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The Gospel of John

A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



The Gospel of John, written that you would believe and have life everlasting, is about the Kingdom of Light invading the kingdom of darkness and triumphing over it through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. It is what many believe to be the most amazing testimony of the identity, person, and nature of Jesus Christ ever written!



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(Edited and occasional added content by Dan Jones)

Table of Contents

“In The Beginning” John 1:1-2.....	8
Eternal Self-Existent One: John 1:1-2.....	8
Singular/Plural God: John 1:1-2.....	9
Jesus the Creator: John 1:3.....	10
Spiritual Life and Light: John 1:4-5.....	11
Piercing The Darkness: John 1:4-5.....	12
John The Baptist: John 1:6-8	13
Enlightening People: John 1:9.....	14
Ultimate Rejection: John 1:10	15
Rejected by His Own People: John 1:11	16
Receive Him: John 1:12.....	16
Saved By The Will of God: John 1:13.....	17
The Incarnation: John 1:14.....	17
There Came a Man Sent From God: John 1:6 & 15.....	18
The Pre-existence of Christ: John 1:15.....	19
Personification of Grace: John 1:16-18.....	20
The Unique Revelation Ministry of Jesus Christ. John 1:18.....	21
Pointing to Jesus: John 1:19-23.....	22
The Fiery Ministry of John the Baptist: John 1:25-28 (Matthew 3:1-12)	23
The Great Introduction: John 1:29-34.....	24
Handing Off the Baton: John 1:35-37	25
The Journey Begins: John 1:35-39.....	26
Operation Andrew: John 1:40-42.....	27
He Changes Our Identity: John 1:42	28
Jesus Calls Ordinary People: John 1:43-26.....	29
Greater Things Than These: John 1: 47-51.....	30
Angels Subservient to Him: John 1:50-51	31
Jesus was Invited to a Wedding: John 2:1-2 ESV	32
Taster's Choice: John 2:3-11.....	32
Take Time to Play: John 2:12.....	34
Jesus Interrupts The Passover: John 2:13-17 NLT.....	35
The Temple Cleansing Work of Jesus: John 2:16-17.....	36
First Mention of His Resurrection: John 2:18-22 ESV.....	37
Distinguished From Humanity: John 2:23-25.....	38
Nicodemus Noticed Something: John 3:1-2	39
You Must Be Born Again: John 3:3-8	40
Spiritual Blindness: John 3:9-12	42
The Story Behind the Cross: John 3:14-18	43

The Father's Love: John 3:16	44
A Heart for Salvation: John 3:17	45
Sin and Darkness: John 3:18-21.....	45
He Must Increase: John 3:22-30.....	46
The Last Lengthy Witness of John the Baptist: John 3:22-36.....	47
Building the Team: John 4:1-2	48
Walking with Jesus: John 4:3-6	49
Overcoming Prejudice: John 4:7-9	50
The Story of Two Wells: John 4:10-14	51
Jesus Exposes Her Empty Wells: John 4:15-18.....	53
Religious But Lost: John 4:19-24.....	54
Jesus Christ, The Messiah: John 4:25-26.....	55
Barren and Fruitful: John 4:27-29.....	56
Distracted and Blind to the Harvest: John 4:31-38.....	57
Sowing Abundantly: John 4:39-42.....	58
Ministry Takes Time: John 4:43-45.....	59
His Second Sign: John 4:46-54.....	60
Everyone's Jesus: John 5:1-9.....	62
Arise, Take up Your Pallet and Walk! John 5:1-9.....	63
Persecuted for Doing Good: John 5:9-16.....	65
Two Mind-Bending Verses: John 5:17-18	66
Like Father, Like Son: John 5:19-24	68
Self Existence and Life: John 5:25-26.....	70
Power over Resurrection and Eternal Judgement. John 5: 25-29	71
Selfless Motives: John 5:30-32	72
The Witness of John the Baptist: John 5:33-35	72
The Witness of His Works: John 5:36	73
The Witness of the Father: John 5:37-38	74
The Witness of Scripture: John 5:39-40	75
Living for the Glory of God: John 5:41-44	76
Moses Pointed to Jesus: John 5:45-47	77
Final Trip To the MountainTop: John 6:1-4	78
Another Lesson From The School of Faith: John 6:5-7.....	79
Feeding The Five Thousand: John 6:8-14.....	80
Two Very Different Paths: John 6:15.....	81
Two More Miracles: John 6:16-21.....	82
When Questions Go Unanswered: John 6:22-25.....	83
Deeper Hunger Pains: John 6:26-29.....	84
The Demands of the Agnostic: John 6:30-24.....	85
Called And Accepted By God: John 6:34-40.....	86
Grumble, Complain, and Make Excuses: John 6:41-46 ESV.....	87
Bold Claim: John 6:46-47.....	88
Was Jesus Advocating Cannibalism? John 6:52-59.....	89
Many Walked Away From Him: John 6:59-71.....	91

Beware of What You Become In The Pursuit of What You Want: John 6:66-71.....	91
Crisis of Unbelief: John 7:1-10.....	93
Hazards for a Jesus Seeker: John 7:11-13.....	94
The Jesus Approach to Education: John 7:14-18.....	95
Shaking Up Religious Traditions: John 7:19-24.....	97
Beware How You Judge People: John 7:24.....	98
The Controversy Grows: John 7:25-31.....	99
In Search Of A Case to Support Their Verdict: John 7:30-32.....	100
Another Promise of the Spirit: John 7:37-39.....	100
The Temple Police Return Empty-Handed: John 7:40-53.....	101
The Woman Caught in Adultery: John 8:1-11.....	102
Jesus is the Light of the World: John 8:12.....	104
The Self-Witness of Jesus Christ: John 8:13-18.....	105
Another Claim to Deity: John 8:19-20.....	106
An Understanding Road Block: John 8:21-30.....	107
Truth Encounter: John 8:31-33.....	108
Freedom Journey: John 8:34-38.....	109
Good Dad, Bad Dad: John 8:37-47.....	109
The Life Principle: John 8:48-51.....	110
Claim to Pre-Existence: John 8:52-59.....	112
Jesus is More Powerful than Karma: John 9:1-7.....	112
The Controversy Grows: John 9:13-34.....	113
The Parable of the Good Shepherd: John 10:1-21.....	114
Jesus is My Good Shepherd: John 10:9-11.....	116
He Knows Your Name: John 10:3-5, 14.....	117
One Flock With One Shepherd: John 10:16.....	118
Jesus Volunteered for the Cross: John 10:17-18.....	118
Jesus Monopolized the Public Discourse: John 10:19-21.....	119
In the Father's Hands: John 10:24-30.....	120
Hold Those Stones: John 10:31-39.....	120
Bethany Beyond the Jordan: John 10:39-42.....	120
Wrestling With Disappointment: John 11:1-8.....	123
The Reality of Death and Dying: John 11:7-16.....	124
Grief and Mourning: John 11:17-27.....	125
The Resurrection and the Life: John 11:25-26.....	127
Jesus Wept: John 11:32-37.....	128
Unbind Him and Let Him Go! John 11:33-46.....	128
True Words From Unlikely Sources: John 11:45-53.....	129
The Week of Preparation: John 11:53-57.....	130
The Thief is Exposed: John 12:1-8.....	131
The Divine Apologetic: John 12:9-11.....	132
The Triumphant Entry: John 12:12-19.....	133
The Greek Trigger: John 12:20-23.....	134
Living For a Greater Cause: John 12:23-26.....	135

A Crisis for the Kingdom of Darkness: John 12:27-33.....	136
Walking in the Light: John 12:33-36.....	137
Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: John 12:37-43.....	138
Interdependence of The Father and Son: John 12:44-50.....	139
The Love Brand: John 13:1.....	140
The Progressive Demise of Judas: John 13:2.....	141
A New Leadership Paradigm: John 13:3-20.....	142
The Mark of True Christians: John 13:31-35.....	143
Peter's Good Intentions: John 13:36-38.....	144
Behold, The Bridegroom Cometh: John 14:1-3.....	145
The Only Way to God: John 14:4-6.....	147
Greater Works: John 14:12-15.....	147
The Mystery of Prayer and Greater Works: John 14:12-14.....	148
The Promise of the Spirit: John 14:16-18.....	149
Christ "In" the Believer: John 14:18-21.....	150
Trust and Obey: John 14:22-24.....	151
The Divine Teacher: John 14:25-26.....	152
A New Peace: John 14:27.....	153
The True Vine and the Vinedresser: John 15:1-2.....	154
Life Pruning: John 15:2.....	155
The Sap Of Life: John 15:3.....	156
The Call to Abiding: John 15:4-5.....	157
Tested by Fire: John 15:6.....	158
Bearing Much Fruit: John 15:7-8.....	159
Abide in Agape Love: John 15:9-11.....	160
Beloved, Let us Love One Another: John 15:12-13.....	161
Friendship with God: John 15:14-15.....	162
Chosen With Purpose: John 15:16-7.....	162
Walking in the Sandals of Jesus: John 15:18-21.....	162
Without Excuse: John 15:22-25.....	163
Spirit-Filled Witness: John 15:26-27.....	164
Walking in Both Sandals of Jesus: John 16:1-4	164
The Advantage: John 16:5-7	165
Conviction and Conversion: John 16:8-11.....	166
The Personal Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Believers: John 16:12-15.....	168
The Coming Crucifixion and Resurrection: John 16:16-22.....	169
Praying in the Name of Jesus: John 16:23-28.....	170
Coming Tribulation: John 16:29-33.....	171
Jesus Begins His High Priestly Prayer: John 17:1-5.....	172
Three-Fold Power: John 17:6-8.....	173
Jesus Praying for His Own: John 17:9-12.....	174
In the World, But Not Of the World: John 17:13-19.....	174
Praying for You and for Me: John 17:20-21.....	175
The Love Story Portion of the Prayer: John 17:22-26.....	176

The Contrast: John 18:1-3.....	177
An Unusual Arrest: John 18:3-6.....	178
Christians and the Sword: John 18:7-11.....	179
The High Priesthood: John 18:12-14.....	181
Condemned by Silence: John 18:15-18.....	182
The First Interrogation: John 18:19-24	183
Peters Root Problem: John 18:25-27.....	183
The Passover Lamb: John 18:28-32.....	184
The Mystery About Pilate: John 18:33-36.....	185
Barabbas Released: John 18:38-40.....	186
The Scourging: John 19:1-7.....	187
Problems With a Crucifixion: John 19:6-7.....	188
Political Checkmate: John 19:-16.....	189
Horrible Beyond Description: John 19:17-19.....	189
Pilate Gets the Final Word: John 19:19-22.....	190
Prophecy Fulfilled: John 19:23-24.....	191
The Great Cross Commission: John 19:25-27.....	191
It is Finished: John 19:28-30.....	192
Knitting the Whole Bible Together: John 19:31-37.....	193
A Barren Funeral Ceremony: John 19:38-42.....	194
Filling in a Gap in the Story: Matthew 27:62-66.....	196
Between His Death and Resurrection: Ephesians 4:8-10.....	196
Angelic Intervention: Matthew 28:1-7.....	197
The Significance of the Resurrection: John 20:1-10.....	198
From Skeptics to Believers: John 20:11-18.....	199
Early Defeat Leads to Amazing Rebuilding: Matthew 28:11-15; John 20:19-23.....	200
Jesus Appears to the Disciples: John 20:19-23.....	201
Huddle #1: Jesus Addresses Fear: John 20:19-23.....	201
Huddle #2: Jesus Addresses Doubt: John 20:24-31.....	202
Huddle #3: Jesus Addresses Misplaced Priorities: John 21:1-8.....	203
Huddle #4: Enjoying Time Together: John 21:12-14.....	204
Huddle #5: A Personal Agape Encounter: John 21:15-17.....	205
Huddle #6: Self Denial: John 21:18-19.....	206
Huddle #7: Jesus Warns Against Comparison: John 21:20-23.....	207
Books Beyond Number: John 21:24-25.....	208

As we launch into this study of the Gospel of John, we are about to behold Jesus Christ through the eye-witness account of the Apostle John. I invite you to roll up your sleeves and open your mind to what I believe is the most amazing testimony of the identity, person, and nature of Jesus Christ ever written! –Terry Baxter

“In The Beginning” John 1:1-2

“1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God.”

Two books of the Bible start with the exact same phrase. The book of Genesis and the Gospel of John both start with the phrase, “In the beginning...” This is not a coincidence. It is by Divine Inspiration.

At the time of the beginning God already was. He predates time. He created time. He caused time and physical matter to come into existence. He exists outside of the realm of time. The Bible presents Him as the uncaused cause.

The Gospel of John fills in an important blank with the identity of God. It says that “the Word was God.” Genesis 1:3 says, “Then God said, “Let there be light” and there was light.” The logos (the Word, who is Jesus) had the power to create. John 1:3 says, “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being.”

With the opening of this Gospel, John is on a mission to solve the mystery of the identity of God. His resulting proposition is both shocking and unmistakable. He proceeds by introducing evidence for the Deity of Jesus Christ. John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” There is no mistaking the clear verdict of this book.

It must be noted that the same author wrote the books of 1, 2, and 3 John and the book of Revelation. These books add to the weight of his argument. Prepare to be confronted with the evidence for the Deity of Jesus Christ. Get ready to meet your Creator and Savior.

Eternal Self-Existent One: John 1:1-2

“1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God.”

A few weeks ago one of my young granddaughters asked me a question, “Grandpa, where did God come from? Who made Him?”

I responded by saying “God always was. He is eternal! The Bible teaches that before the beginning of time and the physical universe, He already was.” She said, “But I object to that answer because nothing could exist without everything else to keep it alive.” Not bad for a ten year-old. It looks like I have a philosopher in the family.

I then went on to explain that God is Spirit and can live and exist outside of the physical universe. I also added that God is “self-existent. That means He is not dependent on anything or anyone outside of Himself for existence.”

We then talked about how we as people have a physical body and we are dependent on many things for our existence. For example, we need air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. Without

these basics we will die, especially in very cold climates. We talked for a long time about what would happen if each of these were taken away from us.

Toward the end I summarized, "God is both eternal and self-existent. He doesn't need anything or anyone outside of Himself for existence. He is Spirit."

As we closed, she said, "Thanks Grandpa, it really helps to have someone I can talk about this stuff with. I have lots of questions about stuff most people don't think about or want to talk about." I then said "Questions are good, I'm here for you. I love talking about this stuff."

Singular/Plural God: John 1:1-2

"1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God."

Let's wrestle with the most mysterious characteristic of God. The Bible presents Him as a singular/plural Being. The God of the Bible is monotheistic, meaning "One God" yet He is presented with a plural identity.

The above text in the Gospel of John is a good example. He was both "with" God and yet He "was" God. "With" presents the idea of being plural, while "was" is singular. Christian theologians explain this mystery with the word "Trinity." God pictures Himself throughout the Bible as One God coexisting in the three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let me cite a few examples.

The first example goes all the way back to Genesis Chapter One. When God created mankind, the text says, "(26) Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26) Notice the emphasis on the phrases "Let Us", "Our Image" and "Our likeness." There is no mistaking the plural language in this verse.

A few chapters later after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, the text says; "(22) Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever...'"

(Genesis 3:22) Notice the phrase "one of Us." We now have a repeat of the language used in Genesis 1:26.

When it comes to the work of creation, the Bible consistently suggests that God the Father planned it, God the Son performed it, and God the Holy Spirit perfected it by adding order, design, and beauty.

As time progresses through the Bible, things get very strange. In Genesis 6:1-6 and Genesis 11:1-9, it looks like the ancient world started to worship fallen angelic beings as "gods." Angels are created beings and do not have creative power. They are not deities. This was the origin of pagan polytheism. This may be where Greek mythology came from and where the mystic religions were birthed with all of their idolatry and deception.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul graphically describes this Satanic seduction of the human race into paganism and polytheism. Paul argues that this distortion and demonic seduction was a radical departure from Genesis 1:26 and the God of Creation.

From its inception, the nation of Israel rejected pagan polytheism and embraced the God of Creation. In Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Moses gives a concise doctrinal statement for the nation of Israel. He said; “4) Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” If you could read Hebrew, you would discover this is a singular/plural description of God. (The Jewish people still pray this prayer (called “The Shema”) every day.) -dj

This mystery is further taught in the Old Testament related to the coming Messiah. Texts like Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6-7 clearly teach that the coming Messiah would indeed be “mighty God and Eternal Father.” This is not polytheism. It is the mystery of Genesis 1:26.

We now come to the New Testament and the fulfillment of these prophecies. The Gospel of John was written to present the evidence that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and had pre-existence as the Creator and was “with God” and “was God” at the beginning. (John 1:1-2) When this is compared to John 1:14, we have the incarnation of Jesus Christ as an exact fulfillment of both Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7. “14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Gospel of John was written to present Jesus Christ as “God” and the fulfillment of prophecy. Verse three directly identifies Him as the God Creation. “3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Be prepared to have your mind stretched as we launch into this book.

Jesus the Creator: John 1:3

“3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

In this verse, John attributes to the Son the work of Creation. “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Modern Christians are familiar with this concept, but at the time John wrote this, it would have been radical and mind-blowing in the extreme.

When we study the vast array of Scriptures on this subject, we discover that God the Father Planned the work of creation, God the Son Performed the work of creation, and God the Holy Spirit Perfected the work of creation. In a moment we will look at some other Scriptures that attributes the work of creation to Jesus, but first let me make an observation about salvation.

Ephesians 1:3-14 presents the exact same outline for our salvation. Verses 3-6 teach that the Father Planned our Salvation before He laid the foundation of the world. Verses 7-12 teach that Jesus Performed the work of our salvation by dying on the cross for us. Finally, verses 13-14 teach that the Holy Spirit works in our lives to perfect our salvation. Notice the blueprint for human redemption was set in place before the work of creation. (Verses 4-5)

So, are there other verses that make the claim that Jesus Christ actually performed the work of creation? The answer is, "Yes!"

Look at John 1:10: "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." That is a very specific verse.

Let's venture on to Colossians 1:16: "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities --all things have been created through Him and for Him." This statement is made by the Apostle Paul and not John. He makes the exact same bold claim. Notice that Hebrews 1:2 makes the same claim; "... through whom also He made the world."

Both of these contexts boldly present the obvious conclusion, "If Jesus performed the work of Creation, He must be God!" Look carefully at Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:1-4. Jesus not only created the universe, He holds it together. He is both the Creator and the Sustainer.

This stretches our understanding of Jesus. He was and is much more than the humble man from Nazareth who worked in a carpenter's shop. The entire Gospel of John is going to push to the conclusion of the Deity of Christ. You cannot read the Gospel of John and not be confronted with the full truth about Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Life and Light: John 1:4-5

"4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5)The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

John now introduces the vital concept of spiritual life. The word for "life" in verse four is the Greek word "Zoe." It refers to the higher principle of spiritual life. Make no mistake, Jesus is the source of all life, both biological and spiritual. Apart from Him, there can be no life.

But in this context, John is not talking about physical or biological life. He is talking about the light that pierces spiritual darkness. Mere biological life is no small thing, but it can be filled with moral decay, sin, and corruption. Mankind without spiritual life can be trapped in human sin and depravity. Where sin and evil reign there is pain, misery, and death.

The Gospel of John picks up where the book of Genesis left off. The book of Genesis deals with the creation of biological life. Genesis 3 left humanity under the curse of the fall and in slavery to sin. John 3 extends the hope of being born again into a new life filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, John is presenting Jesus as the source of the spiritual life that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

John is saying that Jesus came to shine as light in the kingdom of darkness. He was and is that light. He came to break the bondage of sin and death. He came to redeem humanity from fallen human nature and change people from the inside out. He came to bring light to a morally dark world. He came to break Satan's grip on humanity.

It's no stretch of the imagination to view the coming of Jesus as an invasion by the kingdom of light into this earthly kingdom of darkness. Luke 2 clearly records that the angels who appeared to those shepherds watching their flocks by night and filling the night sky praising God were "the armies of heaven." (See verses 13-14) -dj

Just because Jesus came and brought that life, doesn't mean that people comprehended or embraced him. Human depravity loves sin and darkness. The kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness are at war with each other. The Gospel of John and then the book of Acts chronicle the explosion of that light and life in a spiritually and morally dark world.

Piercing The Darkness: John 1:4-5

"4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

Both the book of Genesis and the Gospel of John start with light piercing darkness. Genesis 1:2-5 says; "2) And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3) Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4) And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5) And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day."

There is a direct parallel between this story in Genesis and what Jesus was about to do in the dark and sinful void of humanity. The same is true for every nation, state, city, and individual human heart. Make no mistake about it, piercing darkness is initiated by the Holy Spirit. God is the one who always takes the initiative to bring light, truth, and Redemption into human darkness.

Why? John 1:5 explains clearly that the darkness did not comprehend the light. It did not seek it! It could not understand it! It did not want it! Darkness never seeks the light just as lost and dark sinners do not seek God on their own accord. Jesus seeks the lost, they do not seek Him. When a lost person turns to the Lord it is only because the Spirit of God was actively drawing them to Him.

This light and darkness analogy is used many times in the Bible. John returns to it again in John 3:19-21. These verses follow in the wake of John 3:16. Read carefully what John says; "19) And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20) For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21) But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.""

The Bible presents the picture that the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light are in constant warfare with one another. (See Ephesians 6:12) Whenever a person turns to Jesus,

the Holy Spirit transfers them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. (See Colossians 1:12-13) Nothing excites me more than seeing the light of the glory of God turn the light on in people's lives.

Jesus made it clear that every born-again Christian then becomes a shining light in the world. (See Matthew 5:13-16) Paul had the same message. (See Romans 13:11-14, Ephesians 5:6-21, Philippians 2:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 and many other texts) Peter also touched on this theme in 1 Peter 2:9.

I cannot fully explain the mystery of how the light of the gospel spreads in the world. This powerful work of God is awesome and amazing. Isaiah 58:8 & 10 includes prayer and fasting in the process of spreading light. We can plead with God in prayer to turn the light on in the hearts of people held captive to darkness around us. Make no mistake about it – light is more powerful than darkness and God delights in piercing Satan's domain of darkness.

When a person turns to the Lord, God begins the Genesis 1:4 process in their life. He begins to separate the light from the darkness. He sets them free from sin and darkness. He cleans them up and renews them. The New Testament pictures this as the process of sanctification. The world is changed one heart at a time.

John The Baptist: John 1:6-8

“6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7) He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. 8) He was not the Light, but he came that he might bear witness of the Light.”

John now makes a significant leap. The first five verses were built on Genesis Chapter One, the first book of the Old Testament. John then jumps to the ministry of John the Baptist – which is covered in the very last chapter and last two verses of the Old Testament.

Malachi 4:5-6 says, “5) Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6) He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” It is almost like John was saying, “Jesus is the alpha and the omega of the Old Testament.” He is the beginning and the end and everything in between. The book of Hebrews more than fills in the middle of that argument by saying the entire Old Testament pointed to Jesus Christ.

Notice that John the Baptist came for a witness. His job as the forerunner of the Messiah was to pave the way for the light and to point people to Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. The text clarifies that he was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. John did not draw attention to himself. He faithfully introduced the Lamb of God to the nation of Israel.

According to Acts 1:8, every born-again and Spirit-filled Christian has been given power and authority for something very similar. We are not the prophetic forerunner to the Messiah the way John the Baptist was, but we are to be witnesses that point people to Jesus Christ. We are to prepare the soil and sow the seed of the Gospel in our sphere of influence. We are not here to

glorify ourselves or fulfill the dreams of our own making. We are here to build relationships and point people to Jesus Christ as we go through this life.

Enlightening People: John 1:9

“9) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.”

We need to avoid the temptation of moving too quickly through the next several verses in this context. So, let's slow down and put verse nine under a microscope. There are two amazing parts of this verse:

First, we encounter the phrase; “There was the true light...” There is so much to unpack with this phrase. Let me start by saying that we now have a clue to the mystery of Genesis 1:3 & 14. Many have noted a problem with Genesis chapter one. God said, “Let there be light” on the first day of creation (Vs 3), but did not create the sun or moon until the fourth day. (Vs. 14) Notice also that whatever the source of light was, it allowed vegetation to sprout and flourish in verses 9-13.

John provides an amazing answer to this mystery. In Genesis 1:3, the Father simply beckoned Jesus to shine the “true light” of His glory into the physical realm. The result of God beckoning light to shine in Genesis 1:3 was... “and there was light.”

In 1 John 1:5, this same author made a profound observation. He said, “... God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” That means God is an absolute light source. But wait, if God is light and Jesus is the “true light”, isn't John making a subtle claim to the Deity of Jesus Christ. I believe that is exactly what John was doing.

Just to add more weight to this argument, Hebrews 1:3 says, “And He is the radiance of His glory, the exact representation of His glory...” In other words, from the time God said “Let there be light” in Genesis 1:3, Jesus has fulfilled the role of radiating the light of God's glory into the created realm.

I believe this is what John 1:18 refers to when it says; “18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” John makes the very strong case that this “radiant” role of Jesus extends to the whole world and most likely the whole created Universe. This point alone could be the subject of hours of study and contemplation.

So how does this apply to you and me? Well, that's the second thrust of John 1:9; “which coming into the world, enlightens every man.” Jesus Christ literally “turns the light on” in every person who comes to Him. He illuminates them. He shines in them. This overlaps with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and it is fascinating to watch in the life of a new believer.

Through this illumination process, Jesus moves people from darkness to light. He moves them from deception to truth. He moves them from fear to trust. He moves them from bitterness to

love. He moves them from brokenness to wholeness. He moves them from captivity to freedom. He moves them from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

(And, we find something even more amazing and revealing about the light that is Jesus Christ when John writes about the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven to earth in Revelation 21:23 where he says: "And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light." Yes, "the Lamb" in this verse is Jesus – so we see Jesus being the light from beginning to end.) -dj

This is a small summary of John 1:9 and what starts to happen in the life of a new Christian. Jesus Christ enlightens people who come to Him. From the moment of salvation, the illumination process continues throughout our entire life span. The growing and learning never ends –even into eternity!

Ultimate Rejection: John 1:10

"10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

Rejection can be traumatic. When a parent rejects his or her children it can leave lifelong scars. When a student is rejected by his or her peers it can amount to abuse and bullying. But this verse deals with a much more severe and far-reaching rejection. This is talking about the Creator being rejected by His creation.

This goes beyond the atheists saying "I don't believe in God." This is talking about Jesus Christ stepping into the world that He created and being rejected to His face. I believe much of the created realm did recognize Him, but it was humanity that rejected Him.

Luke records a very telling statement from Jesus to the Pharisees during His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. As His disciples were praising God for Him in Luke Chapter 19, suddenly "39) Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40) But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

I glean two insights from these verses. First, the rocks recognized Him. Second, fancy degrees and the years of education it took to become a Pharisee did not make them more spiritually wise than your average rock by the side of the road. (And one could make the argument that the situation has not changed significantly in two thousand years.)

The Gospel of John is a story of that human rejection. Jesus performed sign after sign, fulfilled prophecy, and taught astounding truth. His claims of being Deity were backed up by His actions. How did it end? They not only rejected Him – they crucified Him.

Paul shares this story in broader terms in Romans 1:18-32. He points out that all humanity exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. The same trend continues today. Humanity stands guilty before the Creator.

Rejected by His Own People: John 1:11

“11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.”

This may qualify as the most surprising verse in the Bible. God gave the Jewish people a very special revelation of the coming plan for the Messiah. The entire Old Testament pointed to Him. Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies related to His birth, life, works, and death. John the Baptist came as a forerunner. His works and teaching screamed of His identity.

Notice that the Scribes got his biblical birthplace right for wicked Herod the king. Yet sin is blinding and Satan is deceptive. Most surprising of all was that the Jewish religious leaders led the chorus of “Crucify Him” at His death.

He did amass a small group of followers. Some did believe in Him. But they could not stop the plot to put Him on the cross and end His life. It never surprises me when religious people get things wrong and end up just as blinded as the world.

Receive Him: John 1:12

“12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,”

Salvation is not bought, earned, or merited by good works. It is a free gift to those who simply receive the message and believe in Jesus Christ. It is not something someone else can do for you. It is based on faith. You have to be involved in the process. It is a personal response needed upon hearing the Gospel.

Few verses say it as clearly as this verse. John 3:16 talks about “believing in Him.” It is not forced on us against our will, for there must be a human response of faith upon hearing the Gospel.

I have no problem inviting people to believe or receive Jesus Christ after hearing the Gospel. Jesus did it all for us on the cross. Our only part is to sincerely believe.

Saved By The Will of God: John 1:13

“13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Make no mistake about it, salvation is the work of God. Being “born-again” is not automatic for every human being. Nor is it true that “all people are God’s children.” We do not choose God, He chooses us. Not all religions lead to God. All of those thoughts are wrapped up in this one verse.

When this whole context is read (John 1:9-13), the mission of Jesus Christ comes into focus. He came as light into the dark world of humanity. Most people rejected Him and sought to destroy Him. Those who did receive in Him were invited into His family as children of God.

The Incarnation: John 1:14

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:1-3 and John 1:14 are tied together. The Word that was from the beginning and created all things now takes on human likeness. It is not a far stretch, because Genesis 1:26 says: “Then God said, “Let Us make man in our image, according to our likeness...” Only mankind was created in the image of God.

The opposite is also now possible. God can theoretically take on human likeness. This is commonly called the “Incarnation” in theological terms. It literally means “God taking on human flesh or likeness for the purpose of human redemption.”

This is where evolution falls apart. According to the Bible, mankind did not evolve from basic life forms. Adam was created in the likeness of God. Of everything God created, only mankind is in His likeness. Every human is stamped with the likeness of God. (Read Luke 3:34-38 and note the final phrase in verse 38)

So let’s reason together for a moment: The Word cannot become a cat, dog, horse, or a monkey. The gulf is too big. There is no direct connection with the likeness of God. They are not a trichotomy. They do not have a body, soul, and spirit. Animals cannot think in abstracts, communicate in complex terms, or invent and develop technology. They are not moral beings possessing a conscience, independent will, and reasoning ability. Animals are not stamped with the likeness of God.

Humanity is special to God. He loves them, but they turned away from Him. With the fall of mankind into sin and death, God developed a plan for the redemption of mankind. Sin had to be “paid for” or “atoned for.” Let’s tie this to an Old Testament story:.

