

The hour has come. The cross and bloodshed will become the vehicle to glorify Jesus. The hour has come. **The intersection of two pieces of wood will become the intersection of grace, mercy, love, and justice.** The hour has come. What was set apart for cruelty, suffering and humiliation will be set apart for restoration. The hour has come. The water – the outward temporary cleansing – is about to be turned into wine – the perfect blood of the only spotless lamb of God. **The final, FINISHED sacrifice for our salvation and redemption.**



The hour has come. And Jesus ushers it in with a prayer.

So what...

Look back at verse 17. How are we sanctified? What does this mean?

For what purpose does Jesus ask God to glorify Him? What is the vehicle for that glorification? Why a cross?

As Christians, we display the cross in many ways. We have jewelry with crosses, most churches have crosses on the walls, we use crosses in cards and artwork. What do you think about when you think about the cross?

The
intersection
of two pieces
of wood will
become the
intersection
of grace,
mercy, love,
and justice.





“I Am He”

18 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. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵ They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” ¹⁰ 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.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. John 18:1-14

Following the Passover meal and some final words from Jesus, the crew heads to a garden. It's no small detail that John memorializes this setting – the garden. It was in the garden of Eden that Adam and Eve took the bite of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, going against the one forbidden thing following creation. The garden was the setting where sin entered the world. And it was also the setting for the first prophecy and promise of the one who would restore us and defeat sin and death.

You [Satan] and this woman [Eve/mankind] will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies. One of hers [Jesus, the Messiah] will strike you on the head [mortal blow], and you [Satan] will strike him on the heel [temporary wound].
from Genesis 3:15



With a band of soldiers, religious leaders, lanterns, torches and weapons, Judas leads the way to Jesus. But nothing surprises Jesus. He knew what was going to happen and instead of retreat, He steps forward announcing Himself, saying “**I AM he.**”

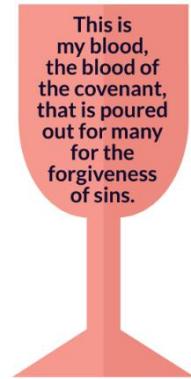
I think it is fascinating that John tells us the approaching men drew back and fell to the ground. Was it the power of His words? The majesty of who He is? The realization they were in the presence of God? His fearless and bold approach where they expected a cowering in fear? Conviction over their sinful nature? We aren't told why, only that it happened.

Jesus insists they take Him and let His friends go. Emboldened and feeling brave, perhaps wanting to prove to Jesus he would not deny Him as Jesus suggested during their meal together, Peter draws his sword and cuts the ear off the high priest's servant. But Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away. He isn't about defending Himself. He is going willingly to that which He came to earth to do. Jesus says, "**shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?**"

So, what is this "cup" the Father has given Him?

In Matthew's Gospel account, he tells us that during the Passover meal, Jesus takes the cup of wine, gives thanks, and **passes the cup to His disciples** saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for **this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**" (Matthew 26:27-28)

Then later that night, after the Passover meal in the garden where our passage in John takes place, Luke's Gospel account tell us that in agony Jesus prays, "**Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**" (Luke 22:42)



We all know, and will soon read from John, how this story ends. Jesus dies a brutal death. God could have removed the cup. Jesus could have saved Himself. **But Jesus was the one willing... willing to die for us** on his own accord. It had a purpose. It was a bigger and better plan. Plan A from the time sin entered the world. The only plan that could save us. If there were ANY OTHER WAY, God the Father would have taken the "cup" from His beloved Son. But there was only way the penalty for sin could be paid for all of us who believe, for all time, once and for all.

So, here we are.

Jesus is bound and arrested.

The hour has come.

The cup is upon Him.

So what...

Why do you think those approaching Jesus in the garden fell to the ground when Jesus approached and said, “I am he”?

What are your thoughts on Jesus praying that the “cup” be taken away, yet still submitting to God’s will? Do you think there are things in your life – “cups” you are bearing – that maybe God isn’t taking away because there is a bigger and better purpose to them?

What does Jesus’ obedience say about His relationship with the Father? What about His love for us?