When Abraham was preparing to offer the sacrifice with his son on the altar, Isaac inquired about the lamb for the sacrifice. In Genesis 22:8 Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the sacrifice.” Another translation could be, “God will provide Himself as the Lamb for the Sacrifice.” Welcome to the doctrine of the incarnation.

In John 1:14, the writer clearly introduces the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us expressing the glory of the Father. Then in John 1:29 and 36 John the Baptist introduces Jesus Christ as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Through the incarnation of Jesus, God literally prepared Himself as the Lamb for the sacrifice.

There Came a Man Sent From God: John 1:6 & 15

“6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John... 15) John bore witness to Him, and cried out, saying, “This is He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.”

God can and does intervene in the affairs of mankind. He allows society to drift into sin and depravity, but there is a threshold when God steps in to check the evil intent of the god of this world.

It usually comes in the form of a courageous man or woman who is willing to stand alone, buck the trends of the time, expose darkness, point to the light and spark a reformation, awakening, or revival. John the Baptist was such a man who came as a forerunner to the Messiah. They come as a corrective measure to a broken system.

The pages of history bear witness to many men of whom it can be said, "There came a man sent from God." Noah was one of those men. Joseph was one of those men. Moses was one of those men. Samuel was one of those men. David was one of those men. Elijah was one of those men. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel fit the description. Certainly Peter, James, John, and Paul fit into this category.

There were many others who fit this description since the inauguration of the Christian Church. I would point to Martin Luther, Hudson Taylor, George Whitfield, Dwight L Moody, Billy Graham, James Dobson, and Josh McDowell to name only a few. You can undoubtedly add others to the list.

There were other men and women sent from God who were social and political reformers. These would include men like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Dr Martin Luther King. They each came for a purpose and as a corrective measure to point people to truth and light as a check to Satan's agenda in the world.

Satan also sends men and women to advance his cause in society. Many come as sheep in wolf's clothing. Others silently go about their devious work of promoting an immoral and antiChrist agenda in society. They exploit everything from the entertainment industry to the education system to spread their lies, deception, and poison among unsuspecting people.

God will tolerate it only so long until He sends a counter-voice as a corrective measure. As 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 points out, the men and women God sends are often the least likely candidates to step into a corrective role.

I often look around and wonder who the men and women of our day are of whom it will one day be said; "There came a man sent from God whose name was" Never underestimate what God might be doing through unsuspecting people.

The Pre-existence of Christ: John 1:15

"15) John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me."

In this verse, John makes a profound statement about Jesus. He says; "for He existed before me." But wait a minute, doesn't the gospel of Luke clearly teach that John the Baptist was at least six months older than Jesus? (Luke 2:26-45) Yes! So what is John the Baptist talking about in John 1:15?

We now come face-to-face with one of the most amazing doctrines about Jesus Christ and the incarnation. He pre-existed His physical birth, as talked about in John 1:14. He was the Word who performed the work of creation.

Jesus made this same claim during a heated discussion with the Pharisees in John 8:12-59. The whole context is fascinating to read, but verses 48-59 are really intriguing. The conversation relates to Abraham. Let me quote a few of the verses where Jesus Himself makes the claim to pre-existence.

"56) Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57) The Jews therefore 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 born, I am." 59) Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

(John 8:56-59)

Why did they get so mad and try to kill Him? They clearly understood that Jesus was not only claiming Pre-existence being older than Abraham, but He was also claiming to be the "I Am" who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. (Exodus 3:13-15) In other words, He was claiming to be the God who revealed Himself to both Abraham and Moses.

While you are pondering this phenomenon about Jesus Christ, let me point out that the Gospel of John does not begin with a genealogy like Matthew or Luke. Why? From the beginning John focuses on the Deity of Jesus Christ and not His humanity. The whole purpose of the Gospel of John is to present the evidence that Jesus is God – and He came into our world as a human specifically for the sake of redeeming mankind.

Personification of Grace: John 1:16-18

"16) For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

Grace is amazing. It is not only unmerited favor and undeserved kindness, it is also God's strength and power made available to help us do what we could not or would not do in and of ourselves. For the Christian, grace is drawing upon the power of Jesus who indwells us through His Spirit. Grace is Divine enablement. It is help for the weak and sinful.

Notice that the Law was given through Moses. It was written in stone by the very hand of God.. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. The word grace was only used a few times in the Old Testament. The grace of God was a foreign concept to the Old Testament view of God. It was a system of rigid legalism. Merit with God was earned through personal goodness. Under the Law, even Moses was denied entrance into the promised land because of one outburst of anger. The law cut no slack and showed little mercy. It was a hopeless system. It left all people under condemnation and distant from God.

The New Testament is filled with grace and hope. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost and not to condemn them. He came as an advocate to reconcile people to God. He came to build a bridge of access to God and not to enforce a wall of separation. Is it any wonder the curtain in the temple was torn in two when Jesus died on the cross? Through grace He opened an avenue of access and acceptance to God.

Before we leave these verses, I want to highlight another profound statement. Notice the wording in verse 18; "... the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." This is the correct translation of the Greek, even though some translations like the King James Version use the word "Son." The Greek word is "Theos," and it means "God."

In this verse, the Apostle John removes all doubt of the identity of Jesus Christ. He is, was, and always will be "God." This is the climax statement to the introduction of this Gospel. He pre-existed His incarnation as the Creator. He was with God and He was God at the beginning. The balance of the Gospel of John is going to defend this claim of Deity and unpack the amazing Gospel of Grace.

The Unique Revelation Ministry of Jesus Christ. John 1:18

"18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

We now have a verse that troubles some people! They react by asking, "Did not Adam and Eve see God in the garden of Eden? Who then was it that Moses saw on the mountain? How can John say; "No man has seen God at any time?"

The answer is that Jesus has always been the member of the Godhead that has explained or manifested God to people. He was the one who walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. John 8:56-58 implies that even Abraham interacted with Him. It was most likely the pre-incarnate Christ that appeared to Moses and others in the Old Testament. John 6:46 in the context of God giving manna during the Exodus is really Intriguing; "46) Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father."

This is when we need to look at several more references about the ministry of Jesus. It has always been His role to make God known to men. Let's look at some other references:

Hebrews 12:3 makes this very important statement about Jesus; "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature and upholds all things by the word of His power."

When combined with John 1:18, we have an amazing description of the historical ministry of Jesus throughout the Bible.

One of the characteristics of God attributed to the Father is that He is Invisible. That does not mean He is not real. He is Spirit and exists beyond the physical realm. In John 4:28; Jesus told the Samaritan woman; "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship in Spirit and truth."

Romans 1:20 and 1 Timothy both support the eternal, immortal, and invisible nature of God. Then Colossians 1:15-16 clarifies that "Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation." The next verse says He was the Creator of all things. This adds color and detail to John 1:14-18.

Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us. One of His missions from the beginning of time has been to display Deity in the physical realm. To know Him is to know the Father. (See John 14:9) He is a co-equal part of the godhead with the mission of revealing the glory of God within the whole realm of creation.

This ministry of Jesus Christ is a biblical mystery that becomes clearer and clearer as you devote your life to studying the Bible. At this point it is sufficient to take John 1:18 at face value. Jesus is the one who explains and personifies the Father to the physical realm.

Pointing to Jesus: John 1:19-23

"19) This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20) And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22) Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23) He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said.""

John the Baptist was making huge waves. People were noticing him. News about him was spreading fast. All the spotlights were on him. In this context, the Jerusalem press was pursuing him for an interview.

Ironically, they were wondering if he was the Christ? The events from thirty years earlier were still fresh in people's minds. The magi from east, the story from the shepherds and even the jealousy of Herod the king that had slaughtered so many new born babies in Jerusalem and its surrounding area. Things had calmed down, but the people were watching, waiting, looking, and listening.

(For hundreds of years, the Jewish people had been reciting a prayer three times a day asking that the Messiah would come: *"I believe with complete faith in the coming of Mashiach. Though he tarry, nonetheless I await him every day, that he will come."*) -dj

Suddenly, John the Baptist appeared on the scene in the wilderness of Judea at a place called Bethany Beyond the Jordan and began his non-traditional ministry. He was preaching a fiery message of repentance and multitudes were turning to God and being baptized.

(Scripture says all of Jerusalem and Judea came out to hear him. (Mark 1:5) That would have involved a walk of about 25 miles through the hot and inhospitable desert wilderness ending about five miles north of the Dead Sea. So why would so many people endure so much hardship and inconvenience to come out and hear a crazy, bug-eating, fire-and-brimstone

preacher? Because he was announcing that the Messiah, that same Mashiach they had been asking God to send for hundreds of years, was finally here!) -dj & tb.

John the Baptist had every opportunity to promote himself and steal away the publicity, but instead he remained true to his mission to prepare the way for Jesus. His quote from Isaiah 40:3 was known only too well by the Pharisees and Scribes. He was claiming to be the one who was preparing the way for the Messiah. He was about to introduce Jesus to the Jewish nation.

This Baptizer was claiming to be a direct fulfillment of prophecy. He was claiming to be the first domino in a series of events that would eventually lead to the disclosure of the Messiah and to the suffering expounded in Isaiah 53.

Undoubtedly, many priests and scribes spent the next three years searching the sacred scrolls while listening to the news about both John the Baptist and then the carpenter's son from Nazareth. They were frantically trying to put all the pieces of the prophetic puzzle together.

Make no mistake, the common people were watching and listening as well. Some, whose baby boys had been slaughtered by Herod, found consolation in Jeremiah 31:15. They were pregnant with expectation and the ministry of John the Baptist represented the first contractions in the birthing process. It was crucial that John the Baptist shun the publicity, stay the course, and stick to his message.

Ironically, we are at the threshold of very similar days. Prophecy surrounding the second coming of the Messiah is rapidly being fulfilled. The role of every Christian is to be as faithful with the Gospel entrusted to us as John the Baptist was in his ministry. It is our job to point people to Jesus.

The Fiery Ministry of John the Baptist: John 1:25-28 (Matthew 3:1-12)

"25) And they asked him, and said to him, 'Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' 26) John answered them saying, 'I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27) It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' 28) These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

John the Baptist was a marked man from the time of his birth because of the unique way in which he was conceived by Zacharias and Elizabeth as recorded in Luke Chapter One. The eyes of many in Israel were already watching him.

His public ministry gained significant momentum quickly. He could not be ignored. He was a maverick. According to Matthew 3:1-12, he came from the wilderness, was dressed in a garment of camel's hair and had a really strange diet of locust and wild honey. Like Elijah in the Old Testament, he was set aside by God for something special. He didn't fit the standard mold.

Both Matthew and John point out that many Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to him not only for baptism, but also to check out his message and ministry. John was not impressed by

the attention. His message was fiery and to the point. People needed to repent and get right with God. John called them to repentance as well.

In a sense, John the Baptist was a revivalist. He was preparing the way for the Messiah, His work on the cross, and for pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Religion was thriving in Israel, but there was a spiritual void. It was empty, formal, ritualistic, and filled with hypocrisy. Control of Judaism had been concentrated into the hands of an elite group of powerful religious zealots. Religion was very political and this group controlled everything.

The coming of John the Baptist was like a light shining in the wilderness. He was a sign that God was up to something new and fresh. He rocked the boat and upset the status quo. The religious leaders had him on their radar screen. This is what prompted many visits and numerous questions from headquarters back in Jerusalem. They were trying to intimidate him into subjection, but John was not impressed. He called them to repentance as well. (See Matthew 3:7-12)

I believe something similar is happening as we approach the end times. According to Ephesians 5:26-27, the Spirit of God is going to prepare the bride for the return of Christ. There will be a purifying process in the church. I fully expect outbursts of revival around the world accompanied by criticism from established institutional churches that are moving deeper into liberalism and apostasy.

Satan will also seek to bring confusion with false teachers and the spread of various cults. There is much to learn from the ministry of John the Baptist. He responded by pointing people to repentance and back to the Word of God. The Spirit of God always honors the Word of God.

The Great Introduction: John 1:29-34

"29) The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30) This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31) And I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32) And John bore witness saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33) And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34) And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'"

John came to introduce the Messiah to Israel. His baptism was far more than a ritual. He was looking for a singular event. He was looking for the sign of the Holy Spirit descending from heaven and remaining on the Messiah.

According to Matthew 3:16-17, when Jesus was baptized, "16) ... behold the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him. 17) and behold a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Notice that all three persons of the trinity were present at this event.

Notice the wording that John used to introduce Jesus; “29) ... Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30) This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'”

Are you ready to have your Bible come alive? John the Baptist is turning on the switch of revelation about the Messiah. He ascribes pre-existence to Jesus and connects Him with the Old Testament sacrificial system for the atonement of sin. God was fulfilling the promise Abraham made to Isaac in Genesis 22:8, He was providing the Lamb for the sacrifice.

I believe John was also indicating that Jesus was the true Passover Lamb that Exodus 12 pointed toward. The Lamb of God would indeed bear the judgment of sin on behalf of all people. His blood is applied by faith over the lives of those who believe in Him. It was more than coincidental that Jesus was crucified during the Passover celebration.

Jesus fulfilled both Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah and extensive symbolism throughout the Old Testament. John is beginning to shine the light on the full identity of Jesus Christ.

Later, the writer of the book of Hebrews would spend many chapters coloring in the details of the Messiah found throughout the Old Testament. He argues that the ceremonial calendar points to Him. The sacrificial system points to Him. The layout of the tabernacle and the temple point to Him. He postulates that things here are a mere shadow of heaven.

When Jesus was crucified, the curtain in the temple was torn in two. (Matthew 27:51) Why was that significant? Many of the stories in the Old Testament point to Jesus. There is so much packed in those words, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

Handing Off the Baton: John 1:35-37

“35) Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36) and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37) And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.”

We often get the theological right, but trip over the practical. That often happens when it comes to handing over the reins of leadership. It's hard to let go and let others step up to the plate.

John had worked hard building a big ministry. He had many followers, students, and disciples that were loyal to him. But when Jesus stepped up, it was time for John to step down. When Jesus stepped forward, it was time for John to step back.

This was a big test for John. Could he hand off the baton? The next day as John saw Jesus, two of his disciples were standing with him. He pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

With that simple move, the two disciples left John and started to follow Jesus. They left their master standing alone and began to seek Jesus. This is a very empty feeling for any leader.

We all stand in the sandals of John. We need to point our family, friends, and work associates to Jesus. We need to let go of our control so Jesus can take control of their lives.

Jesus will most likely lead them to do or believe things slightly different than us. They might like different music, dress differently, or have a different view of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter. They need to follow Jesus! They need to develop a deep and personal relationship with Him. They need to learn how to walk with God for themselves.

These three verses are more significant than we realize. I've seen it multiple times where parents, pastors, and ministry founders refuse to relinquish control to Jesus or hand over the baton. They like to micro-manage people around them. It's never good and it usually results in jealousy, bitterness, splits, and divisions.

In a sense, this is the biggest test of true leadership and maturity. Are you able to trust Jesus to step in and do a better job than yourself? Are you a bridge or a wall in helping others walk with God? Do you encourage others to spread their wings and step out of their comfort zones in walking with God or are you filling the void of God in their lives?

The Journey Begins: John 1:35-39

"35) Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36) and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37) And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38) And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated 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."

I love this story. It demonstrates how inviting and accommodating Jesus is for those seeking to get to know Him. When he turned and saw the two disciples of John following Him, He asked the simple question; "What do you seek?"

What an amazing question. I could picture Jesus sitting in a living room with you or me and asking the same question; "What do you seek?" Another way of asking the question might be, "What are you looking for in life?" Or, "What are you searching for?"

I almost chuckle every time I read the response of the two disciples; "Rabbi, where are you staying?" What a thoughtless reply to a profound question. "We were just curious about where you hang your hat at night." No matter if the reply was serious or insincere, Jesus invited them to spend the evening with Him.

I have often wondered what transpired that evening. Where did they stay? Did they share a meal together? What did they talk about? How late did they stay up and visit? Did Jesus say or do anything to point toward His omniscience or omnipotence?

The thing that pricks my curiosity is found in the next two verses. Andrew went immediately from the encounter and found his brother and reported, "We have found the Messiah!" That's a

profound conclusion from a casual encounter with Jesus. Unfortunately, Scripture is silent about what transpired during the evening together.

So what can we take away from this text? First, Jesus invites people to get to know Him. His response is, "Come, and you will see." He invites us to bring our doubts, hurts and hangups to Him. He is inviting.

Second, getting to know Jesus is a process. This was the first of many meetings. In fact,

Andrew spent the next three years following Jesus as one of His disciples. It all started with that first step toward Jesus. Maybe you need to take a step toward Jesus. I am confident He will notice.

Third, Jesus was a perfect gentleman. He was warm, inviting and accommodating. Spending time with Him is non-threatening. Those who seek Him are never turned away. I believe His response to you and me is exactly the same: "Come and you will see!"

Finally, that evening changed Andrew's life. I'm not sure exactly what happened, but it was positive and transforming. Spending time with Jesus will do the same for you. Let me encourage you to step out and follow Jesus. Get serious and be sincere about it.

Operation Andrew: John 1:40-42

"40) One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41) He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated 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 is translated Peter)."

Andrew was the first of the disciples to follow Jesus. The evening he spent with Jesus deeply impacted his life. He could not contain his excitement. The first thing he did was run and share the good news with his own brother. Soon he had Simon in tow to Jesus. Enthusiasm is contagious.

Andrew is never pictured in the Gospels or the book of Acts as preaching a great message, leading a crusade, or even as a key leader among the Apostles. His focus was on personal evangelism. Every time you see him, he had someone in tow bringing them to Jesus.

When Billy Graham started his public crusade ministry, he had challenges attracting crowds. That radically changed when a pastor in England introduced him to the concept of "Operation Andrew." It was built on the story of Andrew in the gospels. The plan was for each one to reach one.

The strategy was simple. Months before the public crusade, the Billy Graham Advance Team reached into hundreds of churches and trained their congregations in Operation Andrew. Every Christian was encouraged to make a list of ten people and start praying for their salvation. They

would then build bridges of friendship with them, share the gospel as the Holy Spirit opened the door and then invite them to the crusade.

An amazing phenomenon happened in city after city – hundreds of people came to Jesus before the crusade even started. One Billy Graham staff member confided in me that when they focused on the Operation Andrew Training, the crusade wasn't even needed. It was merely the excuse or catalyst to train thousands of people in personal evangelism.

I encourage you to become an Andrew. Have an active prospect list of ten people you are praying for and then seek to build a positive relationship with them. Be intentional about it. Share the love of Jesus with them in practical ways. Get close enough to them so the overflow of your walk with Jesus can spill into their life.

Don't be surprised if you slip right into the center of Acts 1:8. Here is the best kept secret in the church today: the power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed on the front lines of personal evangelism. Relational ministry is extremely dynamic and effective. It was the core to the way Jesus did ministry. It was the key to the way Jesus trained His disciples to do ministry. It was the conduit that transmitted the flames of awakening in the early church.

Person-to-person ministry is both powerful and contagious. If you know and love Jesus, you can do this! You can be an Andrew.

He Changes Our Identity: John 1:42

"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 is translated Peter)."

Jesus changed Simon's name to Cephas, which is translated as Peter. It means a rock or a stone. In essence, Jesus changed Peter's identity. He changed the way he thought about himself.

At the moment of salvation, Jesus does the same for us. He changes our identity from lost to found. Our identity changes from guilty to forgiven. It changes from despised to beloved. It changes from condemned to innocent. It changes from rejected to accepted. It changes from sinner to saint. It changes from broken to healed. It changes from worthless to significant. It changes from aimless to purposeful. It changes from unclean to holy!

The bottom line is that God wants us to think about ourselves differently. Instead of seeing ourselves as rejected, worthless, and unloved: He wants us to realize we are accepted, have value, and are loved. The way we perceive ourselves changes everything. We have a new identity in Christ!

He also wants us to view others differently as well. He wants us to see all other people as having value because they are created in the image of God*. He wants us to view other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. He wants us to treat all people with love, respect and dignity. (*This concept, known as "imago Dei" in Latin, changed the world. It led to the abolition of slavery and sweeping changes in the concept of human rights all over the world. It is

one reason we can truthfully say no one has changed the world more than Jesus Christ – and He continues to do so! -dj)

The bottom line is, if you want your life to change, your thinking needs to change. Accept the truth of your new identity in Christ and live into it. Step into your new life!

Jesus Calls Ordinary People: John 1:43-26

“43) The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." 44) Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of 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 any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."”

We do not know much about Philip. He was much like Andrew and is pictured bringing Nathanael to Jesus. According to Matthew 10:3 and Acts 1:13, he was one of the twelve Apostles but is not mentioned much in the rest of the New Testament.

Scholars agree that he was not the same Philip mentioned in Acts 6:5 who was appointed as one of the seven deacons in the early church. Philip the evangelist talked about in Acts 8:26-40 who shared the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch was one of the seven deacons and not Philip the Apostle. (See Acts 21:8)

I personally like the fact that Philip the Apostle was a faithful follower of Jesus but was never in the spotlight. God has different roles for different people. But that doesn't mean he wasn't effective. He had a great line for Nathanael, “Come and see.” It still works today when inviting people to investigate the claims of Jesus Christ.

The vast majority of God's people throughout history who tipped the scales and won the day for the gospel did not make the headline news in the pages of history. They are part of a “great multitude” like those mentioned in Revelation 7:9. The Bible is full of “great multitudes” of ordinary people who loved and followed Jesus from every century.

As I travel the world I meet them. They are the faithful followers of Jesus in every locality. They are special and have unique stories of God working in their lives. They are the faithful who occupy the prayer closets and trenches for the glory of God around the world. They remind me that God is working everywhere and doing awesome things.

Greater Things Than These: John 1: 47-51

“47) Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" 48) Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49) Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, 50) "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51) And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to

you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.””

John 1:47-51

It was impossible to be around Jesus long without seeing examples of His Deity. In this case, it was His omniscience. He knew the details of Nathaniel's life before he met him. He knew he was a sincere and righteous man with no hint of guile or deceit in his life. He even knew that he had been sitting under a fig tree when Philip called him.

This had a profound impact on Nathaniel. In verse 49 he responded, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” Jesus promised that He would witness much greater things in days to come, including seeing the heavens opening, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Those who take the time to sincerely read the four Gospels and investigate the evidence about Jesus Christ will come similar conclusions. They will soon discover that Jesus knows the details of their life as well and that He invites them into an amazing relationship with Him.

The longer a person walks with Jesus Christ, the more revelation about Him unfolds. It is a growing relationship. There is always more to learn and behold. There is no end to His majesty, glory, and power. As Paul said in Philippians 3:7-11, knowing Jesus is a surpassing value that has no equal.

Each individual must answer that call and make knowing Him their most important pursuit in life. As Jesus promised Nathanael, you will continually experience greater things as you walk with Jesus. Please don't marginalize Him or push Him into a small compartment on the perimeter of your life. There is no end to the amazing revelation of glory that awaits those who diligently pursue Him in this life!

Angels Subservient to Him: John 1:50-51

“50) Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51) And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.””

I find these verses to be very intriguing. Jesus makes an interesting statement to Nathanael that the Gospels are nearly silent about. “You shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” When did this happen?

Well, there is record of it in Matthew 4:11 after Jesus completed His temptations in the wilderness. The text says; “Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.”

Jesus also mentions in Matthew 26:53 during His arrest; “Or do you not think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of

angels?” One Roman legion was 6,000 troops, so that works out to more than 72,000 angels! That would be a huge army of angels!

Apart from these few references, there are no actual accounts of angels ascending or descending on Jesus during His public ministry. There is a brief mention in Luke 22:43 that during His intercession in the Garden of Gethsemane, “an angel from heaven appeared to Him; strengthening Him.” Apart from this, Jesus endured His earthly suffering alone for you and me! This included His mocking, scourging, and crucifixion. He voluntarily stood in our place in undergoing the judgment of sin.

But this conversation with Nathanael does raise an interesting observation about the identity of Jesus. Many believe the pre-incarnate Christ was the angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses at the burning bush. Paul pictured Him as the One that led Israel during the Exodus. (See 1 Corinthians 10:1-4) He was also “the captain of the host of the Lord” that appeared to Joshua before the conquest of Jericho. (Joshua 5:13-15)

There were numerous other times in the Old Testament when He appeared to people as “the angel of the Lord.” The height of His full revelation is pictured in Revelation 19:11-16 where He is portrayed as King of Kings and Lord of Lords leading the heavenly host on His return to earth.

(It’s interesting to note that when John wrote this title of Jesus in Revelation 19 in Greek, he wrote it in all caps: “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” Greek had no punctuation at the time, so the title would have really stood out!) -dj

I believe Jesus was telling Nathanael that the Lord of Hosts was standing before him. He was planting the seeds of His identity of being Deity in Nathanael at this very first meeting.

The bottom line is that Jesus didn’t need the daily attendance of angels during His public ministry because He indeed was and is much greater than the angels. (See Hebrews 1:1-14) Angels were available to Him but were not summoned by Him. Let me stress again, He purchased our salvation all alone.

It should be noted that John Chapter One begins with the statement that Jesus existed as the Word who was with God and was God as the Creator at the beginning. John Chapter One ends with the angelic hosts being subservient to Him. This chapter stretches our understanding of the true identity of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was Invited to a Wedding: John 2:1-2 ESV

“1) 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.”

I like this story. Most people focus on the miracle of turning water into wine, but they miss the truly significant point... “Jesus was invited to the wedding!

It is no secret that the whole institution of marriage is in trouble today. There is a reason. Jesus is being left out of this most basic relationship. People are not getting married for the right reasons and they are not building marriage God’s way.

I like the billboard I've occasionally seen. It says; "Loved the Wedding, Invite me to the Marriage. God." Don't be negligent, invite Jesus into your marriage. He delights in healing broken and struggling marriages.

There is a reason why His first miracle was performed at a wedding. I think He was sending a subliminal message to every married couple. It simply says, "I'm here to help with your marriage... if you invite Me!"

I urge you to invite Jesus into your marriage. Seek His help and grace. Make your marriage about seeking and serving Him together. I believe marriage is the basic place we learn to walk with God and apply all the principles of the Christian life.

Jesus launched His miraculous powers at a wedding. He wants to do the same in marriages today. He wants every marriage to experience His power, love, and grace. Jesus wants to work in and through marriages. I believe He is waiting to be invited into your marriage. What are you waiting for?

Taster's Choice: John 2:3-11

"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 that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." 5) His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." 6) Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. 7) Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. 8) And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. 9) When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the head waiter called the bridegroom, 10) and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." 11) This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

The first sign Jesus performed is significant because it displayed His Creative power. He took plain water and turned it into taster's choice wine instantaneously. He didn't even use any fruit in the process.

He also did it abundantly. He had the servants fill six stone water pots with water. Supposing they contained only 20 gallons each as the text modestly surmises, that's 120 gallons of taster's choice wine. If you use the 30 gallon figure, that's an amazing 180 gallons. It takes a good sized winery to get those results annually.

I know several people who own vineyards and wineries. To be able to produce that volume of wine is a monumental task. Literally years of labor and patience go into making good wine. It includes not only the planting, growing, and pruning process of the grape vines, it also includes

the picking, pressing, perfected recipe, and actual maturing process of the grape juice into wine. But Jesus did it all – instantaneously.

Let me emphasize that Jesus did this sign because there was a need. The seven day Jewish wedding celebration was about to come to a shameful end because they ran out of wine. The mother of Jesus came to Him with a request. She wanted Him to save the moment. In essence she was pushing Him into His first manifestation of Deity. He didn't think His time had come, but John the Baptist had already introduced Him. It was time to step out of the carpenter's shop and into the spotlight.

The Bible talks about wine being symbolic of happiness and even the filling of the Holy Spirit. (See Matthew 9:17, Ephesians 5:18) This might be a stretch, but we as people were created as clay pots. We are called living stones. (1 Peter 2:5) Jesus delights in taking common old human water pots and filling them with His Spirit.

It took a lot of faith for the servants to obey Jesus and dip into those water pots and take a cup to the headwaiter. Just moments earlier it was mere water. They didn't even taste it, they just obeyed Jesus.

The headwaiter was impressed. He called the bridegroom and bragged, "you have kept the good wine until last." The works of Jesus are always the best. His deeds always win the Taster's Choice Award.

So was Jesus condoning wine drinking, drunkenness, and alcoholism? That is a far stretch from what is happening in this text. I personally come from a family of several generations of alcoholism. I am content to practice abstinence from every form of alcohol except under extreme circumstances like a communion service, legislative toast, or severe stomach issue. (1 Timothy 5:23) I choose instead to be filled with the Holy Spirit to overflowing joy and happiness. (Ephesians 5:18)

When everything is considered, this was an amazing first sign. Keep in mind, many in Israel had a vineyard. To them, this miracle was profound. Jesus used a vineyard as His illustration for walking with God and being fruitful. (See John 15:1-17) This first sign pointed to that amazing sermon. In that sermon, Jesus pictured Himself as the vine that produces abundant fruit. If you want a Taster's Choice Life, you need to stay close to Jesus.

Take Time to Play: John 2:12

"12) After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days."

This verse might not sound like much, but it is packed with meaning. It is a stand-alone verse.

The wedding at Cana was over and the Passover was at hand. To fill the time, Jesus and his mother and His brothers and His disciples slipped away to Capernaum. It was a bustling resort town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was most likely also a fishing village. There was an abundance of fresh seafood.

So what is significant about this verse? Nothing! That's right, nothing happened there on this occasion. There were no sermons, healings, or miraculous signs. This was down-time to rest, relax, and bond with family and friends. This is one of several occasions during His public ministry that Jesus took time out. The text says they spent a few days together.

This is really hard for some people, especially task-oriented people. They view hanging out with family and friends as a waste of time. However, Jesus took time to fit it into His schedule. He made family a priority.

Notice that Joseph is not mentioned in this verse. Most scholars believe he was deceased by this time and as the eldest son, Jesus was the family leader. That makes this verse even more significant because it was Jesus who planned the vacation.

So what is the take away from this verse? The application is simple: clear time in your schedule to invest in family and friends. Learn how to play together and have fun. Build memories. Be intentional about it. It is a good and noble thing to focus on family and friends.

Jesus Interrupts The Passover: John 2:13-17 NLT

"13) It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. 14) In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. 15) Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. 16) Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" 17) Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me.""

Before squeezing meaning out of this text, it is important to burn the scene into our minds. Jesus got mad because the merchants were turning the Temple grounds into a lucrative business. They had thousands of captive customers during the annual Passover. The travelers who came to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices found it much easier to buy from the merchants than to bring their own sacrifices. The prices were inflated to the point of being robbery. (Matthew 21:13)

Soon a very complex supply network was established. Herds of sheep and goats were daily brought to Jerusalem to supply the temple demand. Cunning merchants would negotiate prices for entire herds of sacrificial animals. There were also cages filled with doves and undoubtedly sacs full of grain and even new wine offerings were available. The temple grounds looked and smelled like a barnyard, especially during the Passover when the crowds swelled to many thousands of people.

Don't forget the money changers needed to exchange the currency from foreign travelers. As is the case today, the exchange rates were always slanted to favor the money changers. Over

time, the Court of the Gentiles and part of the Temple Grounds themselves were transformed into an open market with all of the sights, sounds, and smells associated with it.

The temple grounds were becoming an ancient Walmart where nearly anything could be bought or sold. Though not mentioned in the text, there were probably numerous relics also sold on or near the temple grounds for travelers wishing to purchase memorabilia to carry home.

Jesus would have no part of it. His Father's House was no longer a place of prayer and worship. It had become a supermarket. Jesus made a whip or a scourge from some cords of rope and started driving the animals out of the temple grounds. He then broke open the cages of the doves and overturned the tables of the money changers. He literally chased the merchants out of the temple grounds. His actions undoubtedly interrupted the Passover celebration for hundreds of people.

What should bother us from the text is not that Jesus got angry and made a scene, but that none of the other religious leaders seemed to care. Some of them were most likely paid by the merchants to secure the best locations.

Something can be inferred about the physical features of Jesus from this story. As a mason and carpenter carrying large stones and lumber all day, Jesus was most likely very strong and in superb physical shape. I personally believe his size and strength intimidated them. I picture the carpenter's son as strong and rugged and with calloused hands, large biceps and most likely a six pack that made even the Roman soldiers jealous.

The relatively small and wimpy priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were no match for Him. They would not and most likely could not stop Him on this occasion. They just stood back and watched. As He unleashed His fury, Jesus cried out; "Take these things away; stop making my Father's house a house of merchandise."

A close study of the four Gospels reveals that this happened on two separate occasions. After the scene He made during His first Passover, it was soon back to business as usual on the Temple Grounds. Matthew 21:12-14 records the second ordeal.

This might help explain why the angry mob eventually demanded His crucifixion. These actions of Jesus significantly interrupted their Passover celebration, and not once but twice. It was easy for the religious leaders to exploit His actions to incite the many pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover to cry out "crucify Him." His actions undoubtedly threw the holiday into chaos.

The Temple Cleansing Work of Jesus: John 2:16-17

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

There are two important lessons from this story. As we compare notes with Matthew 21:13, Jesus said; "... It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den

of robbers.”” Jesus wanted not only the temple, but also every church and synagogue, to be a place of prayer and worship. It should be a place to meet with God.

Unfortunately, it is easy for God’s people to get distracted and turn the church into a social gathering or use it for fundraising schemes. I have no problem with finding creative ways to fund the spread of the gospel, but many times the gospel is totally set aside and the church does anything and everything but actually seek God. I wonder what would happen if our churches actually dedicated themselves to be houses of prayer? I believe we would see the book of Acts kinds of things happening again. The early church was a praying Church.

The second important lesson is that every born-again Christian is called the Temple of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Paul said, ““16) Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? 17) If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

A few chapters later he said nearly the same thing. “18) Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? 20) You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20 ESV)

Jesus is zealous for God’s House. Just as He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, He works to cleanse every Christian. He calls us to holiness. I often think of this truth when I read the story of Jesus cleansing the temple. I invite Him to do that work in my life.

The Holy Spirit is constantly at work cleansing God’s people. The temple in Jerusalem was built on a hill so the wind could constantly blow through it and cleanse it. The Greek word for “spirit” is “pneuma.” It also means “wind.” This is an illustration of how the Holy Spirit is constantly blowing and cleansing in our lives as well.

I glean from these texts that cleansing a temple is just part of the nature of Jesus. I encourage you to welcome that work in your life and not fight against it.

First Mention of His Resurrection: John 2:18-22 ESV

“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.”

The Jews looked at the zeal of Jesus in cleansing the Temple and associated Him with the prophets of old. He was like Moses coming down from the mountain with the stone tablets and seeing the golden calf. (Exodus 32). He was like Ezra discovering the mixed marriages among the first group of pilgrims that returned to Jerusalem. (See Ezra 9-10) He had zeal like Elijah provoking the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 31)

Their desire to see a sign was challenging Him to follow through. They were saying, “If you are going to act like a prophet, show us the confirming signs of a prophet.” In other words, “Prove that God has sent you with a corrective message.”

However, God did not send Jesus with a corrective message, He sent Him on a mission to establish a new message. He did not come to establish the Law, He came to fulfill the Law. He did not come with judgment, He came with grace.

When Jesus spoke of His sign to “destroy this temple and rebuild it again in three days”, He was pointing to His coming crucifixion and resurrection. In a sense, Jesus was using modern marketing techniques. He was giving a preview to entice people to show up at the box office for the full feature movie to come.

After the fact, His disciples looked back and concluded; “This is what He was trying to tell us from the start! He was laying the groundwork for His death, burial, and resurrection from the very beginning of His ministry.”

Distinguished From Humanity: John 2:23-25

“23) Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. 24) But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25) and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.”

These verses are packed with insight. Many try to reduce Jesus to the level of sinful humanity. Theologically, He took on a human body but He did not partake of the fallen human sin nature. Because of His virgin birth, He did not have the sin nature passed on through Adam. Because of His virtuous life He never committed a personal sin. He was neither a sinner by nature or choice. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21)

Some theologians call it the “Hypostatic Union.” Jesus was 100% divine while at the same time being 100% human. He was both God and man. When the Bible refers to Him as “the Son of God” it may be emphasizing His Deity. When it calls Him “the Son of man” it may be emphasizing His humanity.

Verse 23 is intriguing. It stresses that He performed many “signs” during His first trip to Jerusalem after beginning His public ministry. Apart from His cleansing the temple, we have no record of what those signs were. They must have been significant because “many believed in His name beholding the signs He was performing.” The Gospel of John closes by saying He did many other things that are not recorded in the Gospel record. (John 21:24-25) There was no lack of signs and wonders during His public ministry.

The next two verses in John chapter two are significant. They infer that Jesus kept a wall of separation between Himself and sinful people. He was in the world but not of the world. He

interacted with sinful humanity but He did not embrace the ways of sinful humanity. He came as light into moral darkness, but He did not embrace the darkness. He kept Himself pure and holy.

I always cringe when liberal theologians attempt to paint Jesus as having an affair with Mary Magdalene or having homosexual relations with the “disciple whom He loved.” It is a prime example of why He did not entrust Himself to man, because He knew what was in man. He knew how dark and sinful the human heart had become. Jesus came to redeem sinful humanity and not to relish in the sins of dark and depraved humanity. I pity those dark and deceived teachers who twist Scripture to their own damnation.

The idea of “not entrusting Himself to man” also meant that Jesus was in control of the timing and outcome of His eventual crucifixion. It had to happen in Jerusalem and on the Passover. He had to fulfill every Biblical prophecy right down to the soldiers casting lots for His clothing and the curtain in the temple being torn in two.

You can spend a long time meditating on these three verses and not exhaust the meaning. The next chapter most likely happened during this Passover. Nicodemus came to Him by night and spoke of the signs He was performing, but Jesus fully controlled the conversation. As we move into Chapter Three, it is important to remove the chapter division. Even the teacher of Israel was impressed with the signs he saw Jesus perform.

This context emphasizes that Jesus openly lived out His Deity for all to see. He openly preached His messages for all to hear. He did not do His signs in obscurity. There were many of them and they were intended to be very public where they could be validated or falsified. He was the real deal!

Nicodemus Noticed Something: John 3:1-2

“1) Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2) this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.””

We are now introduced to one of the most significant stories in the New Testament. Whatever happened during His first Passover after starting His public ministry caught the attention of everyone in Jerusalem. The focal point was undoubtedly on His cleansing of the temple. It was provocative in many ways. Most people knew something was wrong with turning the temple grounds into an open market for tourism, but only Jesus had the courage to do something about it.

Make no mistake, it caught the attention of everyone. It became the talk of the festivities. As inconvenient as it was, no one could disagree with His zeal or His actions. There was actually something fresh about someone who loved God and the meaning behind the Passover more than profaning the holiday by turning it into secular commercialism.

That night Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cloak of darkness. Though we do not know much about him, he was recognized as being a leader of the Jews. In verse ten Jesus called him "the teacher of Israel."

Were his motives pure? That is a good question. The next time in the context Jesus talked about darkness was in verses 19-21. He pointed out that men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. Jesus was undoubtedly cautious of Nicodemus and was not pulled in by any attempt at flattery. (See John 2:23-25)

In verse 2, there was an interesting play on words. Nicodemus called Jesus "Rabbi." It was the formal title of a recognized teacher. As mentioned above, in verse 10 Jesus calls Nicodemus "the teacher of Israel." There was a subtle exchange of this title between the two of them in this context. Will the real teacher please stand up? One was about to assume the role of teacher and the other the role of a student.

We again notice that Nicodemus refers to the "signs" Jesus had performed. The signs were consistent with someone sent from God. The evidence was beginning to mount. When the four Gospels are harmonized, we now have a pattern developing. The stage was being set. We have everything from the conception of John the Baptist (Luke 1), the amazing events around the dedication of Jesus in temple (Luke 2:25-38), the visit from the magi (Matthew 2:1-18), his trip to Jerusalem around age twelve (Luke 2:41-51), the formal introduction of Jesus as the Lamb of God by John the Baptist, (John 1:19-36), His turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), and now His cleansing the temple. (John 2:13-25) Plus there seemed to be other signs and miracles that were not specifically mentioned in the Gospel of John. They were most likely summarized in Matthew 4:23-25.

Undoubtedly, many religious leaders were beginning to hear about Him. The mystery surrounding Jesus was building. The evidence was piling up. Nicodemus made an astute observation; "No one can do the signs that you do unless God is with Him."

I would encourage you to do a study of the life of Jesus from the four Gospels yourself and come to your own conclusion. If you are unbiased and honest, I think you will agree with Nicodemus. I also believe Jesus will have the same message for you that He had for Nicodemus. "You must be born again!"

You Must Be Born Again: John 3:3-8

"3) Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 4) Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' 5) Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7) Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8) The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"

In verse three Jesus shocked Nicodemus with a statement about being “born again.” He was a religious leader in Israel and had no idea what Jesus was talking about. I am afraid the same holds true today for many pastors and spiritual leaders.

In verse four Nicodemus replies with the notion of entering a second time into his mother's womb and going through the physical birth process again. His mind is stuck in the physical realm.

Jesus replies by talking about being born of water and of the Spirit. He is not talking about water baptism, he is talking about the water breaking during labor in the physical birth process.

How do we know that? Because in the context Jesus repeats Himself, only the second time He substitutes the word “flesh” for “water.” Look carefully at verse 6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” He is talking about physical birth followed by a spiritual rebirth.

Though he doesn't use the phrase “born again”, Paul talks about this same concept in 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 in describing the natural man and the spiritual man. The contrast is profound. A Spirit filled man or woman functions on a different level than a natural man. Notice, Jesus does not say “a religious man or woman.”

No wonder Jesus says a second time to Nicodemus, “Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.” (John 3:7) He then goes on to introduce the ministry of the Holy Spirit in verse 8. Those who are “born again” are filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. They begin to function on the level of the Spirit and not merely the flesh.

In this verse Jesus uses the word “wind” to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is the Greek word “pneuma.” It can mean “wind” or “spirit.” Is it any wonder that on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given, the sound of a mighty, violent or rushing wind filled the house? (See Acts 2:2)

By saying in John 3:8 that the “wind blows where it wishes”, Jesus is implying that those who are born again and filled with the Holy Spirit begin to be led by the Spirit. They begin to function on a new level. The Holy Spirit now dwells within them. He leads them. He empowers them. He illuminates them. He teaches them. He fills them with the fruit of the Spirit. They begin to change from the inside out. They start a growth and maturing process.

According to John 3:3 and 5, Jesus said that those who are “born again” begin to “see” the kingdom of God and they “enter” the kingdom of God. Though they still live in the world and have a physical body, those who are “born again” can now live and function through the Spirit in kingdom principles and values.

I must give a strong caution: being “born again” does not translate to instant spiritual maturity. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 that there are few things as pathetic as a Christian who is still living in the flesh. He says the same thing in Galatians 5:16-24. Being “born again” is merely the beginning of the Christian life and journey. It ushers the new Christian into the realm of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Blindness: John 3:9-12

"9) Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" 10) Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? 11) Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. 12) If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

The unregenerate mind cannot comprehend spiritual truth or reality. Because Nicodemus was not born again or filled with the Holy Spirit, he was blind. It is impossible to have in-depth spiritual conversations with carnal-minded people. Jesus said it is like throwing priceless pearls before swine. (Matthew 7:6)

Paul talks about this at length when writing his two letters to the Corinthians. In the book of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 he talks about the spiritual man and the natural man. He emphasizes that the natural man cannot accept or understand the things of the spirit of God.

He expands on this theme in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. He said that the nation of Israel was blinded when reading the Old Covenant, but when a man or woman turns to the Lord the blinders or the veil is taken away. When the Holy Spirit enters someone's life at the moment of salvation, He illuminates them to spiritual truth. Suddenly the Bible comes alive to them.

Paul then takes it one step beyond in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. He explains that the god of this world actually blinds the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. I have seen non-Christians twist the Bible in an attempt to condone all kinds of ungodly morals and behavior. It is impossible to reason with them because they are being blinded.

So where do we start in communicating with non-Christians? The answer is that we focus on the simple gospel. We do exactly what Jesus did with Nicodemus in John 3: 13-21. We explain to them who Jesus Christ is and why He died on the cross. Jesus took the understanding Nicodemus had of Old Testament stories and used them to explain the gospel.

Be patient. Evangelism is a process. In the case of people who have never been exposed to the Bible, you may need to start with a basic Bible study and lay a foundation. I like highlighting key stories in the book of Genesis. The next step is to take them to the Gospel of John.

Years ago, there was a missionary with New Tribes Missions who was working with a remote tribe who had never heard about Jesus or the Bible. He took a long time to teach them chronologically through the key stories in the Old Testament. When he finally came to the life of Jesus and His death on the cross and His resurrection, it was like turning the lights on. They jumped, cheered, and celebrated. The whole village came to faith in Jesus.

Nicodemus had an advantage. He knew the Old Testament very well. Jesus had a starting point, but it still took the Holy Spirit a long time to illuminate him to truth. Be patient with people as they walk through the evangelism process. Focus on prayer and ask God to work in their lives. Start where they are in biblical understanding and walk them to the cross.

The Story Behind the Cross: John 3:14-18

“14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15) so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. 16) "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18) He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Jesus now takes Nicodemus back to a common Old Testament story found in Numbers 21 and uses it to lay the foundation for the gospel. He reviews the story of the Children of Israel coming out of Egypt and how they started grumbling and complaining. As a judgment, God sent fiery serpents among them and many died from the serpent bites. Soon the people cried out to Moses and to God for mercy. God responds with an unusual solution.

“8) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." 9) And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” (Numbers 21:8-9)

This was a familiar story to Nicodemus. The solution to the serpent bite was a step of faith. The person had to look at a staff with a bronze serpent. Only through this step of faith could the bite of the serpent be defeated. The scene served as a picture of the coming work of Christ on the cross. A few years later when Nicodemus saw Jesus crucified on the cross, this conversation undoubtedly burned in his mind. No wonder he showed up to help receive the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. (John 19:38-39)

Remember, the curse God pronounced on the serpent after the fall of Adam and Eve; “14) The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; 15) And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”” (Genesis 3:14-15)

These two Old Testament stories now converge in the Gospel. ““16) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:16-17)

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross to be crucified, He literally rendered powerless the bite of sin and of Satan. Whoever believes in Him or turns to Him in simple saving faith is healed. The serpent's bite is rendered powerless. They will not perish but have eternal life. Jesus is God's only provision for salvation.

It is no wonder that John 3:16 has become the most recognized verse in the Bible. It is the heart of the gospel. It presents God's only solution to the human sin problem. God lovingly gave His

only begotten Son to pay the penalty for human sin. But the grave could not keep Him. Jesus not only defeated the bite of the serpent, He rose from the dead to prove his Deity and bring the way to eternal life through simple faith.

Let me highlight one point: Jesus did everything to purchase our salvation, but each person must respond with simple faith or belief. It was only those who believed and looked at the staff Moses lived up with the bronze serpent who were healed and spared. Those who refused to look perished. Those who refuse to believe in Christ will likewise perish. There is always a human response needed to the divine initiative. People had to believe the message and look to the staff. So also people need to believe the gospel and look to Jesus for salvation. I have no problem asking people to repent from sin and turn to Jesus for salvation.

The Father's Love: John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

It totally changes my understanding of God the Father. I was at the University of Iowa. Our newly-born son had been born with a life-threatening genetic condition. He had been life flighted from Mason City, Iowa, to Iowa City. My wife was four hours away in another hospital recovering from an emergency C-section.

After one of my many panic sessions that night in which I suddenly woke up and ran down the hallway to check on our son, I went back to my room and picked up my Bible. It fell open to John 3:16. I started quoting the familiar words, "For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son..."

It hit me like a lightning bolt. John 3:16 is not about the love of Jesus being willing to die in my place on the cross. Not at all! This verse is about the amazing love God the Father has for me and for you. Love alone allowed Him to let His only Son suffer on the cross to pay for our sins.

My son was fighting for His life. I would have gladly given my own life to save him. I loved him more than life itself. My eyes welled with tears as I realized for the first time the depth of God the Father's love for me! For in that moment He was holding me in His arms with tears streaming down His face. The gulf between us was bridged. For the first time in my life, I understood how much God the Father loved me! It forever changed my view of God.

At the funeral of our son, I was again overcome by the depth of hurt and pain the Father must have experienced over the death of His only Son. I never again questioned the depth of God the Father's love. It is the theme of John 3:16. "O how He loves you and me!"

A Heart for Salvation: John 3:17

“17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

Some people hold the view of God that He is mean, vindictive, and cruel. They view Him as bent on judgment and condemnation. But that is a false and distorted view of God.

He is actually full of love, grace, and mercy. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “9) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Make no mistake, God will judge sin, but He is patient and restrained. He wants people to be saved, forgiven, healed from brokenness, restored from the scars of sin, and transformed into new people.

John 3:16-17 says this better than any other Scripture. He loves us so much He gave His only Son to pay our penalty of sin and make a way of salvation. He is **for** us and not against us.

You may be running from God because you either see yourself as so sinful and dirty that He could never love you, or you may see God as cold, calloused, and uncaring. Both of these views are lies from the enemy of our souls. I would encourage you to rebuild a true picture of God by memorizing John 3:16-17 and then run into His welcoming arms.

Sin and Darkness: John 3:18-21

“18) He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19) This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20) For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21) But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

Salvation is based solely on belief in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Faith is the great equalizer because anyone can meet that qualification. Rich or poor, male or female, young or old... anyone can believe.

The problem is not with God! The problem is not with what Jesus did on the cross to purchase human salvation or with His resurrection. Let's be honest – the problem is with the human heart. People love sin and darkness more than they love God. The human heart is wicked and evil.

The truth is that nothing shapes a person's personal theology more than their morality. Sin makes people hard and angry toward God. It twists both their reason and their logic. It blinds people to the truth of the gospel. It is impossible to persuade people into trusting in Jesus based on reason alone.

I once met a man who said, “Terry, if you can prove to me that God exists, I'll believe in Him!” I responded by saying, “No you won't! The problem is not with your intellect, it's with your heart. The truth is that you love your sin more than any desire to find the truth about God. You don't see yourself as sinful or lost or in need of a Savior.”

Lost people choose sin above salvation. They love darkness more than light. It is a waste of time to argue morals, ethics, and values with them because they embrace and defend what the

Bible calls "sin." Why? Because sin hardens the human heart and deceives the mind into creating false gods that embrace and condone sin. Truth is inconvenient for them.

So is God unjust to judge the sinner? Not if salvation is based on grace and belief in what Jesus has done for us on the cross. The gospel is about sinful and lost people finding forgiveness and hope in Jesus Christ. It is not about perfect people gaining acceptance with God through their good works. No one could qualify with that approach, because all people are sinners. The Holy Spirit fills in the gap and activity changes people who come to Jesus. He washes and purifies them after the fact.

The true question is, "Are you ready for God to do a work in your heart?" You need to be saved as much from yourself as from your sin. You need to invite God to do a work in your heart.

He Must Increase: John 3:22-30

"26) And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.' 27) John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28) You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' 29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. 30) He must increase, but I must decrease.'"

The Disciples of John the Baptist were alarmed. Attendance was slipping because people were flocking to Jesus. This called for drastic measures. For them, this was a competition. They were ready for a fresh marketing campaign and if needed they would even consider some mud-slinging and Jesus-smearing. They had lost sight of the goal. They were ready to protect their turf at all costs. They were ready to promote themselves.

This is a temptation that beckons all of us. It is true in the ministry, in sports, in Hollywood, in politics, in local communities, and in the business world. With success, often comes pride and self-promotion. It is a subtle trap of the enemy. We are all tempted by the boastful pride of life. (1 John 2:16) It often manifests itself with grumbling, complaining, and self focus. So what is the cure for pride and self-promotion?

We need to adopt the heart and attitude of John the Baptist and promote Jesus and not ourselves. For Jesus to take center-stage we need to step to the side. John the Baptist is one of my biblical heroes. His call and mission in life was to introduce the Messiah to Israel and to promote Him. John 3:30 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible; "He must increase, but I must decrease."

He was willing to step down so Jesus could step up. He was willing to pull the curtain on his own act in order to point all people to Jesus. I wonder what would happen in the world if more Christians walked in the sandals of John the Baptist?

Does this sound radical to you? According to Philippians 2:1-11, putting others before self is the Jesus way. It is the call of every follower of Jesus. Our life purpose should be to serve others and point them to Jesus.

The Last Lengthy Witness of John the Baptist: John 3:22-36

John the Baptist had a very specific calling. His mission was to introduce the Messiah to Israel. (See John 1:19-36) He was not the Christ, but came to point people to the Christ. Much of this introduction was accomplished in the above text. He introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The second most prolific revelation about the Messiah by John the Baptist came in the text we are looking at today. (John 3:22-36) In a sense, this was John's swan song. It was his last revelation about the Messiah and he hit a home run. Let's look at eight amazing facts about the Messiah revealed by John the Baptist in this text:

First, John pointed out that he himself was sent before the Christ. (John 3:28) He was a forerunner to prepare the way for the Messiah. Take a moment and review Isaiah 40:3-4, Malachi 4:5, and Matthew 3:1-3. John the Baptist had prophetic significance.

Second, John clearly stated that Jesus was the bridegroom. (John 3:29) This was significant. Scriptures like Ephesians 5:25-27 describe the amazing love Jesus has for His bride, the church. Revelation 19 is devoted to the wedding day when the King of kings comes for His bride.

Third, John discloses the truth that the origin of the Christ was heavenly and not earthly. (John 3:31) This harmonizes with Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus Christ pre-existed in eternity past as co-equal with God. He laid aside His heavenly dwelling to come to earth and take the form of humanity for His work on the cross.

Fourth, because of His heavenly origin, John stated that the testimony of Jesus about God was absolutely true and trustworthy. (John 3:32-33) His words were not human speculation. He spoke of what He had seen and heard. Jesus Christ was the ultimate eye-witness. His testimony was credible.

Fifth, because of His identity of being Deity, the words that Jesus Christ spoke were in fact the Word of God. (John 3:34) No wonder John the Baptist was willing to decrease and stand to the side. According to John 1:6-10, Jesus was the true light that God sent into the world.

Sixth, John the Baptist briefly mentioned that Jesus was going to give the Spirit without measure. (John 3:34) This is exactly what the Apostle John recorded later in this Gospel. Take a moment and study John 14:16-18, John 15:26-27, and John 16:5-15.

Seventh, John pointed out that the Father loved the Son and therefore gave all things into His hands. (John 3:35) Take a moment and read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Jesus currently has all things subjected to Him by the Father. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He rules and reigns.

Finally, John the Baptist made it clear that belief in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him is the only means of salvation. (John 3:36) The pathway to God and eternal life is very narrow. God only made one way of salvation. No human-made religion leads to God. Salvation is exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ. (Compare to Acts 4:12)

John the Baptist concluded his earthly ministry by pointing people to Jesus Christ. He was faithful to His calling. His legacy is worthy of the utmost respect and study. He is a great example to follow.

Building the Team: (John 4:1-2)

“1) When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2) (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were),”

I would like to make a small but significant point about the leadership style of Jesus. Though His ministry was growing and expanding, He made room for His disciples to actively participate in ministry. He wasn't fixated on doing everything Himself.

Good leaders make room to train up other leaders. Jesus handed over ministry responsibility to His disciples. Many aspects of ministry are more caught than taught. They are learned by doing and not just watching from the side lines.

There are a few significant lessons to be learned from these two verses. First, if you are a mentor, you need to create stretching opportunities for service for those under your training. Second, you may need to step aside occasionally to make room for others to step up. Healthy ministries focus on training the team.

Walking with Jesus: John 4:3-6

“3) He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. 4) And He had to pass through Samaria. 5) So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; 6) and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.”

John 4:3-6 NASB

If you consult a good Bible map, you discover that Jesus and His disciples traveled a minimum of 60 miles from Judea to Galilee. Depending on where they started in Judea and where they ended in Galilee, it was most likely a much longer trek. The most direct route meant they had to cut through Samaria for about 25 miles.

The city of Sychar was approximately 20 miles west of the Jordan river and 30 miles north of Jericho or Jerusalem. There was undoubtedly a well traveled trade route between Jerusalem and the region around the Sea of Galilee. The entire trek could have easily been close to 100 miles.

The most common mode of transportation was by foot. Even in a caravan, many people walked alongside the camels or donkeys. An average day's journey was normally around 20 miles, though those who pushed hard could extend the travel to 30 miles in a day. The backdrop to this chapter puts Jesus and His disciples on a three to five day journey by foot depending on how hard they pushed.

To complicate the journey, food provisions had to be bought en route. The sixth hour of the day in Roman time was likely around 6:00 PM. It is reasonable to assume that the town of Sychar was their destination after the first day of journey.

In other words, they had just traveled around 30 miles by foot when they stopped by Jacob's well. John 4:6 now takes on meaning; "...Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour."

It brings me comfort to know that Jesus and the disciples knew what it was to get weary and tired from pushing hard. They struggled with thirst and hunger, blisters, and sore muscles just like we do today.

This background also helps explain why the disciples were not in the mood to engage in much conversation when they slipped into the city to buy food and provisions. They were also wearied from the journey.

Unfortunately, the Gospel writer does not include the long conversations they most likely had with their Master en route. However, these few verses add significant meaning to the idea of "walking with the Lord." These early disciples spent three years literally walking with Jesus. I can only imagine the lively conversations they had with Jesus.

Overcoming Prejudice: John 4:7-9

"7) There came a woman of Samaria 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 therefore said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)"

Let's take our time with these three verses. They are often misunderstood. There was a long and troubled history between the Jews and the Samaritans. I am going to quote at length from Barnes' Notes on the New Testament to establish the full scope of the problem. He states:

"The Samaritans occupied the country formerly belonging to the tribe of Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh. This region was situated between Jerusalem and Galilee; so that in passing from the one to the other, it was a direct course to pass through Samaria.

This people was formerly composed of a few of the ten tribes, and a mixture of foreigners. When the ten tribes were carried away into captivity to Babylon, the king of Assyria sent people from Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, to inhabit their country, 2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:2-11. These people at first worshiped the idols of their own nations. But being troubled with

lions, which had increased greatly while the country remained uninhabited, they supposed it was because they had not honored the *God of the country*. A Jewish priest was therefore sent to them from Babylon, to instruct them in the Jewish religion. They were instructed partially from the books of Moses; but still retained many of their old rites and idolatrous customs, and embraced a religion made up of Judaism and idolatry, 2 Kings 17:26-28.

The grounds of difference between the two nations were the following :

(1.) The Jews, after their return from Babylon, set about rebuilding their temple. The Samaritans offered to aid them. The Jews, however, perceiving that it was not from a love of true religion, but that they might obtain a part of the favors granted to the Jews by Cyrus, rejected their offer. The consequence was that a state of long and bitter animosity arose between them and the Jews.

(2.) While Nehemiah was engaged in building the walls of Jerusalem, the Samaritans used every art to thwart him in his undertaking, Nehemiah 6:1-14.

(3.) The Samaritans at length obtained leave of the Persian monarch to build a temple for themselves. This was erected on Mount *Gerizim*, and they strenuously contended that that was the place designated by Moses as the place where the nation should worship. Sanballat, the leader of the Samaritans, constituted his son-in-law, Manasses, high priest. The religion of the Samaritans thus became perpetuated, and an irreconcilable hatred arose between them and the Jews. See Barnes "John 4:20".

(4.) Afterwards Samaria became a place of resort for all the outlaws of Judea. They received willingly all the Jewish criminals, and refugees from justice. The violators of the Jewish laws, and those who had been excommunicated, betook themselves for safety to Samaria, and greatly increased their numbers and the hatred which subsisted between the two nations.

(5.) The Samaritans received only the five books of Moses, and rejected the writings of the prophets, and all the Jewish traditions. From these causes arose an irreconcilable difference between them, so that the Jews regarded them as the worst of the human race, (John 8:48) and had no dealings with them, John 4:9."