Take this cup.
Drink from it.
This is my blood,
the blood of the new covenant,
that is poured out for many
for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:27-28



Peter Denies Jesus

¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ 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.” ¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.” ²² When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?” ²⁴ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed. John 18:15-27

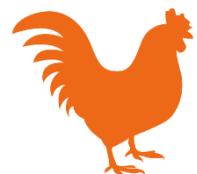


Many disperse, but Peter follows Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest. His worst nightmare comes to pass. The thing Jesus predicted and he vehemently denied is happening. First with a servant girl, next with those warming their hands with him outside the courtyard, and finally with another servant of the high priest...**Peter denies knowing Jesus.**

His strong conviction, his adamant dismissal, his former bravery do nothing to squash his current fear. It is why earlier that night in the garden Jesus told Peter to watch and pray. Jesus further explained, “Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation. **The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**” (Matthew 26:41)

Be alert. Watch and pray. We can't fight temptation on our own. We need to tap into the power of God.

Not many hours after this warning, Peter denies Jesus. Three times. And not to an armed military commander, but to an unthreatening servant girl. The rooster crows.



And this is so us, right? We feel so close to God and we make promises we can't keep. Or we royally mess up and we make promises we can't keep. Or we want something so badly and we make promises we can't keep. Or we let emotions get the best of us and we make promises we can't keep.

Be careful what you promise to God. He doesn't want our naive promises; **He wants our person, our presence, our devotion**. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We must watch and pray.

So what...

What promises have you made, so sure you would keep them, but ultimately broke? Why was it so hard to keep? What caused you to break your promise?

What do you think led to Peter – who was so bold with Jesus and even went after a member of the group arresting Jesus – now being so afraid to the point of denying Him to those much less threatening?

How is the Spirit “willing”? Why is our flesh weak? What does each look like?

How can a discipline of “watch and pray” help us? What does it look like to do this?



What is Truth?

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰ They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." ³¹ Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." ³² This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" John 18:28-38a

Jesus is transported from the Jewish high priest to the governor, Pilate. David Guzik points out, "With great irony, John exposes the hypocrisy of the priests. They will murder an innocent Jesus, yet they were afraid of ceremonial defilement." They also tell Pilate it is unlawful for them to put anyone to death, so instead they implore him to do it for them. Time and again, they focus on the outside religious optics, while their hearts are full of impure motives.

With little interest, Pilate questions Jesus. He is unimpressed and unthreatened by Him, particularly when Jesus speaks of His kingdom not being of the world and instead with the purpose of bearing witness to the **truth**.

Pilate says to Jesus, "What is truth?"

What threat is this Jesus if his kingdom is TRUTH? I imagine Pilate is thinking.

God came to earth on a mission of truth. **Jesus tells us He is the WAY, TRUTH, and LIFE**. His kingdom is truth. And while this was not at all a threat to Pilate who was concerned only with his posh political status, it was offensive to the Jews, and it is just as offensive to many today.

Hating the idea of absolute truth, our culture likes to live in a kingdom of pragmatism (if it works, do it), relativism (no all-encompassing truth; your truth is your truth, and mine is mine), and inclusivism (all ways to “god” are equally valid and lead to the same place in the end). In fact, the Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year for 2016 was “post-truth.”

So, what is truth? It isn’t cultural norms, the most followed news source, a celebrity opinion, a professor’s latest publication, our emotions, comfort or desires. **It is Jesus...the WORD that became flesh...God’s Word.** This is truth. Absolute truth. Truth that exists whether one believes it or not. If we want to know truth, we must know Jesus.

So what...

What is absolute truth? Do you believe in absolute truth? What are some absolute truths universally believed (if any)? Do you believe that the Bible and God’s Word are truth?

How can we know the truth? And when we do, how can we advocate for and defend it?

Why do you think people are threatened by, and argue against, absolute truth?



Barabbas is Me

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.”³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”⁴⁰ They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.³ They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands.⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.”⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?”¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”¹⁵ They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. John 18:38b-19:16

Jesus is taken before both Pilate and Herod, facing false accusations and charges based on pride, envy, and self-preservation of the Jewish elite. **Jesus offers up no defense.**

How do you react when you are falsely accused or misunderstood? For most of us, the natural inclination is to fight back. We want to clear up the misunderstanding; clear our “good” name. We likely call or shoot off a text to a friend. We may craft a vent post on social media. Anything to make sure someone (everyone) knows we were wronged and things aren’t as they are being portrayed.

But Jesus shows us another way. He never fought back. He never spent His precious time or energy clearing up the many misunderstandings or false accusations hurled His way. And if anyone had a right to do so, it would be Him.

Jesus didn't strive for human acceptance, attention or adoration. He just kept faithfully, obediently, and humbly living out His calling. He never argued or pled with anyone to follow Him. He didn't water down the message to make it more palatable. He spoke the truth, and then He stepped back. As a result, He was accused of all sorts of "religious" offenses and was consistently misunderstood and misrepresented. But He was never deterred.