As you see, this tense relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans was very deep. The roots of prejudice often cut deep. When the Samaritan's received the gospel, there was no excuse for the Jewish people to reject Jesus. This adds meaning to John 1:10-13. (Take time to review these verses.) Jesus had initially commanded His disciples not to go to Samaria (Matthew 10:5-6), but after His resurrection, He commanded them to take the gospel to both Samaria and the remotest parts of the earth. (See Acts 1:8)

This text reminds me that God loves the whole world. He wants all people to hear the gospel. Don't let prejudice, discrimination, social norms, tradition, or bad theology stop you from reaching out to all people with the love of God and the Gospel. Our job is to share the gospel with all people. God's job is to save people. He is Sovereign over evangelism and missions. You will most likely be shocked by who responds to the gospel and who turns away with a closed ear.

The Story of Two Wells: John 4:10-14

"10) Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" 11) She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? 12) You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" 13) Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 14) but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

If you could put on a pair of Greek glasses and read this conversation in the original language you would discover it is really a story of two wells. In verse 10, Jesus offered the woman a drink of living water. The Samaritan woman responded by saying, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep."

She was right. She used the Greek word "Phren " to describe the well. This word refers to a hand dug well deep into the ground with water seeping into the bottom. The Old Testament does not record Jacob actually digging this well, but tradition attributed a well at the foot of Mt Gerizim to Jacob. It was near the city of Sychar and was on the land given to the sons of Joseph. The well was over 100 feet deep and cut through limestone. It produced water for centuries, but over time became polluted with litter and debris of every kind.

In verse 14, Jesus promised her a different kind of water from a very different kind of well. He uses the Greek word "Pege", which refers to a gushing spring or fountain that bursts from the ground with an unending supply of fresh water. In verse 10, He called this "living water." He was referring to the inner ministry of the Holy Spirit that accompanies salvation. Please read John 7:37-39 for a full disclosure of what Jesus was offering the Samaritan woman.

The contrast between these two wells is missed in all English translations, but it paints the full picture of what Jesus was saying to the Samaritan woman. Life without Jesus is like drinking from a polluted sink pit. It is putrid, sinful, painful, exploitative, and filled with guilt and condemnation. It is very distasteful, but those trapped in bondage to sin get caught in a vicious cycle of craving more only to be overcome by guilt and despair. They are stuck. They see no way out. They have only known one well. Over time, a life of sin gets deeper and deeper and more putrid.

This was graphically driven home to me a number of years ago as I was traveling through southern India. I saw a woman filling her water pots from a sink well. She had a bucket with a long rope attached and was filling several containers. Most of the people in the city had running water in their homes, but she was poor and most likely at the bottom of the caste system. She undoubtedly lived in one of the squatter mud huts with a thatched roof that were scattered through the town.

She happily allowed me to snap a picture of her. When she left, I slipped over to the well and looked down. What I saw broke my heart. The well had dirty diapers floating on top and all kinds of other litter. There were frogs sitting on the floating debris and the water was less than inviting. There was actually a stench coming from the water. I could not believe that people were actually using water from that well. It is shocking what “normal” becomes for some people.

As tragic as this scene was, it paints an extreme contrast of what Jesus was saying to the Samaritan woman. Life without Jesus is a sentence to drink daily from a polluted well. As the story unfolds in John 4, Jesus exposes how empty life was for the Samaritan woman. Stay tuned as the story unfolds.

But I must ask, “what kind of well are you drinking from?” Are you in bondage to sin and daily quenching your thirst with polluted water? Has your “normal” become more like a trap? Are you ready for some of that living water Jesus was talking about? He is waiting for you to come to Him. His Spirit can produce within you springs of fresh living water.

Jesus Exposes Her Empty Wells: John 4:15-18

“15) The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.' 16) He said to her, 'Go, call your husband and come here.' 17) The woman answered and said, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You have well said, 'I have no husband'; 18) for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.'”

The thought of an eternal well was compelling for the woman, but she was not tracking on a spiritual level. She was thinking of physical water; Jesus was talking about spiritual water. Most people want the benefits of salvation, but they are not prepared to deal with the ramifications of repenting from sin.

To expose the depth of her lost condition, Jesus asks her to go and call her husband. The woman simply responded by saying, “I have no husband.” At that point Jesus exposed the depth of her inner thirst and her sinfulness. He pointed out that she has had five husbands and was currently living with a man.

People try to quench their inner thirst in many different ways. She was looking to relationships and sexual gratification. Others look to drugs, alcohol, materialism, wealth, or fame. People are thirsty for meaning, belonging, and significance in life. These self-dug wells of the flesh do not satisfy. What kind of wells are you drinking from?

Notice that Jesus knew her lost, sinful, and empty condition. He said, “You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.” He was not condemning her, He was exposing her. As a Samaritan, she accepted the first five books of the Bible. Suddenly, it was obvious that she had broken the Ten Commandments. She was an adulteress. Jesus knows the true condition of your heart as well.

But there was a bigger shadow of guilt over her life. Remember earlier that I mentioned the Samaritan’s built their temple of worship on Mt Gerizim. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses used Mt.

Gerizim to pronounce blessings and curses on Israel. They were blessed if they obeyed and followed God, but severely cursed if they disobeyed and fell away from Him. There was no question that both Samaria and her own life lacked all the blessings promised at Gerizim (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), and reflected the curses. (Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

Her inner well was empty. She was exposed and under conviction. So she did what most people do when God is working in them: she tried to change the subject! She attempted to argue religion. She was running from her own need and deep spiritual thirst. She was in justification mode!

Are you running from Jesus? It will not work. He knows everything about you! He knows both your sin and your emptiness. He knows your successes and failures. He knows the games you play and the facade you hide behind to cover up your inner brokenness.

If you stop long enough and look, you will notice Him waiting to meet you at your empty wells in life. He wants to offer you living water in place of your sinful wells.

It starts by being honest about your own lost and sinful condition. Isn't it time to have a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus about the true condition of your heart? We all have a choice between two wells in life. It is impossible to drink from both wells at the same time. The flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to one another. (See Galatians 5:16-26)

Religious But Lost: John 4:19-24

"19) The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20) Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' 21) Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in 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 an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24) God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'"

Many times when people are under conviction they change the subject rather than deal with personal sin and guilt. Such was the case with this woman. Her argument was basically; "Why do my morals matter, I believe in God and I pray?" "I am very religious." In other words, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you have some form of religion." After all, "All religions lead to God."

These arguments summarize Satan's deception. He loves to distract and deceive people with false religions. In this text Jesus exposes Satan's lie.

I have heard all of these arguments and many more. The Samaritan woman felt as long as people were sincere it didn't matter what they believed. But in this text Jesus made the point that it is possible to be sincerely wrong.

He pointed out that knowing God does not boil down to going to a certain temple, belonging to the right denomination, or being connected to a certain religion or sect. There have been many man-made religions throughout human history and new ones are being developed constantly.

Jesus cut through all the confusion. He pointed out that the Samaritans worshiped what they did not know. They had a history of blending all religions together. They were wrong because God's prophetically revealed plan for human salvation was traced through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and king David. In other words, Jesus pointed out that the Savior would come through the Jewish people. "Salvation is from the Jews!"

The Old Testament gives over 300 prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled them all. No other world religious leader has or can fulfill these prophecies. Human religion is man-made and filled with deception and error. A born-again relationship with God through Jesus Christ is based on biblical truth and results in being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Even the casual Gospel reader discovers that His communications with the Samaritan woman builds on his conversation with Nicodemus in the previous chapter. No wonder He stressed to the Samaritan woman that "those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth."

Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were sincere seekers. The Holy Spirit was pulling them toward the truth and toward the gospel. They were both very religious and very empty at the same time. The Spirit was not present in their religious rituals. They were lost in the trappings of man-made religion.

Many people today are religious but lost. They are duped into believing that religion can save them. They are sincerely going through the motions of religious ceremony, but they are devoid of truth and the Spirit. The Bible makes it clear that there is only one way to God. Take a moment and read Acts 4:10-12. The Samaritan woman was about to meet the Messiah and have her world turned upside down.

Jesus Christ, The Messiah: John 4:25-26

"25) The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.' 26) Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He. '"

The woman had one final argument for Jesus; "I know that Messiah is coming; when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." She was sure that her bullet proof argument would end the conversation. She actually had good theology.

Jesus had one final answer for her, "I who speak to you and He." The ball was back in her court. She now had a major decision to make. She could believe or disbelieve. She could receive Him or reject Him. Her eternal destiny rested on what she was about to do with Jesus.

The Old Testament pointed forward to Him. The four Gospels put Him on center stage and shined the spotlight on Him. The balance of the New Testament develops the full understanding of Him.

Remember, the Samaritans accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament. That's all she needed to lay the framework of her understanding of the Messiah. You and I have the whole Bible. Granted, she met Jesus in person and had a brief conversation with Him. I would argue that when you pick up a Bible you have much more evidence and revelation of the Messiah than the Samaritan woman had even after meeting Jesus in person.

The ball is now in your court. Take time for study and research. Read the Bible. You also have a major decision to make. Who is Jesus Christ? Is He the promised Messiah? (Genesis 3:15) Is He the Son of God? (Isaiah 9:6-7) Is John 3:16 true?

Salvation comes down to what you do with Jesus Christ. You can accept Him or reject Him. You can believe in Him or disbelieve. You can repent and turn to Him or you can continue your life without Him. Your eternal destiny depends on what you do with Jesus Christ.

Barren and Fruitful: John 4:27-29

"27) At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why do You speak with her?' 28) So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, 29) 'Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?' 29) They went out of the city, and were coming to Him."

Just when the story got interesting, the disciples returned. This ended the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, but what she did next spoke volumes about the Gospel seed that had been planted.

She abandoned her water pots. Both her focus and her priorities had changed. As she went back to the city she started telling her story to everyone. She shared her testimony with great enthusiasm and raised the question about whether Jesus was indeed the promised Christ.

Soon a significant number from the town were following her to meet Jesus. There are valuable lessons to learn from this portion of the story of this trek by Jesus and His disciples through Samaria.

First, never underestimate the power of a testimony. People are searching. All you and I need to do is point people toward Jesus. The Holy Spirit will do the rest.

Second, the disciples had just spent considerable time in the same community and not one person followed them. Why? I suspect they focused on the business at hand. They were there to buy food and not minister to people. This is a reminder to be ready in season and out of season to talk to people about Jesus.

Third, notice that when the disciples returned to Jesus, they were surprised that He had been speaking to a woman. This indicates they may have had a wall of prejudice between themselves and this mission field. They didn't like the Samaritans and they looked down on women in general. The gospel is often hindered because of our inhibitions and hang-ups.

Finally, it is surprising how many times I hear one church group say; “God isn’t doing anything in our region”; only to discover that great things are happening in the very same town within unsuspecting people. This story is a biblical example of that phenomenon.

I marvel how easy it is for the “frozen chosen” to get out of step with God. No wonder 1 Thessalonians 5:19 admonishes... “Do not quench the Spirit.” The problem is never with God, it is always with us.

Distracted and Blind to the Harvest: John 4:31-38

“31) In the 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) The disciples therefore were saying to one another, 'No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?' 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, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. 36) Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37) For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38) I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.'”

John 4:31-38

In this chapter, Jesus dealt with the two basic human appetites of thirst and hunger. We can conclude that knowing and worshiping Jesus Christ is like drinking living water, and doing God's will is like eating eternal food. Both are satisfying beyond description.

In the physical realm both are needed daily. The same is true spiritually. The true believer is invited to fellowship and commune with God daily. Psalms 42:1-2 says; “1) As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee O God. 2) My soul thirsts for God, for the living God, When shall I come and appear before God?” Nothing compares to inhaling the presence of God.

Serving God and being on the front lines of where He is working is like dining at a banquet table. I marvel at the works of God and the way His Spirit draws people to Him and transforms lives. Jesus told His disciples that He had food to eat that they did not know about. It wasn't until after Pentecost that they would discover the joy and marvel of the Spirit-filled life and doing ministry in the power of God.

It is easy to fool ourselves into thinking that God is not working or that the harvest is not ripe in our region. But Jesus said, “Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.”

I can only imagine the scene as the disciples looked up and saw the physical fields three months away from harvest, but then noticed movement beyond the fields. As they refocused they saw the Samaritan woman returning and leading a crowd of people to meet Jesus.

This is a practical text that exposes the fallacies of dead theology. If nothing is happening and people are not coming to Jesus, it is most likely because the laborers are being distracted and are tragically out of touch with the Spirit of God. It is time for churches to stop making excuses for being barren these days. Needs are everywhere and the harvest is ripe. Let me share a story.

I was at an “on fire” Lutheran church service in a park that is very bold in prayer, preaching the gospel, walking in the Spirit, and ministering to people. Does that sound like a contradiction? Next week, after the open air service, they are retreating to the lake for a baptism service. The pastor shared that they are expecting over 50 new converts to be baptized. Does that surprise you? A month after that, I was teaching a Spiritual Warfare Workshop at this same church. What’s up with that? They are constantly sending out short-term mission teams and promoting numerous young people into full-time service with GoServ Global and elsewhere. How do you explain that?

Well, they have lifted up their eyes to see the ripe harvest around them. They are rolling up their sleeves instead of making excuses. They are presenting Jesus as living water and true food. As a result, the Spirit of God is working.

Sowing Abundantly: John 4:39-42

“39) And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I have done.” 40) So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. 41) And many more believed because of His word; 42) and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.””

Have you ever witnessed an awakening or outpouring? I have on numerous occasions. This is when the Spirit of God draws many people to Jesus and salvation at the same time because the gospel is being broadly proclaimed.

That’s exactly what happened in Sychar. Many in the village came out to hear Jesus because of the testimony of the Samaritan woman. She openly talked about Jesus to many people instead of to just one friend. Then many more believed because of the words of Jesus. It was a movement that had momentum. The harvest was great. Many came to believe.

There are many examples of this in the New Testament starting on the day of Pentecost and beyond. Over 3,000 came to Jesus after Peter’s first sermon. (See Acts 2:41) These awakenings are amazing! Doors are opened and they often follow a period of broadly sharing the gospel in an entire village or region.

So why do we seldom see outpourings or awakenings today in our American churches? There may be many reasons, but I believe part of the answer comes down to methodology. Our primary focus is on one-to-one personal evangelism versus mass evangelism. In most 3rd world countries where I travel and do ministry the primary method is open air meetings with entire villages or groups of people hearing the gospel at the same time.

During my recent trip to Uganda, we had open-air meetings in two villages where nearly everyone from the village gathered under a mango tree to hear a gospel presentation. We gave an invitation, but also knew we were early in the planting phase. We did not want premature conversions. Teams will be back every week until God brings the harvest and a church is planted.

The Bible gives “the principle of the sower.” It basically says “As you sow you reap.” It applies to many areas of life. When it comes to the gospel if you sow sparingly you also reap sparingly. The New Testament church practiced “abundant sowing.” Now wonder there was such an abundant harvest after Pentecost among the Jewish people and then among the gentiles.

I am not opposed to “personal evangelism”, but it was not the primary method used in the New Testament nor is it the primary method used in many places around the world today. Most 3rd world churches equip their people to boldly and enthusiastically “go and tell” while the American church barely gets our people to timidly invite people to “come and hear.”

Don’t get me wrong. I love fishing of all kinds. I am both a sports fisherman with a rod and reel and I’ve done commercial fishing with huge nets. I was once coming home from Alaska and got in a conversation with a guy that bragged about catching his limit of fish after a week of hard fishing and was bringing a cooler full of fish home. He then asked how many we caught. I said “90,000 pounds.” What was the difference? We were using different methods.

It’s time for the Western church to discover some biblical fishing techniques and try some different methods. It’s time to practice abundant sowing. Don’t put God or the gospel in a little box and then build your theology around meager results. Practice New Testament methodology.

Ministry Takes Time: John 4:43-45

“43) And after the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. 44) For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. 45) So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.”

It’s true! If you want to be recognized as an expert you need to be at least 50 miles from home. The further the better. This is one of the strange phenomena of life.

Notice, when He came to Galilee He was received because of the things He had done in Jerusalem at the feast. It might be important to reflect back on three things that happened during the feast.

First, in John 2:13-22, Jesus had cleansed the temple which resulted in a major public confrontation with the religious leaders. He was a hero for all of the travelers at the feast because He addressed the commercialization and exploitation of pilgrims at the Passover. Jesus became their champion by exposing this corruption.

Second, rumor may have spread about His conversation with Nicodemus and the unique content of His born-again message. (John 3:1-21) His teaching was radically different from the religious leaders. He stayed up late into the night with Nicodemus.

Finally, He and His disciples were baptizing many people during the Passover week. (John 3:22-4:3) The testimony of John the Baptist about Him was now public record. The ministry of Jesus was gaining both notoriety and momentum. He could no longer be ignored – even back home.

For these reasons the people of Galilee received Him back with open arms. You may notice that most of them had already arrived back in Galilee. The reason may be subtle, but Jesus and His disciples were most likely the only ones who allowed themselves to be delayed for two days in Samaria. The others took the direct route. I wonder if Jesus viewed it as a delay or a providential investment of time for the sake of eternity?

We learn from these otherwise obscure verses that Jesus was intentionally focused on people and ministry, but very casual with His schedule. He wasn't time-driven. He took time to walk through the doors that God opened. This is another valuable lesson we learn from Jesus: Ministry takes time! Don't rush it!

I often wonder how often I quench the Spirit because I am so time-driven. This is my #1 personal weaknesses. I often get places early but seldom stay late. I miss the afterglow.

Maybe that's why God sends me on so many mission trips to 3rd world countries. Their pace is much slower. They value relationships more than events or time. One of the few things I've been slow at in life is learning this lesson: "Ministry Takes Time!" I suspect I'm not alone.

His Second Sign: John 4:46-54

"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. 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. So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 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." 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. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee."

This story reveals how word about Jesus was spreading far and wide and in many circles. Jesus traveled directly to Cana in the district of Galilee after returning from His first Passover in Jerusalem after starting His public ministry. Cana is where He had turned water into wine. He was building on a previous trip to the region.

That is significant because ministry is built layer upon layer, service upon service, meeting upon meeting. Repetition is good. It allows time for the message to sink in and for the Holy Spirit to work in people's lives. It takes time for planted seeds to grow and mature to the point of harvest, just like it takes time for a baby to develop in the womb before birth. Be patient and grant time for God to work.

Meanwhile, 25 miles to the northeast in the town of Capernaum, a certain royal official had a son that was sick and at the point of death. He personally traveled most of the day to urge Jesus to come and heal his son. This illustrates how fast news about Jesus was traveling. The Royal official departed for Cana very soon after Jesus had returned. Assuming he rode in a carriage, this was still a four to five hour trek one way.

For some reason, he viewed Jesus as his only hope. I am sure he had been to the local doctors. They couldn't help. He may have even checked in with some priests and also tried traditional remedies. He was desperate. The inevitable was happening. His son was dying. Why do people wait until their back is against the wall before seeking Jesus?

The exchange between Jesus and the nobleman is amusing to ponder. Keep in mind, this is a man with some clout. When it says he requested Jesus to come and heal his son, we might assume the request came with some weight and authority.

Jesus took the occasion to make a point to the crowd, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." Don't get me wrong, I love seeing signs and wonders and soaking in manifestations of God's power on display, but faith believes in God even in the absence of these things. In the broader context of this story, Jesus was pressing the people of Cana to grow to the next level. How about you? Can you believe in Jesus even when He is silent?

As the text reads, it seems like the royal official was annoyed by this exchange between Jesus and the crowd. In verse 49, he cuts through the flack and says, "Sir, come down before my child dies." I don't see Him as rude, I see him as desperate and even bold. He displayed courageous faith.

What happened next is amazing. Jesus took him also to the next level of faith. He was of the opinion that Jesus had to do the healing in person and possibly lay hands on his son. But Jesus had a different plan. He just healed his son from 25 miles away and then told the father to go his way.

Do you ever try to tell God how He has to do things? Have you stuffed God in your own small box of methodology? (I feel a sermon coming on, but let me step off my soap box and move on with the story.)

Let this picture sink in for a moment: The father left believing in the words of Jesus with absolutely no visible evidence his son was healed. His son was 25 miles away! Verse 50 says, "The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him and started off." I wonder if he had a restless night not knowing the outcome?

Of course, you know how the story ends. One of his slaves met him on the way home with news that his son was healed. Notice this meeting took place the next day. (Vs 52) The royal official literally clung to the words of Jesus for 24 hours before receiving validation. The result was that his whole family became believers.

But notice verse 54 says; “This is again a second sign that Jesus performed, when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.” Though Jesus healed many people, these BIG SIGNS were not common. They carried weight. They stood out. They were beyond ordinary.

I have learned over the years that God has different plans for different people and different occasions. This may sound trite, but “the Creator is creative!” He doesn’t do things the same way every time. He is the Lord of every situation. He is as much Lord of the healing as He is Lord of the funeral ceremony.

I’ve seen people come to Jesus because of the witness of a healing and I’ve seen people come to Jesus because of the witness of godly saints mourning and celebrating the promotion of a loved one to glory. Faith includes inviting Jesus to intervene in our circumstances as much as it includes trusting and worshiping Him in our unique outcome. Faith recognizes that He is present in every situation with a special and sovereign plan that is equally a manifestation of His power and glory! This is true whether by life or by death.

Everyone’s Jesus: John 5:1-9

I’d like to make an observation that is easy to miss: As we casually read the Gospel of John and the other Gospels, we discover that all people had equal access to Jesus. This can already be established by the time John Chapter Five opens and Jesus swings by the pool of Bethesda and reaches out to a severely handicapped man.

Let’s scan the variety of people touched by Jesus so far in the opening chapters of the Gospel of John. We discover that Jesus was there for the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the religious leader, and the common person, the Jewish people, and the Gentiles, the sick as well as the healthy, the nobleman, and the fisherman, the newly weds, and the many time weds, the devout religious people, and the sinners, as well as the urban dwellers and the rural folks. He reached out to everyone.

But you might object and say, “Then why didn’t Jesus heal everyone at the pool of Bethesda?” The answer is simple, Jesus doesn’t have to heal everyone to love everyone. Granted, He was the Great Physician, but His primary mission was not to heal –it was to **save**. He came to deal with the root cause of all human misery and suffering, which is sin.

I share this simple observation because it is profoundly important. Satan works hard to convince people that Jesus has no time or place for them. That is not true! I like the words to the old hymn that says; “There’s room at the cross for you.” Why? Because He is everyone’s Savior.

I share this because you may be harboring the deception that Jesus has no time or place for you. It is entirely possible that you see yourself as too sinful or too lost for Jesus. As you read

the four gospels, you will discover that Jesus welcomed people wearing sandals just like yours. He was inclusive and not exclusive.

“So,” you ask, “why did so many people reject Him?” That’s a good question. The truth is, I don’t know each person’s reason. Let me ask you a question, “Are you rejecting Jesus?” In John 1:11-12 it says, 11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

It seems clear by reading the four Gospels that Jesus didn’t reject people, but rather people rejected Jesus. He was there for everyone. He is also there for you and me.

He is everyone’s Jesus.

But let’s face reality, there will be many who stand alone before God at the judgment seat with no advocate on their behalf. Why? Simply because they had no time or place for Jesus. During their life they rejected Jesus and now they face eternity without Him. I cannot think of a more tragic condition than “lost for all eternity.”

Arise, Take up Your Pallet and Walk! John 5:1-9

“2) Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. 3) In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; 4) for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.]”

There is not much known about the pool of Bethesda. It was most likely by a gate through which the sheep were admitted into the temple grounds. Bethesda means “the house of mercy,” A fitting name for those desperate for healing.

Tradition has it that these waters were rich in minerals which had some medicinal value. Supposedly, about once a year there was a release of bubbles or boils in the water similar to some hot springs today. Those who entered first received the greatest benefit.

According to the text, those who were sick, blind, lame or withered gathered there hoping for healing. It should be noted that these were long term conditions. Some ancient scholars say the pool was over 125 feet long and in places quite deep. The point is that many desperate people gathered there daily hoping that “Lady Luck” would one day heal them.

The mention of five porticoes indicates there were roofs there to shelter people from the hot sun and rainy days. It was a fairly pleasant place to hang out and pass time. In one sense, this became a subculture all of its own. Undoubtedly, many close relationships were formed.

This adds meaning to the question Jesus asked the man who had been thirty-eight years in his condition; “Do you want to get well?” (Vs 6) That may sound like an insensitive question, but

some people benefit greatly from their physical infirmities. It is an excuse not to work and a ticket to many subsidies. Many people fake injuries or infirmities today to collect workman's compensation or other benefits. They don't want to get well!

The man responded to the question Jesus asked with a big excuse; "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but when I am coming another steps down before me." (Vs 7) Trust me, excuses are your enemy and not your friend!

No matter what your plight or situation in life, things will not change until you first change. It is impossible to change anyone who does not sincerely want change. The truth is that the change must start within you. Jesus hit the nail on the head with that question. He was the first one to expose the man's real problem.

In no way do I want to minimize the significance of this miracle, but when Jesus said, "Arise, take up your pallet and walk," the man suddenly did just that. I believe you will either carry your pallet through life or it will carry you! Amazing things happen to people who get rid of their excuses. They are suddenly able to walk.

I maintain this healing was as much about his mindset and it was his body. There are many people who are paralyzed in life by their flimsy excuses and sick mindset. The truth is people will never overcome addictions, see their relationships healed, tackle new challenges or become fruitful and successful in life until they change the way they see themselves and get rid of the excuses that only enable failure.

One of the first challenges that accompanies salvation is to be renewed in the spirit of your mind. (Ephesians 4:22-24) You need to move from a "can not" to a "can do" person. (Philippians 4:13) You need to stop making excuses and embrace your new identity in Christ.

But you ask, "what if I have a legitimate physical handicap?" The answer is "seek healing, embrace daily grace, and make the most of your situation for the glory of God." But don't waste your life sitting by the pool of Bethesda making excuses for doing nothing!

Get a Christian education. Change your attitudes. Sharpen your skills. Set some worthy goals. Start a business or ministry. Chase your dreams. Do everything you can with what you've got and trust God to expand your capacity. If you seek God's grace and apply yourself, amazing things can happen.

You will be surprised at how soon you will be carrying your own pallet through life. Soon you will be passing many otherwise healthy people who are paralyzed in life by a sick mindset and wasting day after day at the pool of Bethesda.

Persecuted for Doing Good: John 5:9-16

"9) And immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. 10) Therefore, the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.' 11) But he answered them, 'He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.' " 12)

They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk'?" 13) But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. 14) Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." 15) The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16) And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.

It is hard to imagine, but there are times that doing a good thing can evoke bad responses from people. You would think that healing a man who had been lame for 38 years would be cause for celebration, but not in this case.

Granted, the Sabbath was a day set aside to worship God and to rest. It was a day to celebrate His finished work of creation. It was a day for man to cease from his work so He could focus on the work of God.

But think about it, when we worship on the Sabbath don't we expect God to actively respond to us? He must be working on the Sabbath. What is worship? Is it a work? I maintain there is no greater act of worship than for a healed man to carry his pallet on the Sabbath in celebration of what God had done!

Notice why they were so upset at Jesus. They were persecuting Him because He healed on the Sabbath. He dared challenge their carnal legalism. He exposed the evil condition of their hearts. Doing good on the Sabbath pulled their trigger and brought down their wrath.

If this happened within the religious community, get ready for even more vile anger and persecution from the secular world. Hate is totally irrational.

I can think of numerous situations where doing good is looked upon as evil by the world. For example, talking a woman who is bent on having an abortion into keeping her baby is looked upon as being bad by the world. Teaching any evidence that challenges the theory of evolution is banned in many educational institutions. So much for the free exchange of ideas. Prayer is banned in many schools, sports functions and even in the workplace today. It doesn't surprise me that many college campuses are trying to ban Christian groups from the right of open assembly. In some states it is illegal to counsel a teenager with an identity crisis into accepting God's birth design, even though statistics show that those who have sex change surgeries are 70 % more likely to commit suicide. So why is the twisted material responsible for the mental crisis promoted and protected in these states?

The bottom line is that Christians should prepare to be persecuted for doing good and standing on truth. It is happening more and more in today's world. They got so angry at Jesus they were bent on putting him to death. Anger and hate can become intolerant and deadly. They are blind and irrational.

Two Mind-Bending Verses: John 5:17-18

"17) But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." 18) For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was

breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

Jesus had no problem calling God His Own Father. In other words Jesus was saying, “If you did a DNA test on me, the results would prove that God is my Father.” He was claiming God as His actual Father.

There are two implications of this claim. First, He was claiming that His works had Divine origin. Turning water into wine instantaneously takes supernatural power. Performing a healing 25 miles away takes Divine power. Healing the lame man and telling him to carry his pallet on the Sabbath took both Divine Power and Divine Authority. Was He contradicting the Law or was He giving Divine clarification to the Law? What gave Him that authority?

But wait, Jesus was saying something even more profound about God. When He said “My Father is working until now” He was implying that God is active and not passive in both today’s world and in the universe. In other words, God did not resign after the sixth day of creation. The Creator is still at work and is still creating.

I seldom do this publicly, but let me invite you to join me in some creative speculation into the mysteries of reality, the universe, and the Bible based on John 5:17-18. Keep in mind, creative speculation is an exercise in pondering the mysteries of God without coming to any definitive conclusion.

I have spent years pondering and speculating John 5:17. You are about to discover that this verse is very perplexing and mind-bending. The obvious question is “If the Creator is working until now... what is He creating?” The best biblical answer I can find is “New heavens and new planets.” (2 Peter 3:12-13) Based on these verses and others like them, I believe it is within the realm of biblical possibilities to imagine that God is constantly spinning new galaxies into existence. This might help explain why there appears to be old stars and new stars and old galaxies and young galaxies.

This may also help explain why there are an infinite number of galaxies and many of them are radically different from others. It is also possible that time, space, gravity, and the laws of physics might operate differently in different galaxies and that they can indeed function independently from each other. This could only be done by an Eternal Intelligent Being who exists outside of time and physical matter.

Furthermore and more perplexing, if the claim of Jesus that His “Father is working until now” means that the Creator God did not resign after the sixth day of creation, one might ask if the first day of creation as recorded in Genesis 1:1 was His first day on the job? One thing we know for sure is that God pre-existed the beginning of Genesis 1:1 as time began. It is also a valid question to also ask what the eternal Creator God was doing for all eternity past? These are perplexing but valid questions raised by this verse.