Leading up to the most severe accusation facing Jesus — betrayal and fabricated charges that would lead to a brutal death — Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and prays. **He steeped Himself in prayer and conversation with God, His Father.** God Himself in human flesh refueled with a fresh dose of truth and intimacy. A necessary equipping to endure His calling.

Only in being rooted in who we are in God can we resist the temptation to fight back the distractions of the devil to get us off track. And it requires **ongoing refilling through prayer and abiding in God.** Then, fully equipped, like Jesus, we won't be tempted to defend or debate; instead, we will have the assurance necessary to keep our eyes up and our feet moving to the rhythm of our calling for His glory.

Herod and Pilate, upon examining the charges, find nothing on which to convict Jesus or sentence Him to death as the crowd is demanding. Per Passover custom, Pilate offers to release Jesus back to the Jews. Instead, they demand the criminal, Barabbas.

"Barabbas. Barabbas!" From his small dark prison cell and unaware of the discussions going on between Pilate and the people, Barabbas surely heard the shouts of his name from the crowds, followed shortly after by even louder cries of, "Crucify, crucify him!" I wonder if he was trembling or stoic with the assumption that his life was surely about to come to an excruciating end — just punishment for his many crimes.



Instead, **the notorious murder goes free, while the innocent Jesus is condemned.** Little did he know they were shouting "crucify him" of the one they just days before were shouting, "Hosanna!" as they waved palm branches. The cross meant for Barabbas is instead hailed on the raw, bloody, exposed shoulders of Jesus.

Jesus doesn't resist or fight back. In fact, He metaphorically joins the chorus saying, "[your name]. [your name]!" You see, **He isn't just taking the place of Barabbas on the cross, He is also taking it for you and me.** He humbly, powerfully, and willingly accepts the punishment we deserve.

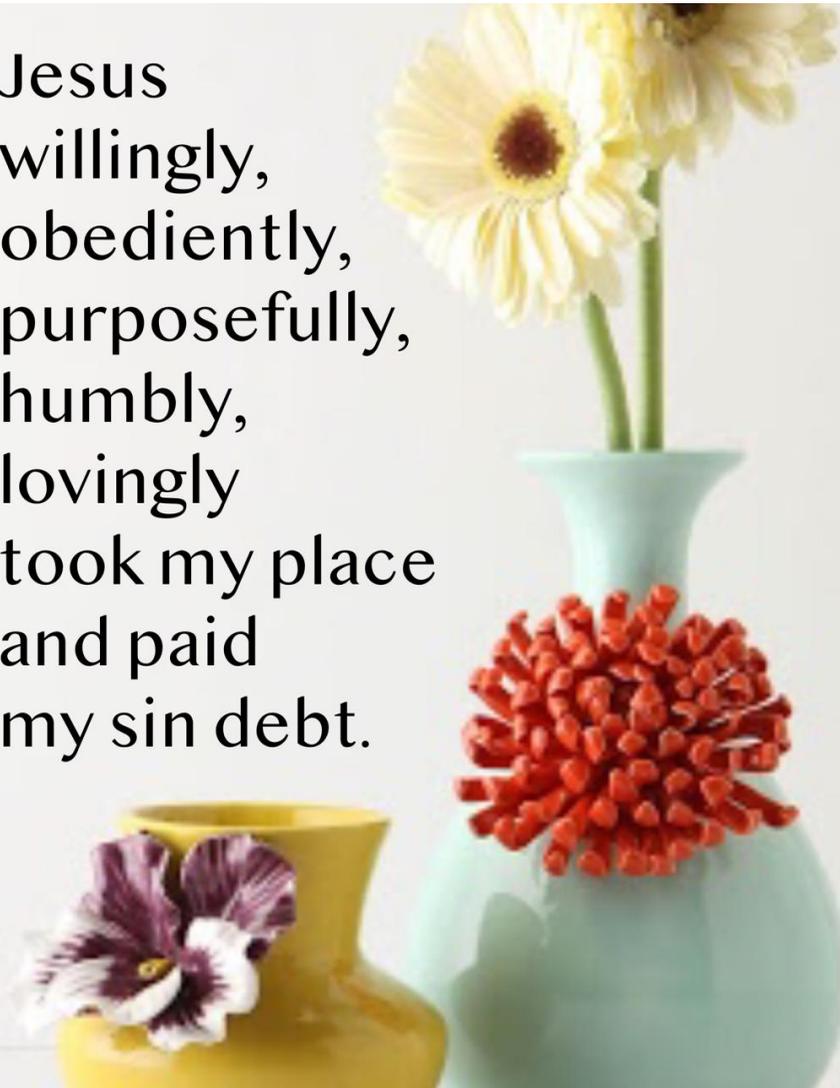
So what...

Are you generally eager to clear up misunderstandings about yourself? How does Jesus show another way? How is He able to do this? Why was it important for Him to do this?

Picture the scene of Barabbas in his prison cell hearing his name wondering if it was his time to die on a cross...and then hearing that he had been released and Jesus would be crucified instead. Imagine what he is thinking and feeling. Do you have this kind of emotion when you think of what Jesus did to take your place?

How would you feel if you were Jesus? How do you think Jesus felt as He awaited a brutal death (that He didn't deserve) while listening to the crowd scorn Him? How many people do you think were there in the crowd that became believers – witnesses and scoffers that Jesus died for and would see again in Heaven?

Jesus
willingly,
obediently,
purposefully,
humbly,
lovingly
took my place
and paid
my sin debt.





It. Is. Finished.

So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

“They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.” John 19:17-37

Prophecy after prophecy are fulfilled as Jesus is crucified. Things that Jesus Himself could never have orchestrated. Some Bible scholars count that The Old Testament contains over 400 prophecies about the coming Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus.

A professor named Peter Stoner, along with about 600 students, calculated the odds of just eight (of the roughly 400) prophecies being fulfilled in any one person who had lived up to the present time, coming up with a probability of 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

Lee Strobel, an atheist-turned-Christian who wrote the book *Case for Christ*, puts these odds into perspective, "I imagined the entire world being covered with white tile that was one-and-a-half inches square—every bit of dry land on the planet—with the bottom of just one tile painted red. Then I pictured a person being allowed to wander for a lifetime around all seven continents. He would be permitted to bend down only one time and pick up a piece of tile. What are the odds it would be the one tile whose reverse side was painted red? The odds would be the same as just eight of the Old Testament prophecies coming true in any one person throughout history!"

Here are just a few excerpts related to this specific passage of Jesus' death from things spoken hundreds of years before Jesus walked the earth:

Zechariah 13:7 - Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered;

Isaiah 53:7 - He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Psalms 22:16 - For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet.

Psalms 22:14-15 - I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws.

Psalms 69:21 - for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Psalms 22:18 - they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

Isaiah 53:12 - he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Psalms 34:20 - He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

Isaiah 53:9 - And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

The moment spoken about so many years ago has come. And even in this final, monumental moment of Jesus' death, He looks at His mother at the foot of the cross and essentially tells our author John ("the disciple whom Jesus loved") to care for His mother.

"It is finished," Jesus declared as He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The last words spoken by Jesus before His death... It. Is. Finished.

Jesus was not finished, but IT WAS FINISHED. What is the "it" He refers to?

Sin debt paid in full.

Debt wiped away completely and forever.

Lost sought and saved.

Atonement for sins of all who believed and will believe.

Reconciliation of man with God.

Old Testament prophecies and foreshadowing.

Seed who would crush the serpent's head.

Power over sin and Satan.

All that He set out to do in human flesh.

Not abolishment, but full and complete fulfillment of the law.

All works given to Him by the Father.

Bearing witness to Truth.

Lighting the way, making the path known, becoming the path.

Nothing more to add; nothing more to do.

The final word in the redemption of humankind.

It's a heavy moment in our study of the life of Jesus. But it isn't the end. It is just the beginning.

So what...

Did you realize so much prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus?

Why is it important for Jesus to have fulfilled Old Testament prophecy?

What does it mean for something to be finished? What does the finished work of Jesus mean to you?

it is finished



The Tomb is Empty

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes. John 19:38-20:10

Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy disciple of Jesus secretly asks Pilate for permission to take away the body of Jesus. He does so in secret because he fears the Jews. Also present is Nicodemus. Remember him? He is the Pharisee and leader of the Jews who went at night to speak with and question Jesus. They come to perform the Jewish burial custom and place Him in a tomb owned by Joseph, no small sacrifice on his part.

Imagine the thoughts and emotions experienced by Jesus' followers. Their beloved teacher – the one they really thought was the Messiah – lying dead in a tomb. Sorrow, anger, confusion, guilt, doubt, and perhaps even hope likely took turns swirling through their innermost being.

What now? What does this mean? Were we wrong all along? Were we duped? We all know the devil is awfully crafty at planting destructive seeds when we are at emotional low points.