We now have a crisis in our standard biblical thinking. Was the Creator God only active for six days of Creation in all of eternity past? I’m just being honest, but that seems like a waste of an eternity past. That also seems terribly lazy.

But what if the biblical account of creation focused on our unique galaxy and not the entire universe? What if the Creator has been busy for all eternity past creating unique and independent galaxies? Could it be that an independent galaxy and not the universe as a whole is God's basic unit of reality? Is the resulting Universe a mere composite or collection of billions of independently-created galaxies that God has created over eons of time in eternity past? I confess, it is very hard for my mind to think in eternal terms.

By the way, this theory would do absolutely nothing to the literal six day view of creation of our galaxy, planet earth, and all life forms that exist here. A careful study of Genesis One and Two actually places the scope of revelation on our solar system and not our entire galaxy. It also does not concede any room for evolution as an explanation for the origin of life. The Eternal Creator has done it all and is very good at it. He has been Creating for a very long time.

Think about another question, what would it take to have new heavens and a new earth as referenced in 2 Peter 3:12-13 and also in Revelation 21? There are two possible answers. First, the present universe could be destroyed and God could create a new one. Because He is God and has infinite power, He could do that if for some reason He did not delight in what He has already created. That has philosophical problems all of its own. How could a perfect God create a universe He didn't like? Why would He choose to start over from scratch? I don't see the biblical revelation of God being that fickle.

Or second, our present galaxy could collapse or be rolled up like a scroll and God could place us elsewhere in the universe in the new place He has gone to prepare for us! (John 14:2-3) That would mean when we looked up into the night sky we would see totally different constellations or "new heavens." Our vantage point in the universe would be radically different from our present one. (Ok, we've squeezed verse 17 more than enough. Maybe I've gone too far for some of you, so let's move on to another brain twister.)

The second amazing implication in this text comes from John 5:18. The Jews were absolutely correct. When Jesus was claiming that God was His DNA Father, He was making himself equal to God.

If this was a mere misunderstanding, Jesus had every opportunity to set the record straight. But let me point out that Jesus was crucified not for any bad that He had done, but for Who He claimed to be. As the Gospel of John unfolds, Jesus actually doubles down on this claim.

The John 5:18 claim now becomes as mind-bending as the John 5:17 claim. You cannot read the Gospel of John without being intellectually, theologically, philosophically, and scientifically challenged. The claims made in this book will stretch your view of both truth and reality. The Gospel of John draws the curtains back on the mysteries of God as the narrator says, "Let the show begin."

Like Father, Like Son: John 5:19-24

"19) Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. 20) For the Father loves the Son, and

shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. 21) For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. 22) For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23) in order that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24) “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

As you read these verses, keep the context in mind. In the previous verse, the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus because He was making Himself equal to God. His claim of being the very Son of God infuriated them. Notice that in the balance of this chapter Jesus does not attempt to clear up a misunderstanding, rather He doubles down on the claim of being equal to God and begins to present systematic evidence to back up His claim.

The reader is now confronted with the full mystery of Christ. He claimed to be far more than just a good man or a prophet. Jesus claimed to be God. He was either a liar, a lunatic, or the promised Messiah. There is no neutral ground. Jesus is either who He claimed to be or He was among the worst deceivers to ever walk in human sandals. No wonder the Jews were offended.

Let's start looking at His arguments to back up His claim of Deity. First, He claimed total synergy with the Father. In verse 19 He claimed total dependence on the Father and complete harmony with the Father. He claimed He and the Father could do the very same works and that He was dependent on the Father's lead. According to John 1:1-4, this claim included the work of creation. This claim alone stops me in my tracks and forces me to grapple with the full magnitude of His claim of Deity.

Second, in verse 20, He claimed total love and acceptance from the Father. There was no breach between them, no secret that separated them, no hidden truth between them, and no attribute not shared coequal between them. The Father freely shared all aspects of His power, works, and Deity with the Son. This claim put Jesus in a category all of His own among human religious leaders. Only the promised Messiah could make this claim.

Third, in verse 21, He claimed coequal power over death and sovereignty over life. He claimed authority was given to Him by the Father to grant life to whomever He wished. That claim points to the independent will given Him by the Father. This leads directly into the next point.

Fourth, in verse 22, He claimed sovereign judgment was handed over to Him by the Father. This may sound minor, but He was claiming to be Chief Justice over humanity. In other words, He claimed His decisions and verdict is final.

Fifth, in verse 23, He was claiming the right to honor and I would add worship on an equal basis with the Father. Please underline this point in your thinking; if He is anything short of His claim of being equal to God, this claim alone would make Him guilty of blasphemy and worthy of eternal condemnation. I personally believe this was the tipping point that set Him up for crucifixion.

An amazing scene unfolds in Revelation 4-5. These two chapters present a heavenly worship service where the Son is finally seated next to the Father and receives coequal honor, glory, and praise from the heavenly hosts. This might be the fulfillment of John 5:23.

Sixth, He claimed that receiving His words and believing the Father's witness about the Son is the only basis for eternal life. In other words, Jesus was claiming to be the only Savior of humanity. He was claiming to be the only way to God and the only means of salvation and eternal life.

I define religion as man making gods and rituals for himself to placate the void within in his search for the above and beyond. I define Christianity as God progressively revealing Himself to mankind through the Bible and His Son Jesus Christ, Who is indeed the only Savior of lost humanity.

By the way, the above six verses are merely the opening arguments Jesus made to the Jews in defense of His claim of being Deity. His full case is developed in the next 23 verses.

Keep in mind, this whole discourse was sparked by a simple miracle Jesus performed by healing a lame man on the Sabbath day. I maintain that God has a greater purpose for miracles and healings than simply granting good health. The miracle paves the way for the vital message God has for people.

Self Existence and Life: John 5:25-26

"25) Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26) For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;"

One of the significant attributes of Deity that most people never consider is "Self Existence." As people, you and I are dependent on many things outside of ourselves for life and existence. For example, we need air, water, food, clothing for warmth, and shelter from harsh elements. Death comes quickly for people in the absence of these external things.

Some have also argued that we also need socialization with other people or pets. There are stories of people functioning alone in wilderness areas for long periods of time with just a dog or a domesticated wild animal for companionship.

God however is dependent on nothing and no one outside of Himself for existence. He is Spirit and not flesh. (See John 4:24) He can exist just fine outside of time, space, matter, and nutrition. He has "Self Existence." This ability makes Him eternal and enables Him to be the "Uncaused Cause" that caused all else to come into existence.

Despite having Self Existence, God still has intellect, emotion, will, unlimited power, and absolute presence both within and outside of time and space. Think about it. "Self Existence" means He doesn't burn out or consume energy over time for existence. This is the primary characteristic that makes God eternal. Notice that "Self Existence" is in fact the profound claim Jesus is making about Himself in these two verses.

The second claim He makes in these two verses is that He is the source of life. He claimed to be able to impart life to the dead by simply speaking to them. His very words carry life and have the power to impart life.

In Genesis Chapter One, God spoke light into existence. John Chapter One links life to light. Both originate with the very Words of God, and Jesus makes claims to both of them. In the gospel of John, Jesus lays claim to be the source of both life and light. (Notice John 8:12) These are bold and profound claims.

Before we leave these two verses, let me give a practical application. Words are powerful. What we think and say shapes many things about how our day unfolds and what happens within our relationships. I am by no means implying that you or I have the power to create, but I do believe our words and our mindset influences our lives deeply.

Therefore, be careful with your words. They can impart either life or death, light or darkness, hope or despair. They set us up for happiness or sadness, success or failure, and they can be the source of blessing or curses. I believe that what we think and what we say have a profound influence over our lives.

Power over Resurrection and Eternal Judgement. John 5: 25-29

“25) Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live. 26) For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27) and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. 28) Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29) and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

In these five verses, Jesus claims two more roles reserved for God. First, He claims resurrection authority. At the sound of His voice all the dead will one day come to life. This reminds me of His words to Martha after Lazarus had died; “I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25-26) During His public ministry, Jesus interrupted many funerals. He spoke life back into people.

Second, Jesus claimed that eternal judgment has been handed over to Him. (Vs 27) He knows those who belong to Him. He will make no mistake. People will face one of two eternal destinies. During His public ministry, Jesus warned more about hell than He did about heaven. (See Luke 16:19-21 as an example.)

According to John 3:16-18, His first coming was as Savior of mankind. Make no mistake, His second coming will be in His role as Judge. Salvation is based on a personal born-again experience. It is the result of saving faith and belief in Jesus. Those who are saved produce good works. (Ephesians 2:8-10) The tree is known by its fruit. (Matthew 7:19-23)

Again, as we survey this context in John 5:25-29, Jesus is making very bold claims about Himself. He was either a liar, a lunatic, or exactly Who He claimed to be. You cannot study this chapter of the Gospel of John and remain neutral or believe He was just a good man. His self-claims are very clear. Jesus was claiming to be God.

Selfless Motives: John 5:30-32

“30) I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 31) "If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. 32) There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true.”

Jesus now starts to transition His argument about being Deity away from His own opinion and onto four lines of external evidence. His reasoning in this transitional statement is profound: “I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

Let's be honest –no one would pick for themselves the mission entrusted to Jesus. He came to face criticism, castigation and crucifixion. He came as “the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29) He came to lay down His life as an atonement for the sins of all humanity.

Let me illustrate this in more graphic terms. One quality of being Deity is that He knew the end from the beginning. He knew every detail of the future. In other words, He knew what awaited Him in both His scourging and crucifixion –and still He volunteered for the mission. He did not seek His own will, but the will of the One who sent Him.

In other words, He did not sign up for the job because of the benefits. What He left behind in heaven to come to earth was much more glorious than anything that awaited Him during His sojourn on earth. The Apostle Paul captures this thought in Philippians 2:5-11. His motives were absolutely pure and selfless.

The Witness of John the Baptist: John 5:33-35

“33) You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. 34) But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35) He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.”

I love these three verses. Jesus was challenging the Jewish people to go back and check out the witness that John the Baptist made about Him. Let me give you a brief guide for your study:

Mathew devotes chapter three to the witness of John the Baptist. (Matthew 3:1-17) He also touches on him in chapter eleven. (Matthew 11:1-19) The Gospel of Mark opens with this line of reasoning by focusing on John the Baptist. (Mark 1:1-13) Luke includes the details of the birth of John the Baptist, his leaping in the womb at the early visit of Mary and his public ministry. (Luke 1 & 3) The gospel of John devotes most of chapter one to John the Baptist and revisits him in chapter three and also here in chapter five.

The testimony of John was consistent. Let's look at eight key points that John made about Jesus: 1) Jesus was mightier (Matthew 3:11), 2) Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit

(Mathew 3:11b), 3) Jesus would come with judgment (Matthew 3:12), 4) Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29; 36), 5) Jesus somehow existed before him (John 1:30), 6) the calling of Jesus was from heaven (John 3:27), 7) that Jesus was the bridegroom (John 3:29) and, 8) that Jesus must increase while John decreases.

There were many Jews who revered John the Baptist. When Jesus pointed to the witness of John to undergird His identity, it carried weight. John was very clear that his ministry was that of a forerunner. He came to prepare the way for the Messiah. I would encourage you to take time and study these passages about John the Baptist in-depth. They are very compelling.

The Witness of His Works: John 5:36

“36) But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.”

John 5:36 NASB

Jesus now appeals to His works as evidence of His Deity. When you study the life of Christ, His works can be divided into four parts: You can look at 1) His miracles, 2) His teachings, 3) His character, and finally, 4) His resurrection. As you put these under a magnifying glass they all point to His Deity.

The four Gospels were written to lay out this line of evidence in an orderly fashion. As you study the life of Christ, it becomes evident very quickly that He was more than a man. He was and is in a category all of His own.

But notice, I included His resurrection as the final exhibit. He pointed to His coming death and resurrection numerous times before the event to prepare His disciples in advance. One prime example is Matthew 16:21; “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.”

Why is this important? In Romans 1:4 the Apostle Paul makes an astute observation; “4) who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord...” In other words, the resurrection was final proof of His claim to Deity.

As you scan the history of great leaders and the founders of various world religions, only Jesus Christ and Christianity seals the deal with a resurrection. Paul argues this strongly in 1 Corinthians 15:1-28.

The sincere student who wants to investigate the claims of Jesus Christ must spend considerable time looking at his works. This line of evidence, added to many others, clearly points to the verdict that He was and is God.

The Witness of the Father: John 5:37-38

“37) And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. 38) And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.”

As we walk through this amazing defense of His Deity in John Chapter Five, it is almost like a courtroom scene unfolding. Jesus now presents His next line of evidence. He now points to the amazing witness of the Father Himself.

The most significant was at His Baptism. The Gospel of Matthew records the following testimony; “16) After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; 17) and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”” (Matthew 3:16-17) In this text the Father spoke audibly about His Son. The Gospels of Mark and Luke also record this story with great detail.

A similar voice came from heaven in Matthew 17:5 on the Mountain of Transfiguration. As Peter was speaking, he was suddenly interrupted with a heavenly voice. Let’s look at the context: “5) While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” 6) When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.” There was no question about the meaning of the message. The Father was claiming Jesus as His own Son. The Gospels of Mark and Luke also record this story.

Another profound account of the Father directly testifying about His Son is recorded in John 12:27-33. Let’s look at two of the verses: “27) Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28) Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29) The multitude therefore, who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, “An angel has spoken to Him.” Jesus makes it clear in the next verse that this voice came as a witness to the crowd.

As you can see, there were three separate occasions when the Father spoke directly from Heaven and bore witness of His Son. There is no doubt that some of the Jews listening to Jesus systematically unpack His case as recorded in John Chapter Five were present at the baptism of Jesus and heard the audible voice from heaven themselves. Undoubtedly, the event made headline news.

His point was well taken. The Father had indeed borne clear witness of His Son. It’s one thing for a man to call God his Father. Any lunatic could make that claim. But it is another thing for the Father to thunder from heaven with an audible voice and call Jesus His Son.

The Witness of Scripture: John 5:39-40

“39) You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40) and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”

Jesus now presents the argument that the Scriptures point to Him and His Deity. The whole Bible is His story. He can be found directly or indirectly in every book of the Bible.

When King Herod became troubled at the sudden appearance of the magi from the east, he called the scribes and asked where the Christ was to be born. They quickly searched the scrolls and came up with a decisive answer. (See Matthew 2:1-6).

He is seen as the pre-incarnate Christ throughout the Old Testament. He is seen as the fulfillment of prophecy in the four Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew was written to help the Jewish people see Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy. Time and time again Matthew points to the prophecies Jesus fulfilled. He is the subject of most of the New Testament Epistles. The book of Revelation was written to reveal Him in all of His glory and set the stage for His future return.

The problem is not that the Jewish people lacked biblical evidence pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the problem is that they were blind and ignored the testimony of Scripture. (See 2 Corinthians 3:12-18) The same is true for every person who reads the Bible without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Satan works hard to blind people to the Gospel. (See 2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

People are so distracted. They choose to ignore the Bible. This willful ignorance is the most costly oversight in this life. There will be a test. This utter neglect of the Bible is like taking a final exam without ever attending a lecture or reading the text books. It's called, "Failure!"

I believe every person, Christian or non-Christian should pray sincerely and spend some time reading or listening to the Bible. They should ask the Holy Spirit to guide them as they read and help them understand who Jesus Christ is and how they can get to know Him.

I often have people ask me where they should start reading. If they have never cracked the Bible open previously, I encourage them to start with Genesis, then Exodus followed by the four Gospels, and the book of Acts. I also encourage them to read one chapter a day from the book of Proverbs just to soak in some wholesome wisdom that is so lacking in today's world.

In other words, I point them to the first two books in the Old Testament followed by the first five books of the New Testament, and then the book of Proverbs which is right in the middle of the Bible.

It is important to start with the most fluent translation in your language. In the English language that could be The New Living Translation, The New International Version, The New American Standard Bible, or the English Standard Version. King James is also good, but some may struggle with the Old English words and grammar.

An alternative to reading the Bible is to download an audible version of the Bible on your smartphone, iPad, or computer. A free download is called "Bible.is". I highly recommend it! It is

available in many translations and many languages. I listen to entire books of the Bible every night and often throughout the day.

Christianity has many critics. I have no problem with critics if they know what they are talking about. If they haven't personally read at least the basic books from the Bible mentioned above, they are not informed critics – they are ignorant and foolish. They are facing their final exam in life without even reading the class syllabus or passing kindergarten. Don't be that person!

Living for the Glory of God: John 5:41-44

“41) I do not receive glory from men; 42) but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. 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 you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?”

It is so easy to get caught up in serving people rather than God. Opinion polls, social norms and the winds of change are constantly blowing. If you live to please people you will be like the surf of the sea which is driven and tossed by the winds. (James 1:6-8)

Jesus had a better plan. He lived for His Father. He lived by the Word of God, the Character of God, the truth of God, and the will of God. He lived to bring clarity to godly morals and values. He lived to point people to heaven and not to Hollywood. His mission was to reach the world while not being conformed to the world.

He made it clear that you cannot live to please God and please man at the same time. Fallen human nature and human depravity set a course contrary to God. No wonder the world is so deceived and lost. No wonder the world needs a Savior.

Jesus set His course contrary to the prevailing winds of human depravity. He paddled upstream instead of drifting downstream. He climbed up hill instead of coasting down hill. Why? Simply because He fixed His compass on bringing honor and glory to His Father.

You and I have the same decision to make. Are we going to live to seek glory and fame from people or are we going to live for the glory of God? Are we going to be people pleasers or God pleasers? These two paths in life are radically different. They lead in opposite directions and will etch very different eulogies on your tombstone and legacy. They yield very different eternal destinies.

Moses Pointed to Jesus: John 5:45-47

“45) Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Jesus closes His defense with a profound line of reasoning. The religious leaders of Jews prided themselves in keeping the teachings of Moses. Scholars generally agree that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. The books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy point to the Messiah over and over again.

For example, compare Genesis 1 and 2 with John 1:1-12. Both point to Jesus as the Creator. Compare the fall of man in Genesis 3 and the promised Messiah in verse 15 with Romans 1-3. Compare the life story of Abraham with Romans 4. Compare John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus as the Lamb of God in John chapter 1 with Genesis 22 and Exodus 12 and the Passover lamb.

You can literally find hundreds if not thousands of direct promises, types, and analogies in the writings of Moses that point to Jesus Christ. I recognize this is a bit more of an advanced study, but the next time you read the first five books of the Bible ask the Holy Spirit to start showing you the many portraits of the Messiah in these chapters and verses. You will be shocked.

But there is a problem.

The Apostle Paul talked about a problem for the Jewish people when it came to reading the writings of Moses. Take a moment and read 2 Corinthians 3:12-18. Let's look at a few verses: "15) But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16) but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." The same is true for every non-Christian.

It is virtually impossible to understand the Bible without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Divine teacher. (See John 14:26 and 1 John 2:27) He is the One who "takes the veil off" when reading and studying the Bible. Without His help the Bible can be confusing, dull, dry, and hard to understand.

But when the Holy Spirit turns on the light of understanding, the Bible becomes the most fascinating and phenomenal of all books. There is no end to the depth of its teaching and revelation. A lifetime suddenly becomes way too short for the serious Bible Student or scholar to search the depth of Scripture and research the mysteries of God contained within its pages. Keep in mind, God invites every Christian to read and study the Bible. The promise of Divine guidance in Scripture is for every believer. It is one of the most precious blessings of the Christian's life.

Final Trip To the MountainTop: John 6:1-4

"1) After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2) A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. 3) And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. 4) Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near."

We now have the task of doing a harmony of the gospels. Starting about twenty days before the Passover, large crowds started gathering to form caravans to travel from the region of Galilee to Jerusalem. Luke 2:41-45 mentions one such caravan when Jesus was twelve years old.

This sets the stage for the question Jesus asked Philip in verse 5: "Where are we to buy bread that these may eat?" Prices were inflated and bread was becoming a scarcity. Nearly all bread had already been bought and packed away in the caravans. Some caravans had already passed through this region and others were leaving shortly.

Notice that news about Jesus had been spreading quickly. Many had been hearing about the signs He had performed at the previous Passover and great multitudes were following Him because of the healing He was performing on the sick. Momentum was building. Verse 2 says that "a great multitude was following Him."

It is possible that a few industrious travel agencies were offering a stop in Galilee with the hopes of seeing Jesus. He had become as much of an attraction as the actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover.

Notice verse three says; " And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples." This sounds very similar to Matthew 5:1. Some believe Jesus may have given the Sermon on the Mountain at this time. I believe He gave the Sermon on the Mountain a full two years earlier.

We are now confronted with a frustrating fact about the Gospel of John, it moves very quickly! In fact, John leaves out many details recorded in the other Gospels. For example, John does not even mention the Sermon on the Mountain, the appointment of the twelve disciples or the seventy-two, nor does he include the transfiguration or many of the other miracles or the many parables Jesus taught. One must wonder "why?"

A distinction of the Gospel of John is that he zeroes in on the mounting tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders which eventually led to His condemnation and crucifixion. Remember that the root of the conflict was the claim Jesus made of being "the Son of God." He was crucified not for any wrong He had done but solely for Who He claimed to be.

Now let me make a shocking observation, it is entirely possible that John chapter six through nineteen covers the final three weeks of the life of Jesus. In other words, the trip He was about to make to Jerusalem would be His last.

The next time Jesus would join His disciples on this mountain was most likely talked about in Matthew 28:16; "But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated."

The book of John opens with John the Baptist proclaiming that Jesus was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins to the world." (John 1:29) The whole book establishes the fact that Jesus Christ was indeed the Passover Lamb prepared by God to be crucified in fulfillment of every prophecy, typology, and analogy of the accepted Lamb of God. The Jewish religious leaders fought Him every step for the way and then paradoxically offered Him up as the Passover Lamb during the actual Passover celebration.

Another Lesson From The School of Faith: John 6:5-7

“5) Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” 6) This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. 7) Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”

This is a significant story. Notice that Jesus had compassion for the people and was concerned about physical needs like food. One might ask why Jesus was moved by this need? This might escape the casual observer, but Jesus was the Provider. He has always filled that office. He still does. He provides for the needs of people. Jesus was constantly motivated to care for the needs of people from His position as both Healer and Provider. It Is Who He Is!

What Jesus does next is very insightful. He asked Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” The text says He was testing Philip. I believe God constantly puts us in stretching situations to test our faith. If we are not being stretched we are not growing.

Philip responded by saying, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” Philip had done the math. One denarii was a full day’s wage for a common worker. Two hundred denarii was a lot of money, but it was insufficient. I have found that there are seldom enough resources to meet the needs of ministry. It seems to go with the turf. It is part of the school of faith.

Notice that Jesus knew what He was intending to do. God always has a plan. I believe it is our job to tell the story, but it is God’s job to move the mountain. In this case, it was the disciples job to set the table, but it was up to Jesus to provide the meal. Faith is doing our part while trusting God to do His part. Faith bids us to move forward with God’s clear leading even without provisions at hand.

Notice, I said “clear leading.” There is no doubt from this story that Jesus was the One leading. The disciples had no thought, burden or desire to feed the people. To them, the whole thought seemed foolish and maybe unnecessary. Little did they know that Jesus was laying the groundwork for a crucial teaching later in the chapter.

I have learned the hard way that it is important to discern when God is leading and when the flesh has a selfish desire. There is a huge difference. Jesus is not responsible for providing for our programs or promotions. He promises to build His church and not our cathedral.

On the other hand, if the idea sounds really crazy, it might be from God. If it is something we would not consider then the thought might originate with the Holy Spirit. The question is most often settled in the prayer closet.

By God’s grace He has vetoed a number of my fleshly idea’s over the years. Usually it was because He had a better plan, a different plan or a bigger plan. On other occasions my timing was premature. Walking in the Spirit enrolls us in the school of faith.

Feeding The Five Thousand: John 6:8-14

"8) One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 9) "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" 10) Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11) Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. 12) When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." 13) So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14) Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.""

Sometimes when we take inventory it comes up way short. Andrew had done just that. He had been out in the crowd to assess how much food they had to work with. All he found was one boy with five barley loaves and two fish. It is significant the boy was willing to give what he had to Jesus. It has been said that little is much when God is in it.

I personally believe that Andrew had one more factor to His inventory. I believe he put Jesus in the equation. You see, two fish and five barley loaves were not enough until they were given to Jesus. All God needs is what we have at hand, even if it seems terribly inadequate.

Jesus didn't skip a beat. He directed the disciples to have the people sit in the grass. It was at this point that the math seemed even more impossible. There were around 5,000 men beside women and children. That's a lot of hungry people to feed with two fish and five loaves of bread.

(By the way, have you ever noticed that Jesus often fed people with fish and bread? (See John 21:13) I see this as indisputable biblical evidence that I occasionally need a fishing trip. My wife thinks it's saying I need more time in the kitchen learning to cook bread or lending a hand cleaning up the mess. My response is summarized in Matthew 16:23.)

Back to the text. Jesus gave thanks and started handing out the food. As they passed it out it was multiplied many times over. Everyone ate and was satisfied. They gathered up twelve baskets full of leftovers. The boy received his initial investment back many times over. It is impossible to out-give God.

Why did Jesus perform this sign? The response of the people says it all: "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus did it as a witness of His glory and majesty.

Let's take a bigger look: In Chapter Five Jesus intellectually made the case for His Deity. Now, in Chapter Six, Jesus performed signs to validate His claim of deity. His claims were matched by His actions.

In the same way, God wants our theology to be lived out in our daily lives. Many Christians talk like theologians but live like atheists. They live as if God doesn't exist. When we blend our actions and our resources with our understanding of Jesus and step out for Him, amazing things start happening. God wants us to be on the front lines and not the side lines.

Two Very Different Paths: John 6:15

“15) So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.”

Feeding the five thousand was the deal-closer for most people. They realized He was the promised Messiah. In their thinking that also meant He was to sit on the throne of David and rule over Israel. They were ready to put Him in His rightful place and fight to liberate Israel from Roman oppression. They thought it was time to restore the Kingdom to Israel. They were ready to raise arms and use force.

Jesus would have none of it. Yes, He was the King of the Jews and much more. He was King of kings and Lord of lords. (See Revelation 19) His enemy was not Rome, it was the fallen god of this world and the kingdom of darkness. His mission was not to restore national sovereignty to Israel, it was to redeem lost and fallen humanity from death and despair.

(God's ultimate plan was indeed to put Jesus the Messiah on the throne as King to heal the sin Israel committed way back in 1 Samuel 8 when they rejected God as King and asked the prophet Samuel for an earthly king to lead them. This is why it was so ironic that Pilate would eventually hang a sign over Jesus on the cross that said, “Jesus, King of the Jews” in three languages. Even more ironic were the religious leaders who would shout, “We have no king but Caesar!” and commit treason against God Himself as Pilate tried his best to release Jesus. What they did not understand is that the Messiah King would come first as the Man of Sorrows described in Isaiah 53 who would atone for all their sins and restore relationship with the Father for all who believe, and then later come as the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS who would bring judgment and justice as described in Revelation. So, as Terry says, the restoration was not of Israel's national sovereignty, but of our relationship with Him –and ultimately His sovereignty as our King.) -dj

The rest of His earthly journey was marked by this under-current. The religious leaders made the case before Pilate that Jesus was planning an insurrection against Rome. Read Matthew 27:11-37 and John 18:28-19:15 with this in mind.

In John 18:33-37 Jesus clarified that His kingdom was not of this realm. He was no threat to Pilate or Rome. He had a much higher mission and very different means.

There are always people who try to force spiritual values through political means and even resort to the force of arms. Human history and our present world are deeply scared by religious wars. Though we need godly people in politics, God chooses to work through the prayer closet and the loving gospel to accomplish His means. In this text, Jesus chose the way of the cross to reach and redeem the world. The church must follow His example.

Two more Miracles: John 6:16-21

“16) Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, 17) and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18) The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.

19) Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. 20) But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21) So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."

The feeding of the five thousand was followed by two more astounding signs or miracles. The other gospels point out that Jesus did not get in the boat with His disciples because He had stayed behind to dismiss the multitude and to pray. (Mark 6:45-46). He sent the disciples on ahead of Him.

The first miracle was that Jesus came walking to them on the water in the middle of the storm. I have discovered that Jesus often walks up to us in the heart of the storm and says, "It is I, do not be afraid." It is very unusual to pick up hitchhikers in the middle of the sea. Notice that Jesus wasn't treading water or swimming, He was out on the original power walk. No wonder the text says they were frightened.

Notice that the very waves the disciples were fighting were stepping stones for Jesus. If you are going through a storm right now, why not ask Jesus to walk into your life in a deeper way?

The second miracle is more intriguing. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, they were translated to their destiny. In other words, the entire boat and its passengers surfed across both time and space instantaneously. There is no natural explanation for this miracle. Stop and ponder this phenomenon.

A similar thing happened to Philip the Evangelist in Acts 8:39-40. He was suddenly translated from the roadside to the town of Azotus. According to the text, this was done by "the Spirit of the Lord." A miracle, by definition, is a supernatural event. It transcends the usual laws of physics.

The amazing thing about Jesus is that He could do these things at will. As the disciples witnessed these miracles or signs over and over again, one question nagged at them, "Who is this guy?" (See Matthew 8:27) These signs and wonders repeatedly performed by Jesus undergirded His claim of Deity.

Among all religious leaders or founders, these reported "signs and wonders" are unique to Jesus Christ. They put Him in a category all of His own. There is no doubt that He was far more than a man.

When Questions Go Unanswered: John 6:22-25

"22) The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone. 23) There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate 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 small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. 25) When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"

Human curiosity and divine mysteries seldom meet when forced to be resolved on the playing field of human experience and naturalism. The crowd had several facts that did not add up. 1) There was initially only one new boat on the beach. 2) Jesus did not leave in the boat with His disciples, they left without Him. 3) The other boats that arrived later confirmed that Jesus had not entered a boat to cross the lake, but when they arrived He was already there. This led to the obvious question, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” It also begged another question, “How did you get here?”

They had every right to question Him. I have learned over the years that God is not threatened by our questions and He does not condemn us for asking. But many times His answers do not fit into our little boxes of human experience and reason.