I imagine it is a hard, dark, loooooong day for the followers of Jesus. They wait. But they don't even know what they are waiting for. For three years their decisions about where to go and what to do were made for them as they followed Him. Now what?

But God's plan is unfolding. In the exact manner and timing He ordained. Charles Stanley writes, "The dark moments of our life will last only so long as it is necessary for God to accomplish His purpose in us."

Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb but finds the stone covering it rolled away. Likely full of mixed emotions, Mary goes to get the others.

Our Gospel writer, John, and Peter go with her to the tomb. I love that John makes sure we know that he and Peter started to run together, but that he reached the tomb first. This moment must be seared in his memory. The moment he arrived at the tomb and found it empty, just as Mary said.

I picture them frantically looking around assessing the situation. The linen grave clothes are tossed to the side, but **the cloth that was on Jesus' head is folded neatly in a place by itself**. John made sure to preserve this for us to read thousands of years later. The God of order, the Prince of Peace, did not leave in a hurry. He took His time; he folded His face cloth.

Can you even imagine what they must have been thinking? John tells that as of this moment they had not understood the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. It's kind of crazy though, isn't it? Jesus had told them on at least three occasions.

The disciples go back to their homes. Their leader, teacher, Messiah, friend crucified, but no longer in the tomb.

So what...

What are your thoughts on Joseph? We are told he feared the Jews, but yet he went and asked for Jesus' body. Yes, he went secretly, but he still went. Can you relate to Joseph? Would you go and do the right thing, even afraid?

Picture each of the people in this passage. What do you is going through their minds? What emotions are they experiencing?



Jesus Appears

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these 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. John 20:11-31

Not sure what to make of the empty tomb and folded face cloth, the disciples retreat yet again into hiding, while Mary remains weeping at the tomb. In conversation with who she thinks is the local gardener, she hears, “**Mary.**” Her heart skips a beat. She can hardly breathe. Immediately, at the sound of her name, she knows with whom she is speaking. “**Go, tell the others...**,” Jesus proclaims.

Doors locked, huddled in fear, uncertainty, and possibly a small sprinkle of hope, the disciples gather and wait. Minutes feel like hours as time drips drips drips by. Day melts into evening.

Suddenly Jesus appears standing among them. “**Peace be with you,**” He says. His words proclaim the opposite of what they had been feeling. Still processing how in the world He got in through the locked doors, He shows them His hands and side. Don’t be mistaken; this is no ghost or vision. This is the real thing. Again, “Peace be with you.” But this time He adds, “**As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**” Then He breathed on them. I imagine the intimacy of His presence and gift to them. Did he one by one gently grab them by the shoulders, lock eyes with them, and exhale?

There is no door, no barrier, no emotion Jesus can’t break through to get to us. Nothing is beyond His reach, even when we are too scared to seek Him at the moment. He comes with peace, proof, purpose, and power.

“Peace be with you.” - In Jesus, we can have peace. When our hope, faith, and trust is in Him, peace will prevail.

“...He showed them His hands and His side...” – Yes, we have faith. But along the way, we are given many proof points to bolster our faith. **Many hints, foreshadowing and fulfilled prophecies.** We have faith, and we can know. Jesus says to Thomas, “blessed are those who have not seen and believe.”

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” – We aren’t living an aimless, waiting-for-heaven existence. **We have a purpose.** To go and tell what we have seen and experienced. To share the Gospel and the story of redemption. To show what it looks like to be forgiven, and to offer that forgiveness to others in the name and work of Jesus.

“**Receive the Holy Spirit...**” – Approximately seven weeks later Jesus will have ascended, and the Holy Spirit will come in a mighty way. A power that will transform the disciples from frightened men behind locked doors to bold men of God willing to die rather than stop proclaiming the Gospel. And this same power is available to us when we believe.

John then includes the reason for signs and accounts he included in this Gospel...SO THAT **we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in His name.**

God spoke through messengers and prophets in the Old Testament. The Gospels tell of the life and work of God in the flesh, His resurrection, and ascension back to His rightful throne. The story continues with the arrival of the Holy Spirit coming into each of us; God with us. **In God's great story, the baton is being passed, and it is currently in our hands.** We have His peace, proof, power, and purpose. We have a commission to go and continue the work; to continue the story fueled by God in us. The face cloth is folded neatly in the tomb. The story was planned from the beginning and won't be rushed. Step into it. Run the race set out for you to continue the story. There is still work to do, and we have been created for this purpose; for His glory. It is finished, but we are not as long as we have breath. **For one day Jesus WILL return.**

So what...

John states the purpose for the signs and accounts he included in his Gospel account here toward the end (verse 31). Did it convince you? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

Have you heard of the Great Commission? Read Matthew 28:16-20. What does it mean to be sent? What are we sent to do? What does Jesus promise?

How can we live on purpose, in purpose, for purpose? In what ways has God called you to this mission? What does it look like in your life?



**There is no door,
no barrier, no emotion
Jesus can't break
through to get to us.**



Follow Me

²¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ 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.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 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. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." John 21:1-19

The disciples had just witnessed Jesus appear to them from behind locked doors. He breathed on them, spoke to them, showed them His pierced hands and side, then He left. Eight days later, He appears again, and He leaves again. He has not yet ascended to heaven and the believers have yet to be filled with the Helper, the promised Holy Spirit to come. So they wait.

Peter, still confused, afraid, and wondering what will come next, reverts to the familiar. "I'm going fishing," he says. After hours of no fish, a voice from ashore instructs them to cast their nets on the right side. Suddenly John recognizes Him. "It is the Lord!"



Jesus makes breakfast with bread and the newly caught fish. It is beautiful and familiar and just feels right. But I imagine deep in the pit of Peter's stomach he is wondering if the elephant in the room is going to be addressed. I wonder if he is living in the tension of joy that Jesus is here and shame for abandoning Him. I wonder if the pretending nothing happened is killing him. He doesn't have to wait long.



After breakfast, Jesus turns to Peter, "**Do you love me more than these?**" Peter replies, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus continues, "**Feed my lambs.**" Three times Jesus asks Peter this same question.

Three times Peter had denied Jesus... and three times Jesus offers Peter the chance to express his love. Three times Jesus gives Peter a mission. God is so gracious in His love, forgiveness, and constant pursuit of us.

Our ability to serve Him isn't based on our successes, but on His. As Rick Yancy says, "God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called." The same invitation to "Follow Me" that Jesus gave Peter three years earlier remains, though this time through a new lens of what the good news and following Jesus looks like.



It is a beautiful calling to continue the Kingdom work. But Jesus is also brutally honest with Peter. It won't be easy. There will be sacrifice. Jesus tells Peter what his life will look like living for Him and what kind of death he will experience. With such a heavy calling, Jesus wants him to know what he is getting into. **A life lived for the gospel isn't always an easy one, but it is the most valuable, fulfilling and rewarding.**

Like Peter, Jesus invites us to answer the question, "Do you love me?" followed by an invitation to **FOLLOW HIM**. Not because we are uber qualified, always do the right things, keep all our promises, or anything else rooted in who we are. **It is all because of who He is.** He is perfect FOR US and He invites us to be part of His mission on earth. He invites us to help continue to share the good news with those around us. To love and care for His sheep.

So what...

What do you think was Peter's mindset when he decided to go fishing?