For example, what would have happened had He replied, “I strolled part way across on the water and then I didn’t feel like rowing in the storm so I just translated my disciples, their boat and myself the rest of the way instantaneously.” That would have been a truthful answer, but it would not have fit their life experience and view of reality. They would have concluded He was a lunatic as they turned away laughing and mocking.

I believe there are many times God cannot and does not answer our questions because our box of understanding is too small. The atheist is forever condemned to be an atheist if he or she restricts reality to the small box of naturalism and human experience. By definition God is supernatural. He exists both within and way beyond the box of naturalism. The box of naturalism alone is too small to contain Him.

The evolutionist refuses to even consider the manifold evidence for creation because their lens of reality does not include the existence of God. Manifold evidence can be right in front of them but they are blind because they are restricted to come up with a “natural explanation for everything.” Furthermore, they refuse to acknowledge the huge problems with the theory of evolution simply because “It has to be true.” Their only solution is to add billions of more years for random chance to work. Here is the problem: If you start with the premise that God does not exist, you are forced into a predetermined intellectual box.

So why didn’t Jesus directly answer their question? When you consider the full context of John Chapter Six, the way Jesus answered the question was by telling them they first needed to radically change their understanding of Who He was. Until they accepted the possibility that He was God incarnate, He could not give them answers based on supernatural physics even though the evidence was right in front of them.

The problem was not with Jesus. The problem was within them. Until a person's understanding of Jesus changes, their life is cursed to be lived out in the very small box of human experience, naturalism, personal bondage, and unanswered questions. No wonder Solomon said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

Deeper Hunger Pains: John 6:26-29

“26) Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27) Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” 28) Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” 29) Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.””

Jesus made an interesting observation about the crowd. He said they were seeking Him for temporal and not eternal reasons. They were seeking Him because they ate the bread and were satisfied and not because of the sign itself. They were seeking Him because of the fringe benefit. They wanted to tap into a free feeding program.

He then advised them to start seeking the food that endures to eternal life. He explained to them that the hunger of the human soul was more important than the hunger of the human body. Some people never get past mere physical appetites. They live for the here and now. Jesus wanted them to engage in a work that was much deeper and more rewarding.

They then asked Him the crucial question; “What shall we do that we shall work the works of God?” They were anticipating a long list of good moral deeds like Moses gave them. They were expecting Him to point them back to the Ten Commandments or the 613 ordinances of the Law that the Pharisees often recited. But He did something radically different.

He said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” He wanted them to know that eternal life was found in Him. Only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can fill the inner void of the human soul.

Of course we need to be responsible and take care of basic human needs. Jesus was not minimizing those needs. Food, clothing, and shelter are essentials for maintaining physical life, but there is something that goes much deeper. Because you and I were created in the image of God, we are very different from animals. We have an innate capacity for worship and relationship with God. We were created with eternity in our DNA.

Jesus wanted them to go deeper. He was about to unveil something more satisfying than food, clothing, sex, rewarding career, wealth, and perceived success. Some people are satisfied and content with these things. He was definitely promising them something better than the painful side of life for those caught in abusive relationships, bondage, addictions, despair, and broken dreams. Some people are trapped in these things.

He was about to point them beyond the mere pursuits of physical life. He wanted them to discover the amazing wealth and depth of spiritual life that comes through a personal relationship with Him. He was about to reveal Himself as “The Bread of Life.”

The Demands of the Agnostic: John 6:30-24

“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.””

An agnostic is someone who doesn't know or isn't convinced so they don't commit. They live in limbo. Such was the case with the multitudes who followed Jesus. They wanted to be close enough in case they needed a healing or a meal, but they weren't persuaded. They enjoyed listening but there was no personal application. They had head knowledge but did not embrace Him in their hearts.

They wanted more signs. They wanted more proof. They wanted more miracles. The many things Jesus was saying and doing was not enough for them. They wanted Jesus on their own terms, but God doesn't work that way. He sets the rules.

The Apostle touches on this constant demand for more signs and information in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. (It is worthy of your in-depth study.) He points out that Jews constantly ask for more signs and Greeks search for more wisdom, but God simply offers the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins. He said this simple message was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved.

Keep the context of their demand in John 6:30-31 in mind. Jesus had just performed three amazing miracles. He fed 5,000 men and their families with two fish and five loaves of bread. He walked on the water and instantly translated the boat and His disciple through time and space to the other side of the lake. But they wanted manna out of heaven just like Moses gave the children of Israel.

Jesus points out that it wasn't Moses who gave the manna. In fact, a careful reading of the Bible attributes all of the signs and wonders that happened under Moses to Jesus Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 10:1-4) I personally believe it was even His finger that wrote the Ten Commandments. The deeper you study the Old Testament the more you encounter the pre-incarnate Christ.

Jesus then goes on in the discussion to say that He Himself is the true bread which God gives out of heaven. This now becomes one of the seven great “I AM” claims of the Gospel of John. In this context Jesus claimed to be “the Bread of Life.” He is the daily bread God wants His people to feed on every day.

If you are an agnostic, I would encourage you to stop demanding more and more outer signs and start studying the claims of the person and works of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible. Come to God on His terms rather than making your own demands. Ask God to open your eyes to the evidence and the truth He has placed all around you in creation and in the night sky. (See Romans 1:18-21, Psalm 1-6). Ask Him to open your eyes and soften your heart. But at some point be ready to make a step of faith. Be prepared to follow Jesus on His terms.

Called And Accepted By God: John 6:34-40

“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.”

People run through life in search of something. They seem hungry and thirsty for meaning, belonging and purpose. In this context, Jesus pulls back the curtain on the inner thirst of the human soul and He presents Himself as the Bread of Life. He promises that those who come to Him will never hunger and those who believe in Him will never thirst.

He based all of this on belief in Him. Faith is a mystery. It conquers fear and dispels doubt. Faith in Jesus is the basis of relationship with God. Faith is the common possession of the family of God.

But Jesus goes a step beyond in this text. In Verse 37 He says “All that the Father gives me shall come to me.” There is no question that the Bible talks about a “calling”, “choosing”, “election” or “predestination.” It is a mystery and I will not try to explain it.

In verse 44 Jesus says, “No one can come to the Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.” God the Father is active in the world drawing people to Jesus Christ. Our job is to preach the gospel; it is the job of the Holy Spirit to draw people to Jesus and convert them.

I also believe that people have to respond. They need to “believe in Jesus.” People have free will. I do not see a contradiction between Divine Sovereignty and human responsibility. They work together like the annual phenomenon of bird migration. When the time is right they just flock up and head to warmer climates. How does it work? I do not know, but I believe God ordained it.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit becomes active in the lives of those who are called and they migrate to the gospel. Those who believe in Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit and an inner work of transformation begins. This is not a forced work. God honors free will and personal effort in the spiritual growth process as well. Some pull all stops and seek God with fervor. They grow rapidly and become mighty in spirit. Others seem to stumble toward growth and maturity.

But in this text, Jesus promises to accept all those who come to Him and believe in Him. The emphasis is not on human work or effort. The emphasis is always on God and His grace, His work and His faithfulness. I am so thankful that He is faithful even when we fail. Jesus promised He will not lose any who come to Him. Our salvation is dependent on Him and not us.

Chewing on this text takes time, but in it is found the bread and water of the Christian life. These are the basics and the essentials. I don't second-guess God. I am just thankful that for some reason, He graciously worked in my life and adopted me into His family. I can say with the

Apostle Paul that knowing Jesus Christ is by far the most precious value of my life. (See Philippians 3:7-11)

Grumble, Complain, and Make Excuses: John 6:41-46 ESV

“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.”

We like to accept credit for what God does either in us or through us. Yet we limit God to what we know or understand. These Jews were struggling with Jesus making a claim of heavenly origin because they knew something about His family. They had studied His family tree. They knew about Joseph and Mary.

Unfortunately, their study was not complete. They missed the detail of Him being a direct descendant of King David through both His earthly mother and legal earthly father. They also missed the prophetic significance of His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14) in Bethlehem. (See Mathew 2:1-23)

It is impossible for anyone to come to faith in Jesus Christ without the active work of God in their life drawing them to the gospel. You can have all the religious arguments you want, hate and ridicule Christians and even mock and make up excuses, but apart from God graciously working in your heart and life you will forever remain lost and blind. You can even be religious and lost as was the plight of the religious Jewish people who rejected the Messiah.

The bottom line is that if you seek Him you will find Him if you seek Him with all of your heart. Get serious and get sincere. Cry out to God and ask for His grace and mercy. Don't wait to believe in God or come to Jesus Christ on your terms. Your terms don't matter. The only thing that matters is His calling in your life. He is not impressed with your excuses.

Bold Claim: John 6:46-47

“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.”

This claim to have personally seen God is often repeated in the Gospel of John. I refer you back to John 1:18; “No one has seen God at any time: the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” This is the perfect circular argument.

It goes like this; “No man has ever seen God, but Jesus has seen God... so that means He is much more than an ordinary man.” If this argument were standing alone it might be hard to

embrace, but it comes on the tail of two full chapters where Jesus is presenting His case of being Deity.

He is basically saying, "If you want to know anything about God the Father, just ask me; I've spent eternity past with Him therefore, I know everything about Him!" There is no question about His claim to being Deity.

When Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life," He is qualifying that statement. Let me explain.

Many people celebrate Christmas and Easter because they believe in the birth and death of Jesus Christ; but what He is saying in these two verses goes far beyond. He is saying that you need to believe in His full identity as eternal God.

This is the point where Chapter Six became a tripping stone for the Jewish people. What He says next caused many of them to walk away and abandon Jesus completely. He is about to make a claim that can only be possible if His claim to being Deity is true. Stay tuned!

(Jesus is mentioned as a tripping stone or "stumbling block" several times in Scripture.

Isaiah 8:14 prophecies of Him:

"And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Jesus says this of Himself in Matthew 21:44:

"And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 23-24:

"...but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

And Peter, quoting the prophecy from Isaiah, writes this in 1 Peter 2:8:

"...and, 'A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for."

It's interesting to note that the Greek word for "stumbling block" in these passages is "scandalon." Yes, that is the very word from which we get "scandal" and "scandalous."

Jesus was scandalous indeed in the eyes of the religious leaders of His day because of His frequent practice of associating with "notorious sinners.") -dj

Was Jesus Advocating Cannibalism? John 6:52-59

"52) Then the Jews began to argue with one another, 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 yourselves. 54) He who eats 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) He who eats 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 he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58) This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." 59) These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum."

When is the Bible to be interpreted literally and when is it to be interpreted figuratively or allegorically? In no uncertain terms the text in front of us is very difficult to understand if it is taken literally. In fact, these words became the tripping stone for many of His followers. They understood Jesus was speaking literally of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and He did nothing in the context to correct them.

So how do we deal with this text? First, keep in mind that Jesus was talking about the manna that God provided for His people in the wilderness for forty years under Moses. He was talking about His origin being from heaven. That was to be taken literally.

Second, He was talking about true bread. The manna could sustain physical life but did nothing to impart spiritual life. Those who ate the manna still died. Jesus is the only bread that can give eternal life. That can be taken literally.

Third, I believe Jesus was pointing ahead to the institution of communion. I like the way Matthew records the events at the last Passover meal Jesus had with His disciples in Matthew 26:26-29. Jesus picked up the bread from that meal and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then He took the cup from the meal and said; "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Unfortunately, we do not have time or space to get into the full explanation of the Passover meal at this time. Let me just say that Jesus was saying the bread and the cup at that meal was in fact pointing to His body and blood.

With this understanding, Jesus was speaking both literally and prophetically to the crowd of what was about to transpire in Jerusalem. He was indeed the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was the literal fulfillment of the Passover meal. He was the true manna. He was about to fulfill the Old Testament picture of the Gospel that is hidden in every Jewish ceremony.

The irony is that the Jewish people were all eating the bread and drinking the cup at every annual Passover celebration without knowing or believing its prophetic meaning. It all pointed to Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Remember what Jesus had just said in John 6:47; "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes has eternal life." He was trying to get them to see, understand and believe what was in front of them at every Passover meal.

I like what Paul said in Galatians 3:8-9; “8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU. " 9) So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.” Notice that Abraham had the gospel preached to Him and believed. In the same way, so did Moses in both the Passover meal and the Manna in the wilderness.

The Bible is full of pictures of the Gospel that point to Jesus Christ. Jesus literally fulfilled the Old Testament ceremonies. It wasn't until after the event of the crucifixion and resurrection that the light bulbs went off for many of the Jewish people who walked away from Jesus in John chapter six. The message Peter preached on the day of Pentecost tied it all together and clearly explained the Gospel as pictured throughout the Old Testament. That's why the rate of conversion among the Jewish people in the book of Acts after Pentecost was so explosive. The seeds planted in Judaism were ripe unto harvest.

Many Walked Away From Him: John 6:59-71

“These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.”

Some people who start following Jesus end up walking away from Him. They reject the implications of Jesus being Lord and the resulting call to a life of obedience. Some see Him as too narrow. Others view Him as too strict. Still others reject His claim of Deity. In the end, most of these people want to be lord of their own life.

Jesus made the profound observation in this text that it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing. It is possible for someone to be religious and yet void of Spirit. Those who are truly born again are filled with the Holy Spirit and have no stronger pull in life than to follow Jesus.

I like the reply of Peter to the question Jesus asked the twelve; “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of

eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." For the true believer, nothing and no one else can take the place of Jesus Christ.

Beware of What You Become In The Pursuit of What You Want: John 6:66-71

"66) As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67) So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" 68) Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69)

We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." "70) Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" 71) Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him."

Have you ever walked away from Jesus? Maybe you were enticed back into sin and your past lifestyle. Maybe some liberal college professor filled your mind with lies and doubts and caused you to abandon ship. Maybe you have been hurt or disappointed by some Christian leader or the church. There are tons of excuses, but Peter got it right.

In essence he said, "Where else can I turn to be filled with so much inner life and hope?" He had tasted what the world has to offer and came up with guilt, emptiness, and despair. It was anything but living water or the bread of life.

Keep in mind, his observation was given prior to the day of Pentecost. He had not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit or tasted the fullness of the Christian life. He was merely talking about the life giving words of Jesus. They were food to his soul.

Over the years there have been a few times that I have slipped back into sin or been distracted by other pursuits. It didn't take long and I became empty and miserable. Once you have drank living water, tasted the bread of life, and walked with Jesus Christ as a disciple, nothing else satisfies.

Sure, you can still find momentary pleasure in sin, but you cannot find thirst-quenching fulfillment. What you sought to fill that craving ends up making you sick to your stomach and, eventually, the man or woman in the mirror looks nothing like who God made you to be. (See Ephesians 2:10) -dj.

Peter was speaking from experience. He had gone back to his nets after his first encounter with Jesus. He was going through the motions but he was empty. The next time Jesus passed by and said, "Follow me", Peter didn't hesitate – he left everything and followed Jesus.

Unfortunately, that wasn't his last episode of straying from Jesus. He denied three times that he knew Jesus and then returned to his nets once more. But his attempt at starting up his old career came up empty. John 21 records the story.

Jesus didn't let Peter just walk away. He showed up on the shore and served Peter and the others an awesome meal. That's just like Jesus. There have been numerous times over the years that I have been at my worst and Jesus graciously met me at His best. Jesus didn't condemn Peter, but He did point out his problem was a lack of love. (See John 21:15-17)

There are many people like Peter. They have good theology but suffer from heart trouble. Maybe that's you! It is possible to know the truth but embrace all kinds of other things.

For most people, growing into an abundant walk with Jesus Christ is a journey. It has a definite starting point when you put your faith in Jesus and invite Him into your life, but there will most likely be some bumps along the way.

The important thing is to not walk away or get stuck in a rut. At some point you need to decide between Jesus and the world.

Did you notice that Chapter Six closes with a contrast of two disciples. There was Peter and there was Judas. Your life will end up in the sandals of one of the two of them. Wisdom says: "Beware of what you become in the pursuit of what you want."

Crisis of Unbelief: John 7:1-10

"1) After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. 2) Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. 3) Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. 4) For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5) For not even His brothers were believing in Him. 6) So Jesus said to them, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune. 7) The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. 8) Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come." 9) Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee. 10) But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret."

I remember back in Bible College this text was quite controversial. The lively discussion related to whether or not Jesus was losing control and even deceived His family by saying He wasn't accompanying them to the feast. I now grieve over that discussion and the blinders it placed over this amazing text.

Granted, there was a rift between Jesus and His younger half brothers. They were chiding Him to go up to the feast and do even more miracles. The root reason was that not even they believed in Him. In a sense, they were mocking Him. The people around Jesus had reached a crisis of unbelief. He was being abandoned not only by many of His disciples, but even His own family were doubting Him.

But I believe this was part of the plan. From my perspective, Jesus was starting to distance Himself from His family and brothers for their safety. In verses 6-8 He states that His time was quickly approaching. The world was starting to hate Him and He was about to become the focal

point of the wrath of the Jewish leaders and of Rome. I believe He did not want His family to become part of the collateral damage so He deferred from traveling up to Jerusalem with them. I see this as an act of love.

But let's dig deeper into this text and see if it holds a treasure seldom discovered. Keep in mind, it was a five-day journey by caravan from Capernaum to Jerusalem. Jesus stayed behind as His family and most likely His disciples went to the feast of booths without Him.

Let me remind you that this was not the first time Jesus stayed behind and sent His disciples ahead of Him. The same thing had happened in the previous chapter after feeding the five thousand. It set the stage for some very phenomenal events to unfold as we discovered previously.

I have a theory that I cannot prove by this text, but it is quite possible that Jesus again used a radically different mode of transportation to get to Jerusalem. Notice verse ten; "10) But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret." I wonder what the "secret" was about the way Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem? Did he walk every step of the way by Himself with a hood over His head so no one knew who He was over a three-to-five day period of time? Or... did He again crunch time and space by stepping out of Capernaum and into Jerusalem instantaneously as He did with the boat and His disciples in the previous chapter?

Wow! I believe another significant miracle may have taken place in this text that is not highlighted in the verse. Let me underline a thought for you; "Normal to God is incomprehensible to the mind of man." I do not believe Jesus slipped into panic mode over the unbelief of His family or the majority of his disciples. I believe Jesus lived daily in "Deity Mode." Ponder the implications of that statement.

Please understand this: God does not panic over human unbelief. Jesus was and is God and inhabits an eternal realm of reality that operates by very different physics. In this text Jesus was in control and not out of control. He did not explain Himself to people and He did not reveal all of His secrets to people. He came to fulfill a mission of which we only have micro understanding. It will take eternity to explore all of the mysteries of God. In the meanwhile, avoid the trap of getting hung up on trivial issues and missing the big story.

Hazards for a Jesus Seeker: John 7:11-13

"11) So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?" 12) There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, "He is a good man"; others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray." 13) Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews."

Everyone had an opinion about Jesus. He was the topic of nearly every conversation. Some thought He was a good man. Others branded Him as a deceiver. Those who actually took the time to listen to Him were deeply moved and impressed.

This happens today as well. All kinds of people who have never read the Bible or attended a Bible-preaching church seem to have an opinion about Jesus. Beware who shapes your theology!

The problem is that your opinion about Jesus determines your eternity. It is paramount that you get it right! Notice that there were some genuine seekers in the crowd. Be one of them!

But don't let some left-wing humanist who is tainted by evolution and bent toward naturalism and atheism shape your view of Jesus or your morals. There are many critics out there with a bent toward hating Jesus and Christians. Many are college professors. Be careful, their words are full of poison.

Do your own homework! Ask Jesus to guide you. Adopt a personal Bible reading plan. Start with Genesis and then read the first five books of the New Testament. Then go back and read the whole New Testament and finally read the entire Bible from cover to cover. In my opinion, that's the minimum for a sincere seeker. Enjoy the journey and expect to learn amazing things!

Here is some more good advice: attend several different Christian churches and watch and listen. Ask questions and be on the lookout for genuine Christian love and mission. Make sure they point you to the Bible and focus on Jesus Christ. You will discover that some churches are right over the target while others are way out in left field or stuck in terrible ruts. Don't return to the bad ones no matter the name on the sign out front. When God leads you to a good one, stay there and grow.

Then look for a few people who radiate Jesus in their daily lives and who are not ashamed of Him. Often they will invite you to join a Bible study. Draw near to them and direct your questions to them. Ask what they believe and why. Become a Bible student.

Here is the deal: If you seek Jesus you will find Him. More importantly, He will most likely find *you*. He will show up in the middle of your search just as He did in the middle of Feast of Booths in John Chapter Seven.

Don't go through life thirsty and hungry when Jesus is living water and the bread of life. You don't need to live in darkness when Jesus is the light of the world. If you draw near to Him, He promises to draw near to you. Join me in becoming a lifelong Jesus seeker.

The Jesus Approach to Education: John 7:14-18

"14) But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. 15) The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" 16) So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17) If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. 18) He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

Jesus always received stellar reviews about His teaching. One of the greatest messages He ever taught was recorded in Matthew 5-7. We call it “The Sermon on the Mount.” Listen to the reviews of His teaching as recorded in Matthew 7:28-29; “28) When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29) for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

Unfortunately, the message He taught during the Feast of Booths was not recorded. All we have are the reviews. But the Jews were marveling at His teaching. In fact, He left them stunned and perplexed because He had not received a standard education as a priest, scribe, or Pharisee. They openly wondered how He had become so learned.

It is important to realize that from childhood Jesus had a zeal for God's Word. The only story we have recorded from His youth is at age twelve. It is found in Luke 2:41-52. It is the story of Him staying behind in Jerusalem when His parents left with the caravan to return to Nazareth. Listen to what the text says about Him: “46) Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47) And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.” Even from His youth, Jesus was absorbed in the study of Scripture.

But let's return to the question of the multitude after hearing Him teach at the feast, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?” The answer is that He became educated by spending hours in the presence of His Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit taught Him. He undoubtedly had access to some scrolls at His local synagogue and He learned how to listen and ask questions. I believe He fulfilled Psalm 1:2 by meditating in the Law of the Lord both day and night.

He had a zeal and passion for God. He was committed to both listen to Him and to do His will. He made it clear that His teaching was not the culmination of His own thoughts, but rather they were from Him who sent Him.

I will concede that being the Son of God He had the advantage of being Deity and had existed for all eternity past in His pre-incarnate state. This might stretch you, but He had walked and lived through the Old Testament stories as the main character of the God-head who had dealt with mankind. He was not only the Creator, but it was His finger that wrote the Law.

But – and this is vital to understand – growing up as a human, He still had to go through a normal growing and learning process. Luke 2:52 says after returning home with His parents; “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” We can conclude that He had extraordinary insight and illumination through His entire formative years, but He went through a learning and growing process.

God promises the same for every man and woman who spends time in His Word and learns how to meditate on Scripture and listen to the Holy Spirit. I would encourage you to read Psalm 1, Psalm 119, the book of Proverbs, Matthew 7:24-27, Acts 4:13, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, 2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 2:16-17, and 1 John 2:20-29. I could add many more to this list, but let

me say that the Holy Spirit can and does use the Word of God to mentor and teach consecrated men and women into extraordinary servants.

Valuable things can be learned at a Bible College, but God invites His people to enroll in the school of faith. God wants His Word to be the textbook and His Spirit to be the teacher. Welcome to the Jesus approach to education. Isn't it time you start taking your education at the feet of Jesus seriously?

Shaking Up Religious Traditions: John 7:19-24

"19) Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" 20) The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?" 21) Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel. 22) For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. 23) If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? 24) Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Beware of messing with some people's religious legalism. It might get you killed. The big issue that dogged Jesus at the Feast of Booths related all the way back to John chapter five when He healed a man on the Sabbath during the Passover. Small things are big deals to some people. In fact, He made them so mad they wanted to kill Him.

Let me point something out about Jesus: He wasn't afraid to make waves or rock the boat of their religious traditions – but He did it for the glory of God. He cleansed the temple during the Passover for the glory of God. He made a man whole on the Sabbath for the glory of God. He defended truth and not tradition. He was committed to God's ways and not man's ways. He sought favor with God and not approval from man.

I have discovered that many religious people shun the born-again message and are inhibited with the ministry of the Holy Spirit simply because of the religious traditions they grew up with. In other words, religious people are often the most difficult to reach with the gospel. While publicans, sinners, and the common people were running to Jesus, the religious leaders and their devout followers wanted to kill Him.

In this text, Jesus tried to reason with them again, but they refused to listen. He compared circumcision on the Sabbath to performing a healing on the Sabbath, but it fell on deaf ears. (See verses 22-23) There's a big insight that flows through the Gospel of John and that is that religious arguments are often fruitless.

It is good to evaluate why you hold to the religious dogmas that you have. Is it because of the religious tradition you grew up with or the unquestionable views of your church? Are you trying to please or appease your family or friends? Is it because of something you learned in a religious school growing up? Is it anchored in a doctrinal bent hammered into you at a Bible College?

Traditions are not all bad, but in the end they need to be anchored truthfully in Scripture. My study of Scripture over the years has reinforced some of the biblical doctrines I learned at Bible college and it has exposed others as mere theological prejudice. Let me underline that Jesus loves us so much He will challenge our foundations and push us toward truth.

Beware How You Judge People: John 7:24

“24) Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

This is a profound verse that is often skipped over. It is so easy to get things wrong because we do not see the way God sees.

I am reminded of Samuel who was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint a new king in the place of Saul. The text says; “6) When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’S anointed is before Him.” 7) But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

(1 Samuel 16:6-7) Wow! What an amazing revelation.

First impressions are often wrong and what is inside of a man is more important than what is on the outside. Few saw any real potential in Tom Brady. He was way down in the NFL draft and did not look very athletic. The first week in training camp he told his new coach that he was the best investment the New England Patriots ever made. That brought a chuckle. After leading his team to an unprecedented six Super Bowl Championships, he may arguably be the best quarterback of all time. He has shattered nearly every record in the book... and he’s still playing.

There are hundreds of stories of the underdog becoming the super dog. The least likely to succeed often goes on to shatter all records. Many school or college dropouts defy the odds and go on to start multi-million dollar companies. In fact, the list is so long one might conclude that college ruins the potential of many people. The book “Rich Dad, Poor Dad” was one of the most insightful books I’ve ever read to unmask the problem.

A study of thousands of churches around the world by an organization called “Natural Church Development” produced a shocking discovery. They discovered there is a direct correlation between the size of a church and the formal theological education level of the pastor. The study revealed that the greater the amount of formal education the smaller the church. The more formal book learning the more difficult it was for the pastor to relate to his people and preach practical and relevant messages. Pastors who were called into ministry from other careers with real life experiences were radically more effective than those coming right out of a seminary with no practical life experience.

Beware of how you judge people. There is a story of a carpenter's Son who was rejected and despised by the religious elite, but He went on to change the world. They totally misjudged Who was behind those calloused and blistered hands.

The Controversy Grows: John 7:25-31

"25) So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? 26) Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? 27) However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from.'" 28) Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. 29) I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me." 30) So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. 31) But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?""

One of the misconceptions surrounding Jesus as highlighted in this text was His home address. The religious leaders correctly surmised that the Messiah was not to come from the region of Galilee. He was to originate in Judea.

Human memory is short. This issue was settled thirty-three years earlier as recorded in Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 2:1-23 surrounding the magi from the east and the slaughter of the infants in the region of Bethlehem and all of its environs. Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem of Judea, but He was raised in Nazareth of Galilee.

Altogether, there were over 100 prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the only person who has fulfilled every one of them. They dealt with details ranging from His birth and His childhood to John the Baptist as His forerunner, the messages and healings He performed, and specific details of His crucifixion and resurrection. When all the prophetic pieces of the puzzle are put together the end result is a picture of Jesus Christ.

The controversy at the Feast of Booths in John Chapter Seven came about because people were missing many pieces of the puzzle. But they came together fast. Little did they realize that in a few short months at the Passover many more pieces of the puzzle would unfold on a hill called Calvary.

God always gets it right! The whole phenomenon of biblical prophecy puts the Bible in a category all of its own among religious writings. The Bible is indeed the Word of God and Jesus Christ is its main character from Genesis to Revelation.

In Search Of A Case to Support Their Verdict: John 7:30-32

"30) So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. 31) But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, 'When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?' 32) The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him."

As far as the Chief Priest and Pharisees, the verdict was pronounced and the sentence decided upon before the case was ever heard. Their goal was to remove Jesus because He was gaining influence and popularity with the people. He was exposing them and their corrupt stranglehold on the system.

But the people were impartial and absolutely correct. They were listening and watching. They heard His teaching and beheld the signs He was performing. They got it right; "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man does, will He?"

But the religious leaders had already decided His fate. They were plotting to kill Him, but they were not in control of the timing. "His hour had not yet come." Keep in mind, we are only in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of John and His fate was already pronounced.

They only had one problem, they needed to find a crime to match His sentence. But Jesus was absolutely innocent. In fact, He was sinless. They faced a daunting task, but they were determined to get the job done.

The next several chapters contain a number of attempts to assemble a case to support His sentence. Some are ridiculous, others are pathetic and honestly, a few are even comical. Stay tuned as the saga unfolds.

Another Promise of the Spirit: John 7:37-39

"37) Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" 39) But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

The last day of the feast, Jesus stood up and foretold of a new dispensation to come. He talked about the age of the indwelling Holy Spirit for every born-again believer. This is also called the church age. This age has been with us since that day of Pentecost promised at His ascension. (See Acts 1:1-8)

Acts 2 records the actual event of the giving of the Holy Spirit. Though there is much controversy surrounding Pentecost, it was the game-changer Jesus talked about. That river is still flowing. The focus shifted from outward effort to inward empowerment. The emphasis switched from trying to keep the Law by self-effort to the inward sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 tries to capture the difference. It is truly profound.

This was the living water Jesus had promised the woman at the well. (See John 4:10-24) The Holy Spirit is always associated with life and not death. He is associated with relationship and not religion. He is associated with power and not weakness. He is associated with truth and not error. He is associated with love and not hate. He is associated with abundant fruit and not fleshly works. He is associated with joy and not misery. He is associated with healing and not hurting. He is associated with abundance and not famine. He is associated with unity and not division. He is not pictured as a slow drip, He is pictured as a mighty flowing river.