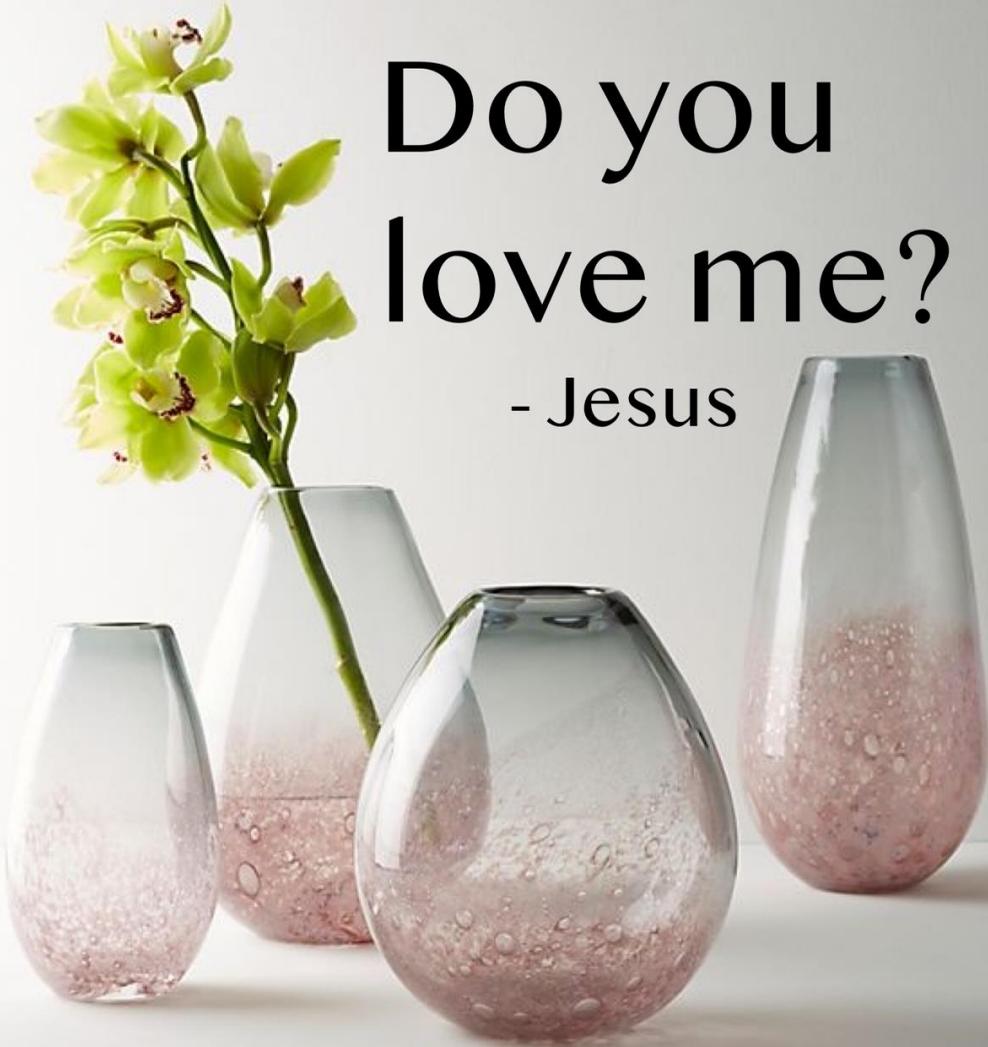
Why do you think Jesus repeated His question to Peter three times?

Are you ready to say "yes" to Jesus and follow Him? How do you feel about being called? How do you think God has/will equip you?

What does "discipleship" mean? What are some practical ways we can do it?

Do you
love me?

- Jesus





Many Other things

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” ²² Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I

come, what is that to you? You follow me!” ²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers^[b] that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. John 21: 20-25

Fresh off this encounter of forgiveness, restoration, and anointing, Peter turns to John and asks Jesus, “**Lord, what about this man?**”

Jesus simply replies, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, **what is that to you? You follow me!**”

Even in the midst of a wonderful calling, why are we tempted to look to the right or left and compare the calling and circumstances of others? Instead of gratitude and diligence in our charge, why do we look at anyone else and wonder, *Why aren't they suffering? Why don't I have what they have? Why do they get to do that? What about me?*

The truth is...it isn't about us. We get to play a part in God's incredible story, but it is all for His glory. We are all created in His image and likeness. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made. We are all created for good works. We are all made on purpose for purpose. Our race is our own, ordained and anointed by God. And it is good.

But of others, “what is that to you, *[insert your name]*?”
Our charge: “You, *[insert your name]*, follow me!”

John closes asserting the **true testimony of all he has witnessed and written**. He wants us to know that there were many other things Jesus did. In fact, so many that the world could not contain the books that would be written.

With this, John concludes his account of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus.

As John told us in the very beginning of his gospel account, “The **Word became flesh** and **dwelt among us**, and **we have seen his glory**, glory as of the **only Son** from the Father **full of grace and truth.**” (John 1:14)

I pray you treasure these truths.

I pray you never tire of studying God’s Word.

I pray you met Jesus here. That you believe Him to be your Lord and Savior.

I pray you will be counted among those who will be with Him in eternity.

And on that note, before we wrap up, we are going to take a small peek into another letter written by our author, John, based on a revelation from Jesus. Don’t go away just yet...stick with me one more day.

So what...

Do you sometimes fall into the trap of comparing your calling or circumstances with others? What do you think the implications of this type of thinking and living are? How does it impede living your best life?

What are some ways we can cheer others on in their walk without doubting our own?

Does it seem a strange way for John to end his account? Why do you think he ended this way?

What is the significance of mentioning all of the many works of Jesus in the last verse? What does this say to you about the works John DID decide to include?

Flip back to day 1 (page 8) and the last question where you wrote out what you currently knew to be true about Jesus. What is the same or different than what you would write now after being immersed in John’s gospel? What things would you say today that you know to be true about Jesus?

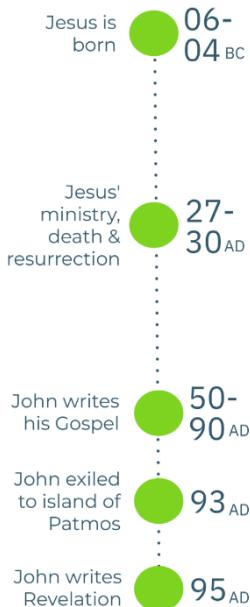


The Revelation to John

⁹I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. Revelation 1:9-19



So here we are. We are living after the first coming, where Jesus fulfilled the law and prophets. In His sacrificial death, we not only got something taken from us (punishment for our sins), we also got something added to us (His righteousness). We are between this time in the past and His second coming in the future, where death will be defeated once and for all. **All people will be on one side or the other: Satan's earthly ways leading to eternal death, or Jesus' holy ways leading to eternal life.**

John, widely believed to be the apostle John who wrote the Gospel account we have been studying, is exiled on the lonely, desolate isle of Patmos for "bearing witness of Jesus" (Revelation 1:9). His fellow apostles had all been martyred and he likely thought his ministry was long over at this point. Though old, alone and enslaved, John "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." However, this one Sabbath day was about to rock his world. He hears a loud voice behind him. It is his friend, Jesus, and He has a message for John. He tells John to write **"the things that you have seen, that are and those that are to take place after this."** (Revelation 1:19)

This Revelation to John is also from Jesus to us. It is full of symbolism and just as full of disparate interpretations. But the end is clear. **The victory belongs to Jesus and those of us who follow Him.**

The work of Jesus to fulfill the law and prophets and to atone for our sins has been completed, but sin still lurks on the earth in our present time. The devil still prowls. His ultimate defeat has not yet taken place. We are still tempted by his playbook...doubting God's goodness, lured by earthly pleasures, desiring power and a name for ourselves. **We eagerly await the second coming of Jesus.** Revelation gives us a picture of what is yet to come... both for those who decide to take things into their own hands and for those of us who put our hope in Jesus.

Jesus begins His revelation to John with a message for seven churches in Asia. He warns the churches of places they have gone astray. He wants them to know that He knows their deeds and that He is the righteous judge. He calls them to repent and offers promises for those who overcome, but for those who don't put their faith in Jesus, the punishment is severe and permanent.

Jesus then whisks John to heaven to see things that must take place. John sees visions of seven seals, and of seven angels blowing seven trumpets, triggering many catastrophic events to come upon the earth. He sees horses, dragons, beasts, and the Lamb who overcomes. And in the end, Jesus shows John this...

"Then I saw a **new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

Revelation 21:1-4

Satan destroyed. For good. Sin and death defeated. For good. The old has passed away.

A new heaven and a new earth. No more deception, manipulation or temptation from Satan, for he is defeated for all time. God Himself with us for eternity.

An angel takes John to see the glorious paradise. Radiance like jewels. Twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve foundations with the twelve names of the twelve apostles of Jesus. **It all comes full circle. It all had meaning. It all matters.**

John sees walls of stunning, colorful jewels. The city pure gold, like clear glass. Even streets of gold. No temple, sun, or moon because **GOD. IS. THERE.** The light of the world now lighting the world. Flowing from the throne through the middle of the street of the city is the river of the water of life. Bright as crystal. One either side of the river, the tree of life, yielding twelve kinds of fruit each month. Here we will reign forever and ever. Paradise. No tears. No pain. No suffering. No addictions. No disease. No depression. No envy. No poverty. No striving. No death. Only life. Full, abundant, joyful life.

In the Old Testament, Daniel also sees a vision of what is to come, but he is told to shut up the words and seal the book (Daniel 12:4). It wasn't yet time to be fully revealed. But here at the end of the revelation to John, Jesus says, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is near.**" (Revelation 22:10).

So, here we are. We **await the final battle and victory** in the second coming of Jesus. Final and ultimate victory is coming. However, while we wait, there is still work for us as followers and believers to do here on earth. Jesus taught us to pray that **God's kingdom come, His will be done, on EARTH as in heaven.** We work with our hands, our feet, our voice while we wait and we enthusiastically join John in His last words – the last words of God's Word to us – **"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"** (Revelation 22:20)

Friends, it is trustworthy and true. All things will be made new. You in?

So what...

What is your favorite part of the idea of heaven?

What kingdom work can you be a part of while you wait for the return of Jesus?

What are some of your favorite takeaways from your study of John?

As this study comes to a close, what will you pick up next? How will you remain in God's Word, abiding in Him, watching and waiting?

Amen.

Come, Lord Jesus!



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