But wait; did you notice that Jesus talked about “rivers of living water” and not just a “river of living water?” In other words, the ministry of the Holy Spirit has many tributaries. There are many watersheds to explore, drink from, navigate and experience. He is there for virtually every aspect of life.

Satan desires nothing more than to bring confusion, discord, and rejection about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because trusting in Jesus with saving faith and learning to walk in the Spirit is the only avenue to God’s abundant supply for this life. I would encourage you to embrace Him and not reject Him.

Ask Jesus to lead you into a deeper life and the amazing, glorious walk with Him offered to all who believe and receive Him as Savior, Messiah, and King! .

The Temple Police Return Empty-Handed: John 7:40-53

“40) Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." 41) Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? 42) Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" 43) So a division occurred in the multitude because of Him. 44) Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. 45) The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" 46) The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." 47) The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? 48) No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? 49) But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." 50) Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, 51) "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" 52) They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." 53) Everyone went to his home.”

I love this story. Jesus had huge influence and a big following with the common people. Many were listening to His message and beginning to believe in His true identity, but the religious leaders would have no part of it. They hated Him and were bent on His destruction.

I especially like verses 45-46. Keep in mind, the religious leaders most likely sent the temple guard which had the authority to arrest Jesus. But the text says, “45) The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" 46) The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." To their credit, the temple guard took time to watch and listen. At this point, they were intrigued by Jesus.

Even Nicodemus, who was one of the religious leaders, tried speaking common sense and truth to the Sanhedrin (This was the official ruling counsel of the Jews made up of the chief priests and many of the religious elite), but they were deaf to his logic. (See verses 50-52) They had decided on the death sentence for Jesus, but they needed a crime.

From this point forward, both the Gospel of John and the other Gospels record numerous attempts to find grounds to condemn Him. The first starts in the very next chapter with the story of the woman supposedly caught in the act of adultery. Stay tuned as the plot unfolds and the Sanhedrin searches for a crime.

The Woman Caught in Adultery: John 8:1-11

"1) But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2) Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. 3) The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, 4) they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5) Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6) They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. 7) But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8) Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9) When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. 10) Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11) She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

Several things can be noted from this story. First, notice that Jesus had spent the night on the Mount of Olives. This may be another example of His prayer life. He often slipped away and spent the entire night in prayer. It is also possible that because He arrived late all rooms were taken. In other words, once again there was no room for Him in the inn and He may not have had time to make a booth for lodging.

Second, notice that early in the morning Jesus went again into the temple and was teaching the people. He loved His Father's house and was returning it to the purpose of being a place to meet with God and learn about Him. The temple had become a place for a lot of festivity and activity, but shamefully little was being done to actually focus on God or minister to people. It would be wise for the modern church to learn from this travesty.

Third, the scribes and Pharisees interrupted His teaching by throwing a woman caught in adultery before Him and the crowd. They were asking for a sentence of condemnation followed by an execution. This is so sad. The purpose of the temple was to present sacrifices to cover sin and seek God's mercy and grace. Unfortunately, the world often feels more condemnation from the church than grace and mercy.

Fourth, the issue was not about the woman. She was merely being used in an attempt to bring Jesus down. I often wonder why the man was not brought forward as well as prescribed by the Law. Notice verse six; "6) They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him..." The feast of booths had not yet ended and they were already on the hunt for a crime to charge Jesus with in order to condemn Him. Corruption does not value people, it uses them.

Fifth, notice that they cited Moses and the Law. They were trying to pit Jesus against Moses. In response, Jesus knelt down twice and with His finger He wrote on the ground. This was an ironic gesture. Two times it is recorded that the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God. He first wrote the copy that Moses destroyed when He came down from the Mountain. Then He wrote the second copy when Moses returned to the Mountain. I believe Jesus was giving them an object lesson. He was saying; "This is the finger that wrote the Law and gave it to Moses."

Sixth, they were correct that the Law was the basis of establishing both guilt and judgment. Unfortunately, the text does not record what Jesus wrote on the ground, but when they heard it they began to leave one by one. He may have been putting their names next to the sins they had committed. Suddenly, each of them stood before the crowd guilty and deserving of the same sentence they wanted to inflict on the woman.

Seventh, notice that Jesus said; "He who is without sin among you, let Him be the first to throw a stone at her." We are all sinners. But there was one person in that crowd who could have picked up a stone and that was Jesus. But He had a problem, the whole crowd stood before Him equally guilty. There were not enough stones in the Temple to carry out the sentence they demanded, because to be fair, He would have had to stone everyone. But John 3:17 says that "God did not send His Son into the world to Judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him."

Eighth, noticed that one-by-one the scribes and Pharisees left until Jesus was standing alone with the woman. If you choose to judge, you will be judged. If you choose to condemn, you will live with condemnation. By your standard it will be measured to you. Hypocrisy is everywhere. It is not restricted to Christians and the church.

Finally, when all the accusers were gone, Jesus graciously spoke to the woman. He said, "neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more." He did not condemn her, but neither did He condone her life-style. She had met Jesus, it was time for a new life. I believe He gave both forgiveness and the grace to change.

As we conclude this text, I must note the parenthesis beginning with John 6:53 and ending with John 8:11. This indicates that this story was not included in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John. Neither was it recorded in the other gospels. Let me share my theory.

The Gospel of John was the first book that John wrote shortly after the early church started. It was one of the earliest Gospels written. Because John was the only Apostle to die from old age, he may have added this story years later around the time He wrote the book of Revelation. From that point forward it was consistently added to every manuscript. That's my theory, and I'm sticking with it! I have no problem with the authenticity of this story.

Jesus is the Light of the World: John 8:12

"12) Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

We now have another one of the seven “I AM” claims Jesus made about Himself in the Gospel of John. He now claims to be the “Light of the World.” He promises that those who follow Him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

John develops this theme even more in 1 John 1:5-7. Let me quote the text; “5) This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” This text captures much of what Jesus was talking about.

At the very minimum, “The light” includes truth vs deception, holiness vs sin and corruption, love vs hate, the wisdom of God vs the wisdom of the world, and the kingdom of light vs the kingdom of darkness. Light and darkness are polar opposites. They have nothing in common. Light gives life while death and destruction abide in darkness.

This also solves another mystery left over from Genesis Chapter One related to light. On the first day of creation God said, “Let there be light”, but He did not create the sun and moon until day four. However, the text says that God created vegetation and plants on day three. (Read the full account in Genesis 1:1-19) Many have asked, “So where did the light come from for the plants to flourish on the third day if the sun was not yet created?” The biblical answer is that “God was the light.” More specifically, “Jesus was the light of the world.”

(And, that happens again at the end of the world, as John writes in Revelation 21:23&24 when the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven to earth: “23) And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who illuminated the earth at creation, will be the light that illuminates the Holy City for all eternity. Truly, He is the one who is and was and is to come – just like He said.) -dj

Ponder the implication of what Jesus was claiming about Himself. Suddenly the benefits of knowing Jesus and walking with Him are mind-bending. The applications are manifold.

Why would anyone want to remain in Satan’s kingdom blinded with darkness of every kind when coming to Jesus Christ translates them to the Kingdom of light? This is partially why knowing Jesus Christ starts such a radical transformation in people. When you add the indwelling Holy Spirit to this equation the potential for growth, wholeness, healing, and service are amazing!

This claim Jesus made about being the Light of the World added more fuel to the fire of conflict between Him and the religious leaders. By the time Jesus leaves the Feast of Booths His doom was settled in the minds of the Jewish leaders. They were determined to kill Him because of who He claimed to be and because of the influence and momentum that was building around Him.

The Self-Witness of Jesus Christ: John 8:13-18

"13) So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."
14) Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I testify 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 am not judging anyone. 16) But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me. 17) Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. 18) I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.""

The Pharisees had become Opponent #1 for Jesus. This is comical because as you read the Old Testament there was no office of "Pharisee." They were self-appointed authorities and critics. And they had the audacity of standing in judgment of Jesus who fulfilled hundreds of Old Testament prophecies.

Jesus made an interesting observation about them; "they did not know where they came from or where they were going." They were unsure about human origin and destiny. They were like many atheists and agnostics today. People without an eternal perspective often make tragic judgment errors in morals, ethics, and theology. Beware who you listen to as your authority and who you allow to teach and mold your children.

The biggest problem with the Pharisees was that they were judging according to the flesh. Human flesh is a poor compass for truth. Just take a few moments and read Galatians 5:16-24. It never surprises me how foolish the wisdom of the world can be. The world often defends wrong as right while condemning everything good and wholesome.

The Pharisees suffered from Religious Legalism. It can miss the mark as badly as secular humanism. Both end up distorting the truth and missing the mark. Neither of them are Gate-Keepers of Heaven.

Jesus made it clear that He was not alone in anything He said or did. He was perfectly harmonized with the Father. He and the Father were on the same page. Jesus was so in line with Scripture that He was indeed "the Living Word." Suddenly John 1:1-2 takes on significant meaning. Let me refresh your memory; "1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God."

The case Jesus made about Himself was indisputable. They could disagree with Him, but they could not biblically disprove Him or discredit Him. They only had one option remaining – they were bent on destroying Him.

Beware of any movement that cannot defend its case on the platform of public discourse. It will soon switch to oppression, ridicule, personal attacks, and destruction. Jesus was in the crosshairs of such a group.

Another Claim to Deity: John 8:19-20

"19) So they were saying to Him, "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; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.”

Jesus in no way backed away from His claim of being Deity. In verse 19 Jesus comes close to theological double-talk. It's like He was saying, “If you met me you would have met the Father, because we are one and the same.” At least, that was the understanding He conveyed.

He does the same thing in John 10:30 when He finally says, “I and the Father are one.” He continued to feed the allegation from the Jewish leaders that He was “calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” (John 5:18)

There is no escaping the charge that Jesus was claiming to be God. This was, in fact, the charge that brought His crucifixion. (See Luke 22:66-71) Jesus was not condemned for any crime that He committed, He was crucified for Who He claimed to be.

An Understanding Road Block: John 8:21-30

“21) Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.” 22) So the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’” 23) And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. 24) Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” 25) So they were saying to Him, “Who are You?” Jesus said to them, “What have I been saying to you from the beginning? 26) I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” 27) They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. 28) So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things 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 spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.” John 8:21-30 NASB

Worldly-minded people cannot comprehend heavenly truth. I used to get discouraged when people blanked out when listening to the gospel. It seemed so simple and logical to me.

I’ve worked hard over the years simplifying the message and finding creative ways to communicate the Gospel. I confess, I’ve listened to some preachers that gave me no clue as to what they were trying to say. I don’t want to be the weak link in the understanding process.

But then I realized that even Jesus hit an understanding road block with some people. This text is a great example. Jesus told them that they were going to die in their sin simply because they refused to listen and accept His message. They saw signs and wonders, heard countless messages, read many Scriptures and observed Him in actions; and they still went brain dead. They refused to accept that He was the Son of God and the only means to salvation.

In verse 28, Jesus made an interesting prophecy. He said; “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things

as the Father taught Me.” Mark 15:33-41 gives an interesting fulfillment of this promise. As the witnesses observed the crucifixion and what happened the moment Jesus died, even the Roman centurion said, “Truly this was the Son of God.” (See Mark 15:39)

Today we have another problem. People are so absorbed and distracted by life they don't have time to stop and listen. They don't care enough to even read the gospels or examine the evidence. Death is a non-reality to them. Eternity is at stake, but it doesn't register until they sit at a funeral or deal with the death of a loved one.

The good news is found in verse 30; “As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.” I marvel and rejoice when people come to Jesus. When the Holy Spirit turns the lights on, it can be so amazing. It's like the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, and the dead living. The transformation is literally astounding.

Truth Encounter: John 8:31-33

“31) So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “32) If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33) They answered Him, “We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’” (John 8:31-33)

What is freedom? Some people think in terms of political freedom. They understand freedom as “no government rules, regulations, or oppression.” Unfortunately, this thinking gives rise to rebellion and anarchy.

Others think in terms of moral freedom which they define as “being able to live as they please and do whatever they want.” They measure freedom as the absence of good and bad, right and wrong. It is expressed as extreme relativism. This thinking almost always drifts into unchecked immorality, a seared conscience and becomes selfish and exploitive.

But Jesus was talking of spiritual freedom which can be defined as “the inner desire, power, and character to live pleasing to God.” In this text, He made the case that this freedom of character is based on truth. It is the outgrowth of exposing inner deception and replacing it with God's truth.

Hence the Christian life becomes a progressive truth-encounter resulting in more and more freedom. As we study God's Word and consciously embrace more and more truth, the Holy Spirit actively accomplishes an inner cleansing, healing, and freeing process. This appropriation of truth becomes powerful, liberating, and transforming.

We can conclude that truth is the fuel that powers inner transformation, and inner transformation is the dynamic process to personal growth and outer change. The potential for personal growth as a result of this process is unlimited. To be clear, this process is based on consciously embracing and applying biblical truth. (Read Matthew 7:24-27, Hebrews 4:11-12 and Ephesians 4:22-24 as a basic introduction to this concept.)

There have been numerous effective discipleship and counseling programs developed based on this concept of “truth encounter.” It is sufficient to say that God wants every Christian to experience an intentional and ongoing truth-encounter as the core of their Christian life and walk. The key is to “continue” or “abide” in His Word.

(The only national flag in the world to contain a picture of an open Bible is the flag of the Dominican Republic, and it is open to John 8:32! The idea of freedom – and freedom in Christ, specifically– founded more than one nation! It’s an indisputable fact that no one has changed the world more than Jesus Christ –and He is most certainly not done yet!) -dj

Freedom Journey: John 8:34-38

“34) Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35) The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36) If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37) I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38) I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.””

The worst possible bondage is to sin. It kills people from the inside out. The long-term consequences are eternal and unimaginable.

Jesus is the Bondage-Breaker! He came to break the power of sin and to set people free. Verse 36 says it all; “If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” He can break every bondage and give new life.

This freedom is not only eternal, it starts in this life. Being born again doesn’t make you perfect, but it does set you on a path of growth toward maturity, sanctification, freedom, and holiness.

Living by grace and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit by faith produces a notable change in people. I believe it is a process that starts with the event of salvation and extends through our whole life. It moves a person from hellishness to holiness –from being lost to being saved, from eternal damnation to eternal salvation – and it is all based on the work Jesus Christ performed on the cross. He broke the power sin, He set the captives free! “If therefore, the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”

Good Dad, Bad Dad: John 8:37-47

“37) I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38) I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.” 39) They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40) But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41) You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” 42) Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43) Why do you not understand what I am

saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44) You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45) But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46) Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47) He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.'"

This exchange becomes very sharp and heated. Jesus exposes the religious leaders and the true source of their malice. He clearly states that though they were descendants of Abraham they were being influenced and controlled by their father, the devil. Jesus was very direct and serious about this accusation.

In verse 44, Jesus points out that the devil is both a liar and a murderer. He has been so from the beginning. This now brings us all the way back to the book of Genesis. We discover from Genesis 3 and 4 that Satan used lies and deception to bring about the fall of mankind, and he most likely influenced Cain to kill his brother Able. (See 1 John 3:11-12) Jesus was saying the religious leaders were infected and influenced with the very same spirit.

Theologically, every child is born into the kingdom of darkness. It is not until a person is born-again that they are translated from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. (See Colossians 1:12-14, Ephesians 5:6-14) This is a truth we must all accept. We need Jesus to save us not only from our sin, but from ourselves.

Fallen human nature has an affinity with sin and Satan because all people are born into his family. We carry the mark of the fall. There is no other explanation for how the religious leaders could boast in the Law, and yet plan and plot murder by deception.

I need to stress this point: being religious does not cut off the influence of sin and Satan. The Pharisees and priests were very religious, but Jesus pointed out they were doing the deeds of their true father, the devil. A person needs to be born-again and filled with the Holy Spirit in order to break this unholy alliance. Even then, the flesh has a magnetic pull to the dark side.

Jesus had a mission to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-8) His trip to the cross was not the devil destroying Him; it was His victory over the unholy alliance formed between Satan and humanity at the fall. The blood of Jesus atoned for the sins of mankind. He made a way to set people free from sin and slavery to the devil. (See John 8:36) That was the point Jesus was making in this text.

I encourage you to read this chapter over and over again. Read until it sinks in and you get beyond the surface of the conflict Jesus was having with the Pharisees. Jesus was exposing profound doctrinal truth in this exchange. Read it until the lost condition of your own heart is exposed and you truly understand the grace and mercy of God in sending His Son to accomplish human redemption.

The Life Principle: John 8:48-51

“48) The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly 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) But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51) Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."” (John 8:48-51)

In this chapter, the Jewish leaders made three brutal charges against Jesus. First, if you go back to verse 41, they claimed He was born in fornication. Someone had done the research and discovered the controversy surrounding His birth. Unfortunately, they failed to consider Isaiah 7:14; ““Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” This was a tragic oversight on their behalf. The mystery surrounding His conception was actually a fulfillment of prophecy.

Second, they accused Him of being a Samaritan. (See verse 48) Undoubtedly, this stemmed back to John chapter four and His huge ministry success in Samaria. The whole city believed in Him. The Orthodox Jews were actually racist and had no dealings with Samaritans. (See John 4:9) When critics cannot win the debate based on the strength of their arguments, they often resort to mockery and character assassination. They wanted to treat Him like a Samaritan.

Third, with the same broad paint brush they accuse Him of being demon possessed. (See verse 48 again) Remember back in verse 44 Jesus had just made the theological claim that they were of their father, the devil. They now throw a similar charge back at Him. The big problem was that He did not act like anyone under demonic influence. In fact, He was the embodiment of godliness. They could not find a single violation of the Law in His character, conduct, or teaching.

The real problem was that their understanding box was too small. He could not be Who He claimed to be because in every way He looked like a man, He walked like a man, and He had basic needs for food clothing and shelter like any other man. Granted, He did amazing miracles, taught profound messages, and made extreme claims, but there was no way they were going to accept His claim of being Deity. Why? Because if He was the Messiah, then they would lose their power as religious rulers. (And the wealth, comfort, and status that went along with it.) -dj

But in verse 51, Jesus made a statement that was profound. He presented the “Life Principle.” Look at it. “51) Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My Word he shall never see death.” In other words, He had the words of life. They, by contrast, were trying to put Him to death.

If you look carefully at this chapter, Jesus is presenting the case that God is always associated with truth and life while the devil is always associated with lies and death. Just take a moment and review verse 44. The devil has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning. It is part of his nature.

This is a universal principle. The kingdom of light is always about love, truth, and life. The kingdom of darkness is always about bitterness, lies, and death. If you want to know the spirit behind any movement, just examine the fruit.

Claim to Pre-Existence: John 8:52-59

"52) The Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.' 53) Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom 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) and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. 56) "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and 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 born, I am." 59) Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

This is one of my favorite passages in the entire Gospel of John. In this text, Jesus makes two bold claims. First, He claimed that He personally knew and pre-existed Abraham, and second, He claimed to be the eternal "I AM" that revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush. (See Exodus 3:13-15) In John 8:58, Jesus claimed this "memorial name" revealed to Moses. This is an inescapable claim to be the God of Exodus 3:13-15.

Keep in mind, this chapter opened with Jesus kneeling down twice and writing with His finger on the ground during the controversy with the woman caught in adultery. As noted previously, many see this as Jesus saying "this is the finger that wrote the Law on the tablets of stone and gave them to Moses."

Make no mistake, the Jews knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. He was claiming pre-existence. He was claiming to be the God who appeared to both Abraham and Moses and later gave the Law.

They were moved to anger. They picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus somehow eluded them. I am very curious how He pulled off His disappearing act on this occasion, but His mission had to be fulfilled during the Passover and not the Feast of Booths. As John the Baptist said a few years earlier, Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. (John 1:29) This shows the extent to which Jesus was in control of the circumstances. He was not a victim.

At this point, even the casual reader is confronted with the bold claim Jesus made of being Deity. It is no longer possible to remain neutral about the person and works of Jesus Christ. He was either Who He claimed to be or he was a liar, a lunatic, or an impostor.

Jesus is More Powerful than Karma: John 9:1-7

"1) 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 would be born blind?' 3) Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4) We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5) While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.' 6) When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his

eyes, 7) and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing."

To those of us from the west, this story might not seem like a big deal. But for a Hindu, this is absolutely profound. For them, to be born blind is part of unchangeable karma. It is a judgment or plight passed on because of personal sins committed in a previous life or the sins from parents. But one thing they know for sure, it is impossible to change one's karma. You just have to accept it and live with it.

When Jesus healed this blind man, He was saying "I am greater than karma." I enjoy preaching on this text in India. It is always thought-provoking and often opens the doors for the gospel. Their mindset is, "If Jesus can change a person's karma, I better listen to Him. Maybe he can change my karma as well." Keep in mind, to the Hindu, karma is the same as destiny.

There is no greater way to illustrate being the light of the world than healing a blind man who lived all of his life in darkness. I often wonder what it was like being blind all of your life and suddenly being able to see? As the story unfolds Jesus gets huge mileage out of this healing, and He gets a new and courageous disciple.

I have a missionary friend in Africa who has a unique spin on this story. On a recent trip to Uganda, John Pipes pointed out that there were two stories of Jesus healing a blind man. In this story, Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud and put it in the man's eyes. Mark 8:22-26 records the story of Him healing a different man that was brought to Him. In this case Jesus spit in his eye and then laid hands on Him. In other words, Jesus used different methods in each story to get the same results.

John pointed out how easy it is for the body of Christ to split over trivial issues. He went on to talk about "the Spitters" and "the Mudders." They will forever argue over the right way to heal a blind person. Is it best to spit directly in the eyes or is it better to spit on the ground and put mud in their eyes? We both got a laugh out of his humorous application, but he did illustrate a tragic point: we often argue about the method and forget the main point –it's about Jesus and not the spit.

The Controversy Grows: John 9:13-34

"24) So a 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 then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26) So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" 27) He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" 28) They reviled him and said, "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 is from." 30) The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. 31) We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. 32) Since

the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33) If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." 34)

They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out."

A good thing turned out to be another major controversy. You would think that everyone would rejoice over a blind man being healed, but that was not the case. The healing gave too much traction to Jesus and His claims of being Deity. As a result the Pharisees set out to discredit and destroy the former blind man. It is an irony in the story, but they became totally blind and deaf to what God was doing and saying through this miracle. There is so much to learn from this miracle.

In fact, the story was so impactful that John devoted the entire chapter to it. Let me make an observation: Jesus didn't heal everyone, but the healings He performed became major open doors to advance the gospel. He got maximum mileage out of each one to them. The same happened in Acts 3-4. The healing of the lame beggar resulted in two chapters of advancing the gospel.

I believe in healing today, but I recognize two crucial points. First, God does not heal everyone. And second, the healings are not about the healings themselves, they are about advancing the Gospel. They are about seeing people come to faith in Jesus Christ. Advancing the gospel is always the goal and agenda behind any divine healing.

In the end, it was the healed blind man who came to faith in Jesus Christ and worshiped Him. (See John 9:35-41) Unfortunately, the Pharisees and religious leaders remained tragically blind. Spiritual blindness is much more of an impairment than physical blindness. It has eternal consequences.

The Parable of the Good Shepherd: John 10:1-21

"1) Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2) But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3) To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4) When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5) A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6) This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7) So Jesus said to them again, "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 hear them. 9) I am the door; if anyone enters through 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. (John 10:1-10)

In John Chapter Ten, Jesus shares the parable of the good shepherd. It builds well on Psalm 23. The picture is that of a shepherd bringing his sheep down from the summer grazing in the mountains and into the winter pasture lands close to the town or city. Each evening the flocks

were gathered and placed in a corral. Oftentimes more than one flock would share a corral. They would hire night keepers to watch over the flocks in the corral. There was only one gateway into the corral and the night watchman would usually sleep in front of the gate.

In the morning the shepherd would come and the gatekeeper would open the door. As the shepherd called for his flock, the sheep knew his voice and followed him. He called each one by name. They were accustomed to their shepherd's voice from the long spring, summer, and fall in the mountain range when they were with only him 24/7. But there was a problem.

Because the corrals were close to the city, thieves would occasionally come with the motive to steal a sheep from the corral. They would not enter by the gate, but climb up some other way, usually when the night watchman was sleeping. The usual habit was to kill one sheep and throw it over the fence. If a whole gang approached the corral with evil intent, the night watchmen would often flee and leave the corral at the mercy of the thieves.

The intent of the thieves was only to steal, kill, or destroy. Sometimes unscrupulous shepherds would hire gangs to wipe out entire flocks of their competitors near the city gate, especially if the flocks were gathered for market the next day or week. Lower supply meant more money for them.

With this background in mind, the parable becomes more palatable. When Jesus said, "I am the Door"; He was literally saying "I am the only way into God's Kingdom." He was claiming to be the only way of salvation. When He said "I am the Good shepherd" He was claiming to be the true owner of the sheep.

To us, this is a beautiful parable of comfort and ownership. But to the religious leaders it was an indictment against them. He was saying that He was the true door and not Moses or the Old Testament prophets. By contrast, they were mere night watchmen.

He was also comparing the priests, Pharisees, and religious leaders to thieves. He pictured them as the evil gang that was stealing God's flock and claiming ownership of them. They did not have the right motives, good intent or the best interests of the people in mind. They were using and exploiting God's people.

This parable resulted in a huge division among the people. It drove a strong wedge between Jesus and the religious leaders. It exposed them. It served to fuel their hatred of Jesus even more. They wanted to kill Him even more.

Jesus is My Good Shepherd: John 10:9-11

"9) I am the door; if anyone enters through 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."

These three verses say so much. We discover two more "I AM" claims of Jesus. First, He says "I am the door." He is the only means of salvation. He is the only way into the Kingdom of God.

Second, He says "I am the good shepherd." He loves His sheep. He willingly lays down His life for them. His eye is on His flock. He puts His people before Himself. He was making a prophecy that He was on His way to the cross to purchase the salvation of His flock with His own blood.

Finally, in contrast to the enemy who is like a thief that comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly. Jesus is about life and not death. He is committed to our good and not our harm. He does not stop all pain or suffering in this fallen world, but He can and does cause all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (See Romans 8:26-30)

I have chosen Jesus as my savior and shepherd. He has chosen me to be in His flock. I don't understand everything that happens in this life, but He is good and I yield my life to His compassionate plan. He has more than fulfilled Psalm 23 in my life!

Let me close by copying something I wrote years ago on Psalms 23 to illustrate how good Jesus is to us:

The 18 promises of Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is known by more people than any other chapter in the Bible. It is only six verses long, but is made up of 18 phrases. It is packed with meaning. Let's walk through it phrase by phrase and see if we can squeeze some fresh meaning from it. I cherish the 18 promises packed into this Psalm for those who know and love God!

Vs 1

1. "The Lord is my shepherd" - that's Relationship!
2. "I shall not want" - that's Supply!

Vs 2

3. "He makes me lie down in green pastures" - that's Rest!
4. "He leads me beside quiet waters" - that's Refreshment!

Vs 3

5. "He restores my soul" - that's Healing!
6. "He guides me in the paths of righteousness" - that's Direction!
7. "For His name's sake" - that's Purpose!

Vs 4

8. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" - that's Testing!
9. "I fear no evil" - that's Protection!

10. "For Thou art with me" - that's Faithfulness!

11. "Thy rod and thy staff" - that's Discipline!

12. "They comfort me" - that's Assurance!

Vs 5

13. "Thou dost prepare a table for me" - that's Provision

14. "in the presence of my enemies" - that's Hope!

15. "Thou hast anointed my head with oil" - that's Consecration!

16. "My cup overflows" - that's Abundance!

Vs 6

17 "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life" - that's Blessing!

18. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" - that's Eternity!

He Knows Your Name: John 10:3-5, 14

"3) To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4) When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5) A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."14) I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,"

The text stresses it over and over again. "Jesus knows His own." He calls them by name. It reminds me of the often repeated calls in Scripture; "Moses, Moses", "Samuel, Samuel", "Zaccheus", "Saul, Saul." He knows your name and my name as well!

But that is just part of the story. He also goes before His own and watches over them. He is the Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for His sheep. According to John 10:10, He came to give us abundant life. As the good shepherd, He searches out the green and lush pasturelands for His own flock.

Part of our calling as Christians is to get to know and trust Jesus as our shepherd. From that trusting relationship comes healing, safety, peace, and obedience. It is a secure relationship. He does not abandon His own.

The only problem with sheep is that they sometimes stray. That's why we need a shepherd to watch over us. He protects us not only from danger from thieves and predators, He also protects us from ourselves. If He is calling your name, it's either for salvation, safety, or sanctification.

He will not force you to follow Him, nor will He drag you through life against your will. He is a perfect gentleman. This text makes it clear that He goes before His own and calls them by name. It is up to His sheep to follow Him. Only one question remains; “Are you following Him?”

One Flock With One Shepherd: John 10:16

“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”

It is often overlooked or goes unnoticed, but Jesus is starting to hint that His flock is much larger than just the nation of Israel. Though He was sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He had other sheep which were not of that flock.

I see this as a reference to the Gentiles. Jesus laid down His life for all of humanity. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son...” The Great Commission is to every nation. (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8)

So what does this mean for you and me? Well, as I talked in the previous section, Jesus knows your name as well. He had you and me on His mind when He went to the cross. The gospel is for all people.

Here is the exciting part: He wants all of His people to become one flock with one shepherd. Only Jesus Christ can bridge the prejudice barrier. His family is color, gender, and age blind. In Christ, we have the basis and mandate for unity, cooperation, and affirmation. What the world talks about, Jesus Christ delivers.

Jesus Volunteered for the Cross: John 10:17-18

“17) For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18) No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.””

This text makes it clear that Jesus volunteered for the cross. The Father did not force Him and the devil did not overcome Him. He laid down His life to pay the debt humanity owed because of His own love and compassion.

Note that the verse says He had authority to lay it down and He had authority to take it up again. Some try to discredit the sincerity of His sacrifice based on the fact of His coming resurrections. The argument is that He had little to lose because He was only dead for three days.

To the contrary, I would argue that the severity of pain and suffering in His death surpassed that of any other human. Why? First, His humanity felt every ounce of the physical pain in the crucifixion. Second, His holy Divine nature was literally tortured the moment He became sin. I cannot fathom the spiritual pain He endured. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21) Third, His substitute sacrifice meant the judgment for the sins of humanity was poured out on Him. Fourth, that

means He endured the full impact of God's wrath. Fifth, from the moment He became sin He was abandoned by the Father. (See Matthew 27:46) Sixth, according to Ephesians 4:9-10, He literally descended to hell between His death and resurrection. I cannot not imagine the magnitude of wrath the evil fallen angels afflicted on Him. Finally, He endured ultimate rejection and abandonment by His own people, His disciples, and His family. He endured the cross alone.

Make no mistake, the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep. He did it for you and for me. The nails that held Him to the cross were made of love. Scripture indicates He had the authority to veto the crucifixion at any point. (See Matthew 26:53)

Let this sink in: He willingly went to the cross for you and me. We had a debt we could not pay, He paid a debt He did not owe. Nothing but love motivated Him. I have questioned many things in my life, but from the moment I fully understood what Jesus endured on the cross for me, I never again questioned His love.

Jesus Monopolized the Public Discourse: John 10:19-21

"19) A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. 20) Many of them were saying, 'He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?' 21) Others were saying, 'These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?'"

There was no doubt that Jesus was controversial. He monopolized the headlines and He was the subject of most conversations. Everyone seemed to have an opinion about Him. Some said He was insane or had a demon. Others recognized His miraculous powers gave credence to His claim of being Deity. It was His claim of being Deity that thrust Him to center stage. Why? Because His claim was backed up by amazing signs and wonders.

No figure in human history has occupied the stage of human conversation and literature more than Jesus Christ. More books and commentaries have been written about Him than anyone in history. He has been the subject of more songs, poems, literature, and art work than anyone else. His Historical prominence cannot be attributed to a lunatic.

Ok, I concede that Mohammad has many followers, but I've never heard a song about Him or even seen a movie attributed to the amazing peace and transformation he brings into a person's life. The contrast is actually stunning when you compare the two.

So it is a fair question; "What is your opinion of Jesus Christ?" Being neutral is not a good answer unless you've never taken the time to seriously read the Gospels. If that is the case, I challenge you to invest a few hours and sit down and read the Gospel of John from cover to cover in one sitting. Even a slow reader can read in it about the time it takes to watch a football game –and the stakes are much higher.

In the Father's Hands: John 10:24-30

"The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do

not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 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. I and the Father are one.” (John 10:24-30)

There is security or assurance in salvation. Those who belong to Jesus know His voice and follow Him. He gives them eternal life and they will never perish.

After giving these promises, Jesus said, “and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.” He keeps them! He protects them! He guards them! He is the guardian of their salvation.

If that were not enough, He then goes on in the next verse and says, “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.” This is double safety.

I take great assurance in the promise that God and not myself is the protector and guardian of my salvation. He has accepted me. I am one of His sheep. I am a child of God through faith in Christ.

But you ask, “What if you sin after salvation? Can salvation be lost?” I also have a question; “Do sheep ever stray or do children ever disobey?” You see, your question is actually about the love, commitment, and ability of the shepherd or parent.

The whole context of John 10 is that Jesus is the Good Shepherd; He doesn't lose any that are His! He is the protector of the salvation of His sheep! The big question in this text is; “Do you belong to Him?”

Hold Those Stones: John 10:31-39

“31) The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32) Jesus answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?' 33) The Jews answered Him, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.' 34) Jesus answered them, 'Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS '? 35) If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 36) do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? 37) If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38) but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.' 39) Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.”

We must go way back to verse 24. Do you remember what they requested of Him? Let's review; “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

I don't know about you, but I don't like double-talk. Jesus told them in verse 30. “I and the Father are one” and how do they respond? They pick up stones to stone Him!” When Jesus

challenged them; "The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."" (John 10:33)

In one sense, they had a good point. They clearly understood that Jesus was claiming equality with God. But, they had forgotten their Old Testament catechism lesson.

Let me quote from the prophet Isaiah. "6) For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7) There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

It sounds to me that if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, He was well within His bounds claiming to be one with the Father! Jesus made a profound point when He repeatedly asked, "What do my works testify about me?"

The bottom line was that the Jewish leaders allowed their emotions to obscure their intellect and good judgment. They were blinded by jealousy and rage. They had long abandoned all objectivity and reason. Their minds were made up. They were bent on destroying Him.

But, "Hold Those Stones!" If He was indeed the Messiah, He could not die by stoning. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 describe His death in stunning detail. The demise of the Messiah would not come through a Jewish stoning. It would be accomplished by a Roman crucifixion. Not one prophetic detail could be off. Jesus had to fulfill everything the Old Testament said about the Christ.

Please understand this point, many of those prophetic details were beyond the control of a mere human. Others in the story had to fulfill their script to the letter for Him to be the Messiah. Altogether there were over 300 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled them all right down to the soldiers piercing His hands and feet and casting lots for His garments. (Psalm 22:16-18)

Think about it: One stone recklessly thrown would have sparked a mob frenzy in this story and derailed Jesus from consideration as a candidate for being the Messiah. If Jesus was indeed a mere man, He would have had no control over the actions of this mob. What an irony! Without realizing it, by not throwing those stones, they themselves became a key exhibit in defense of His claim of being Deity.

Bethany Beyond the Jordan: John 10:39-42

"39) Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp. 40) And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. 41) Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." 42) And many believed in Him there."

According to John 1:28, John the Baptist was baptizing at "Bethany beyond the Jordan." Some Bible maps place it south of the Sea of Galilee in Decapolis, but that would have put it nearly

100 miles from Jerusalem. Other Bible geography sources point to a site about six miles north of the Dead Sea and roughly 25 miles northeast of Jerusalem.

(Mark 1:5 says, "And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." Given this verse in Mark, and excavations at this second site from 1996 to 2005, scholars are reasonably certain that the second site is indeed where John was baptizing. Even so, for "all the people of Jerusalem" to go out to hear John the Baptist in this hot, barren, desert wilderness would not have been easy or convenient.) -dj

It was undoubtedly a place inhabited by more common people who were less accepted and less tolerant of the pious religious elite who ruled Jerusalem. It was considered a "safe haven" for publicans, sinners, and what would have been considered the rednecks of Jesus' day. Notice that Jesus was both welcomed there and felt safe. Why? Simply because it was beyond the reach and jurisdiction of the temple police.

The bottom line is that people knew of the location and many came to Him. The place had been made popular by the ministry of John the Baptist who was a maverick himself and at odds with the Pharisees or Sadducees who ruled Jerusalem. (See Matthew 3:4-12) He courageously exposed them when they came to this site to spy on him.

There is no record of any teachings or possible miracles Jesus performed while staying in Bethany beyond the Jordan at this time, but the text indicates that conversations were much more open and less guarded than in Jerusalem. People were able to talk openly without being censored by the religious police. I am an advocate of both freedom of religion and freedom of speech. The text concludes by saying that "many believed in Him there." That often happens when people are free to talk and investigate the claims of Jesus Christ without fear of reprisal.

We can conclude from these few verses that Jesus was always on mission. He was about His Father's work. He was ministering to people and not merely hiding out or passing time. People were drawn to Jesus wherever He went and news of His presence spread quickly.

The thing that stands out to me in this text is that Jesus was real and not merely religious. He was holy but not pious. He refused to play the political game of the religious elite who looked good on the outside but were sinful and corrupt on the inside. I confess, I have a distaste for fake people. I am very at home in "Bethany Beyond the Jordan."

Wrestling With Disappointment: John 11:1-8

"1) Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2) It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3) So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4) But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." 5) Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6) So when He heard that he was sick, He then 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?" (John 11:1-8)

This chapter contains the amazing story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The first eight verses paint the backdrop to the story.

Remember that chapter ten ended with Jesus and His disciples leaving both the city of Jerusalem and the region of Judea for "Bethany beyond the Jordan."

As the story opens, Lazarus had become very sick. He and his sisters lived in the town of Bethany which was only a few miles from Jerusalem. In essence, the religious leaders in Jerusalem had put a warrant out for His arrest. It was valid in the entire region of Judea which included their home town of Bethany.

That's what brought the protest from His disciples when Jesus decided to go back to Judea as recorded in verses 7-8. They thought a "cooling down time" was highly advisable.

Notice the text specifically says that Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary was the one who had anointed His feet with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. Luke 7:36-50 relates the full story.

When Lazarus turned for the worse, the sisters immediately sent for Jesus. He was their only hope and they viewed Him as their "Health Card." They believed He loved them and would come immediately and heal Lazarus. But the text says; "So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was." (John 11:6)

Has Jesus ever let you down? Have things turned out differently than you expected? Be assured that God has a greater plan and He doesn't love you any less. Over the years, I have discovered that God seldom works the way I want or expect. Looking back, I discovered that He had greater plans and those plans often included my personal growth and development.

As the story unfolds there are many subplots. One big lesson emerges from the disappointment of Martha and Mary over the perplexing delay of Jesus. It deeply challenged their view of Him and even drove a wedge between them. But notice when Jesus decided to go back to Judea it drove a wedge between Him and His disciples. He was putting their lives and safety at risk. They were equally perplexed. This story placed Jesus between two very opposite expectations from people He dearly loved.

I have been to prayer meetings very much like this. The farmers were crying out for rain and the bride and groom were asking for extended sunshine at their wedding celebration. Godly people can place very different expectations on God.

Let me conclude today by saying that personal disappointments may be painful, but they can become huge stepping stones for growth when anger and bitterness are pushed aside and replaced with love and grace. Try to remember that the big work God needs to accomplish is most often within us and not anchored in some external event.

The Reality of Death and Dying: John 11:7-16

“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) This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." 12)The disciples then 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 was speaking of literal sleep. 14) So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15) and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." 16) Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.""

The story of Lazarus was included to force us to deal with the subject of death and dying. It seems that Jesus intentionally delayed His trip back to Judea so that Lazarus in His absence would succumb to death.

The disciples knew that Jesus was not safe back in Judea. Thomas summarized his feeling in verse 16; “let us also go that we might die with him.” I see a little sarcasm in this statement. He was saying, “If we go back there we are going to die with Lazarus.” The first half of this chapter is pretty gloomy because it is filled with the reality of death.

In verses 9-10, Jesus launches into a discussion about day and night, and light and darkness. The backdrop to the conversation adds the contrast of life and death to the discussion.

Two parallel columns to the familiar contrast are beginning to form. This is a hold-over from John 10:10 in the previous chapter; “the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” We could add truth and deception, love and hate, peace and fear, and God and Satan to the growing contrast as well. There are two very opposite forces at work in the world, and whether we like it or not they impact all of us on a daily basis.

Jesus delayed so long He missed the funeral which back then happened the very day a person died, but He walked right into the peak of the grieving process. Death and grieving go hand in hand.

In my world travels, I have witnessed death and grieving in many different cultures and world religions. Let me make an observation –those who don’t know Jesus are usually given to despair, but those who truly know Jesus Christ have a basis of hope. The contrast is as stunning as the growing list above.

There’s a lot of gloom and doom in these verses, but I want to emphasize the point that facing the reality of death, dying, and grieving is the focus of this chapter – and the build-up to what happens next. Stay tuned because this subject touches all of us.

Grief and Mourning: John 11:17-27

“17) So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18)

Now 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) Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. 21)

Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22)

Even now I know that whatever You ask of 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; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26) and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27) She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." (John 11:17-27)

Death and despair often dance with each other. Such was the case in this story. When Lazarus died, he left these two sisters to fend for themselves. We have no record what happened to their parents, nor how old the three siblings were. It is likely that Lazarus was of legal age when tragedy took the parents and the responsibility to provide for his younger sisters fell on his shoulders. He was now the sole figure that legally held the family estate together. Tragedy forces some people to grow up quickly.

With his death, the two sisters faced a very uncertain future. Close relatives were undoubtedly positioning themselves to claim the estate. Others may have been considering a forced marriage to claim title to land holdings. Change and uncertainty were in the wind for these two sisters.

The status of women in Jewish culture made their fate even more shaky. They were mourning far more than just the loss of their brother. They faced the loss of their dreams and future ambitions as well. Their whole future hinged on their brother Lazarus, and now he was gone.

I maintain that not all funerals are equally remorseful. The passing of someone who has endured a long battle with terminal illness is not as difficult to deal with as the sudden loss of the young spouse, mother, or child. Families who have endured multiple losses over short periods of time also rate high on the stress and misery index. In the case of these two sisters, they most likely recently lost both parents and now their only brother was also gone.

With this background, we can now calculate the sad and remorseful situation Jesus walked into with these two sisters. It is likely that the whole community of Bethany and many from the surrounding region joined the mourning. Even the religious elite in Jerusalem who wanted to destroy Jesus stood aloof and exercised restraint to honor the mourning process.

This background helps explain verse 19; "and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother." The attention of the whole region was focused on the town of Bethany and the grieving process of these two sisters.

This is a good place to touch on the subject of grief and mourning. Notice the outpouring of community support in this story. Even Jesus and His disciples were there to lend spiritual and

emotional support for these two sisters. The Bible upholds mourning and grieving as part of the healing process. It is normal.

However, as can be seen in this story, different people cope with death differently. Jesus respected the mourning process of both sisters. He did not judge either of them for openly expressing ill will toward Him for abandoning them. People in grief often express anger toward God. Many wrestle with the nagging question; “God, if you love me, why did you let this happen?”

I do not attempt to defend God in these situations. However, let me note from the text that Jesus understood their hurt and accepted their dismay. I maintain that God understands our doubts, hurts, and questions that arise from the painful side of life. Actually, I believe He invites them as part of our grief and healing process.

We need to respect the mourning process while granting love and support for people. I give a lot of latitude for people to grieve differently. No two people grieve the same. Some grieve openly with loud weeping and mourning. Others grieve silently and inwardly. Some seem to heal and move on quickly while others take months and even years to process their loss.

When you are there to support people in grieving, you don’t need to know all the answers to difficult questions. Just be there and be yourself. Lend a helping hand where needed. Remember that you also are going through a grieving process. Don’t be critical of yourself. Do your best and let God do the rest.

The Resurrection and the Life: John 11:25-26

“25) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26) and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?””

We now have the next profound “I AM” claim of Jesus. Each claim was backed up by a unique miracle or sign. For example, His claim of being the Bread of Life was backed up by feeding the five thousand.

Remember the context of this claim. The eyes of everyone in the region of Judea were on the two sisters who had previously been orphaned and were now grieving the loss of their brother. What better way or time to punctuate the claim of being the “resurrection and the life” than at the tomb of a man who had been dead for four days.

It was one thing to believe Jesus had the power to heal a sick man, it was entirely another to believe He could raise him from the dead. His words to His disciples back in verse four now take on new meaning; “But when Jesus heard this, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” His delay was merely setting the stage for His miracle.

The Bible promises that everyone will one day be raised from the dead. Some to judgment and eternal death and some to glorification and eternal life. In this verse, Jesus is claiming to be the

One who will one day raise all the people from the dead. What was about to happen in this chapter merely serves as a preview of greater things to come.

The response of Martha to this claim of Jesus was profound; “11) She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”” Martha makes a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. She was believing both in Him and His identity as the Son of God and the Christ. She embraced what the religious leaders rejected and were trying to destroy Him for claiming.

This verse captures the full essence of saving faith. It is embracing the full Deity of Jesus Christ. It is putting faith in Him as Savior and Lord. It is acknowledging His sovereignty and embracing His will. He became the new lens through which Martha viewed truth and reality.

One more thought –this time for the religious leader who rejected Jesus Christ, “How do you keep “the Resurrection and the Life” in the tomb?” Very shortly, death was going to be swallowed up in victory by a far greater sign than raising Lazarus from the dead. Another stone was going to be rolled away, but this time by angels.

Jesus Wept: John 11:32-37

“Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?””

Though by no means the central focus of this story, it does reveal how death affects God. When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus, the text simply says, “Jesus wept.”

It affected Him. He openly displayed emotion. He felt grief. He was moved by the scene in front of Him.

He was weeping over more than just the tragic scene in front of Him. He was weeping over the cause of death. He was weeping over sin and human depravity. I believe God had been weeping over the lost and pathetic condition of humanity since that unfortunate day when Adam and Eve turned their back on God to embrace sin.

According to Romans 8:18-25, human sin has deeply marred and affected all of creation. The world is forever scarred from the deep and extensive consequence of human sin and depravity. There is much for God to grieve over.

I share this observation that you might know how your sin and actions affect God. Do you know why Jesus wept? Was it simply because He cared? Even many in the crowd observed that Jesus wept because He loved Lazarus and his family.

He was also prepared to do something about it. Raising Lazarus from the dead was a bandage for an immediate tragedy. Fixing the brokenness of humanity would take a far greater sacrifice. It would cost Jesus everything!

Unbind Him and Let Him Go! John 11:33-46

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?” So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.” When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.” (John 11:33-46)

This story always stretches me. It has many applications. For example, what happens when God begins working beyond your theological box? In the story they were okay blaming Jesus for not being there to heal Lazarus... but wait –“You want me to remove the stone?” Healing the sick was within their realm of belief, but raising the dead after four days... that was off-limits.

Or was it?

Very reluctantly and after an extended argument, they finally removed the stone. Then Jesus spoke those words, “Lazarus, come forth.” What a scene followed the command of Jesus; (44) The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

I have no clue how Lazarus with all the grave cloth stood up and walked out of the tomb, but there he was standing in front of the crowd. Then Jesus had to command them again, “Unbind him, and let him go.” They were reluctant to remove the grave cloth. Why? Because in their thinking he was still dead.

I wonder how often we keep people Jesus has saved and changed in grave cloth? We refuse to unleash them from their former sins, failures, and bad choices. We would rather keep them in the grave than give them a second chance.

I also wonder how many people are walking around bound in grave cloth because people are unwilling to release them? For that matter, let me ask you a question, “Are you all bound up with

lies and deceptions about yourself and past failures to the point of not being free?" Jesus calls us to freedom, but we need to lay aside our grave cloth!

Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) He came to give us new life. Don't go through life wrapped in grave cloth when Jesus can set you free!

True Words From Unlikely Sources: John 11:45-53

"45) Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. 46) But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. 47) Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48) If we let Him go on like this, all men 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 take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." 51) Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52) and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53) So from that day on they planned together to kill Him."

I sometimes wonder why people can respond so radically differently. Many saw the sign Jesus performed by raising Lazarus from the dead and believed in Him. Others went straight to the Pharisees and reported everything that happened.

The chief priests and Pharisees responded by calling an emergency council meeting. They feared that Jesus was putting them out of business.

Moved by a moment of inspiration, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, stood up and said; "You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nations should not perish."

They did not connect the dots, but that was the exact role of the Passover Lamb. At that very moment they set the stage for the words of John the Baptist to be fulfilled. (John 1:29) Jesus was about to be selected as the true Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.

The Week of Preparation: John 11:53-57

"53) So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. 54) Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples. 55) Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. 56)

So they were seeking for Jesus, and were 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 was to report it, so that they might seize Him."

It is sometimes hard for me to believe or understand how violent the Jewish religious leaders became. They were plotting the death of Jesus. It was in the air. Everyone could sense it.

Notice that Jesus was aware of the pending danger, so He took His disciples and retreated to a small city called Ephraim near the wilderness. Some scholars place this about five miles east of Jericho. It would have been slightly over twenty miles from Jerusalem, which was a long day's walk by foot.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand and many came early to purify themselves. Notice that the clock was ticking. Barnes' Notes on the New Testament says; "This purifying consisted in preparing themselves for the proper observation of the Passover, according to the commands of the law. If any were defiled in any manner by contact with the dead or by any other ceremonial uncleanness, they were required to take the prescribed measures for purification, Leviticus 22:1-6. For want of this, great inconvenience was sometimes experienced. See 2 Chronicles 30:17,18. Different periods were necessary in order to be cleansed from ceremonial pollution. For example, one who had been polluted by the touch of a dead body, of a sepulcher, or by the bones of the dead, was sprinkled on the third and seventh days, by a clean person, with hyssop dipped in water mixed in the ashes of the red heifer. After washing his body and clothes he was then clean. These persons who went up before the Passover were doubtless those who had in some manner been ceremonially polluted."

The Lamb of God was also preparing Himself. He was spotless and beyond reproach. He was the sinless sacrifice that would die in place of the people. (John 11:50) He was very aware of the clock and what was about to happen. The story line is now approaching the final week in the earthy life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion is near. John devotes nearly half of His Gospel account to this final week.

The Thief is Exposed: John 12:1-8

"1) Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2) So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3) Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4) But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 5) "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people? " 6) Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. 7) Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. 8) For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."" (John 12:1-8)

Jesus and His disciples now move back to Bethany and were dining in the home of Simon. The text specifically says that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were present at the meal. It was only six

days before the Passover. Very little of the conversation that evening was recorded, but two very noteworthy events took place.

First, during the meal Mary rose up and took a pound of very costly perfume and began to wipe it on Jesus' feet with her hair. The pound of pure nard was most likely purchased for the funeral of Lazarus, but was no longer needed. Her actions that night were prophetic. Jesus said; "let her alone that she may keep it for the day of My burial." Evidently, nard had a shelf life. Jesus was saying that the rest should be kept for His own burial.

(In today's money, three hundred denarii would be about \$40,000! Mary was pouring out the finest and best perfume available at the time on the feet of Jesus. It was powerful stuff –as John tells us, the aroma filled the whole house! And, because most scholars agree that this took place on Wednesday of Holy Week, there is a very good chance Jesus still smelled of it as He was crucified just two days later. As they drove the nails through His feet, His blood would have mingled with the traces of perfume still on those feet from Mary's beautiful gift of anointing.) -dj

Second, it was at this point that Judas spoke up and rebuked Mary for her waste. He pointed out that the perfume could have been sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor. He sounded very pious.

But Jesus saw through him. He knew that Judas was a thief. Judas carried the money bag and was in the habit of skimming money for himself. He loved money above all else. It is no wonder that Matthew records that Judas went directly from this meeting to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. (See Matthew 26:6-16)

What motivated Judas to betray Jesus? Was it love for money? Was he offended that Jesus publicly rebuked him so he set out to settle the score? No matter the reason, Satan will exploit any crack in our character to lure us into sin. Beware of what you become in the pursuit of what you want!

The Divine Apologetic: John 12:9-11

"9) The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. 10)

But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; 11) because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus." (John 12:9-11)

The miracle is not about the miracle, rather it is intended to be an open door for the gospel. Lazarus had become a living validation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. He was walking and talking proof of the claim Jesus made of being the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25-26) Many were coming to see him as well as Jesus.

With this phenomenon the chief priests decided to cast a very broad net. They now plotted to put Lazarus to death as well because many were believing in Jesus because of him.

I maintain that God does not do indiscriminate miracles. If they were common they would not be miracles, they would be the norm. This is where I part from the "name it claim it" crowd who

teach that everyone deserves a miracle. Then they ask the gullible people to send in a big check as seed money for their miracle. This is not taught anywhere in the Bible. It is exploitation and fraud.

Don't get me wrong, I have no problem praying for the sick, anointing people with oil in the Name of Jesus and asking for signs and wonders, but when God does do a miracle I recognize it is for the purpose of advancing the gospel. In fact, we have discovered that God delights in confirming the gospel with timely manifestations of His power and glory!

Hebrews 2:3-4 talks about this phenomenon. I call it "The Divine Apologetic." Just as in the case of Lazarus, God is the One who punctuates the gospel with signs and wonders. As you read the gospels and the book of Acts you discover that God got huge mileage out of every miracle He performed. They were not common, but they were very productive for spreading the gospel.

The Triumphant Entry: John 12:12-19

"12) On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13) took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel." 14)

Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, 15 "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT." 16) These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. 17) So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. 18) For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. 19) So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."" (John 12:12-19)

We celebrate this event as Palm Sunday. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people welcomed Him like a king. They cut off Palm branches and laid them on the road for Him. They cried out "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel."

Notice that this was a fulfillment of the Psalm 118:26 and Zechariah 9:9. The prophecy from Zechariah was very specific including Him sitting on the colt of a donkey. According to John 12:16, the disciples did not recognize the significance of this event until after the fact. The crowd spontaneously did this and no one planned or manipulated the script.

It appears that the resurrection of Lazarus prompted this event. Many in the crowd had witnessed this sign. It is very likely from the context that Lazarus was following after Jesus when He entered Jerusalem. Keep in mind, Jesus had just come from a dinner which had Lazarus, Martha, and Mary present.

As the Pharisees looked on, they were provoked by what they saw. They were jealous. They were moved to desperation to get rid of Him. One must wonder if the young Pharisee named

Saul from Tarsus was also an onlooker and deeply influenced by the events surrounding the crucifixion. In Philippians 3:5-6, he mentioned his rank among the Pharisees and his zeal to persecute the church.

No matter, it was the finest moment for Jesus. It is hard to believe that in one week the crowd moved from crying out "Hosanna" to "Crucify Him." What a difference one week can make.

The Greek Trigger: John 12:20-23

"20) Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; 21) these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22) Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. 23) And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

These verses may sound mundane, but wait –there was something about the Greeks seeking Jesus that served as a trigger in His thinking. He did not respond by consenting to see them, but rather by saying; "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." It was like that first domino that caused the rest to fall in rapid succession.

This reminds me of John 1:11-12; "11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name," The acceptance of the Greeks signified the rejection of the Jewish religious leaders. They did not receive or acknowledge Him as the Christ, but the Gentiles were starting to embrace Him.

This began a definite transition in the teaching of Jesus. From this point forward, He started talking openly about His coming death and departure and the coming age of the indwelling Holy Spirit that would be ushered in after His ascension.

Everything He said and taught from this point forward was His finale. Every word was calculated and every point was intended to prepare His disciples for the close of His earthly ministry.

He was preparing them for a new era that would embrace the Gentiles and catapult the Gospel into the whole world. The mystery of "the Church " was about to be birthed. The Holy Spirit was about to build a new temple on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:11-22)

The Pharisees and chief priests thought they were rejecting Jesus as the Christ. In reality they were sealing their own doom. The Christ was rejecting them and the whole corrupt religious system they governed. In less than fifty years, the temple in Jerusalem would be gone and they would be swept into irrelevance. They would vanish and be gone as the church would thrive through persecution and spread worldwide and embrace every nation, tribe, and tongue.

But there is another phenomenon possibly hidden in this otherwise obscure text. Ironically, Greek and not Hebrew was destined to become the new language to usher in the church age

and the writings of the New Testament. The Old was about to be fulfilled and the New was about to come.

That's part of what intrigues me with this text. John 12:20-22 is a small clue that Greek might serve as a significant piece to the puzzle moving forward. (John 19:20 may be another clue) This timely visit from these Greeks definitely had significance for Jesus.

Living For a Greater Cause: John 12:23-26

"23) And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24) Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25) He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. 26) If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

Jesus now starts talking openly about His coming glorification. The seed of the gospel was about to be planted. He was heading to the cross as the Passover Lamb to die for the sins of humanity. All eyes would be on Him. Little did the religious leaders realize, but they were about to plant a seed that would produce fruit for thousands of years and into eternity. The Son of Man was about to lay down His life for mankind.

Life is an amazing gift. It needs to be invested wisely. Jesus made it clear that those who selfishly embraced their own life and lived hedonistically for themselves would lose it, but those who followed in His steps and invested their life in the Kingdom of God would keep it to eternal life.

I believe in living with an eternal perspective. I believe in laying up treasures in heaven. I believe it is important to hold the things of this life and world with an open hand. I do not believe God owes me anything, but I owe Him everything. I believe those who say they love Jesus need to follow Him. They need to walk in His sandals and take up their own cross out of love and obedience for Him.

I also believe as verse 26 says, that those who follow Jesus are honored by the Father. He blesses His own. He takes good care of them. He pours out His love, mercy and grace on them. He is good and those who serve Him partake of His goodness. (See James 1:16-18) We are His fruits. We become the expression of His love, fullness, and goodness. Jesus Himself as the Good Shepherd watches over His own. (Reflect back on John 10:1-30)

Notice how John 12:24 ends by talking about bearing much fruit. This is a preview of John 15:1-17. It is amazing how people who love Jesus have led the way in virtually every field from leadership, science, medicine, music, art, engineering, business, sports, and industry. The Father is glorified when His people bear much fruit. It happens when people lay down their own life and follow the path of Divine providence. God delights in working through His people.

A Crisis for the Kingdom of Darkness: John 12:27-33

"27) Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28) Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29) So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30) Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31) Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32) And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33) But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die." (John 12:27-33)

Jesus knew exactly what He was facing. He knew the hour was near and the kind of death He would suffer. The phrase in verse 32 that says, "If I be lifted up from the earth" indicated a crucifixion. The next verse made that clear.

Notice that His soul had become troubled. Knowing the details of the future brought anguish to His soul. He was aware of everything, including the torment of being separated from His Father when He took the sins of humanity upon Himself.

Notice from verse 28 that the Father spoke from heaven. His voice was like thunder. This is reminiscent of Exodus 19:18-25 when God spoke to Moses and the people from Sinai where they had gathered to receive the Law. God very rarely speaks with an auditable voice from heaven, but when He does people should listen very carefully. According to Matthew 3:16-17, the same thing happened when Jesus was baptized.

Jesus drove the point home that the voice did not come for His sake. In verse 30, He indicated that the voice came for the sake of the people. We might assume from the context that both the Jews and the Greeks who were seeking Him heard the voice. (Review John 12:20-22) It left an unforgettable impression on the crowd.

Verse 31 is also profound. Jesus said, "Now judgment has come upon this world, now the ruler of this world shall be cast out." Something imminent was about to happen. A better translation might be "now crisis has come upon this world." This was not the final judgment, but the crucifixion was the event that changed everything. Notice that the phrase "this world" was repeated twice. It indicates a shaking of the powers in authority at that moment of time. The grip of the kingdom of darkness over humanity was about to be shaken.

I want to stress this point: The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed things in the spiritual realm. Jesus was about to defeat sin and darkness. The cross would break the grip of Satan over humanity and usher in new possibilities for the redeemed. He was about to disarm the rulers and authorities of darkness. I would encourage you to study Colossians 2:8-15 to get the full impact of what Jesus was hinting at in these verses. Let me stress, "that hour" changed everything and brought a major shake up or "crisis" to the ruler of this world.

Because of that hour, everything moving forward would be radically different. On the cross, Jesus ushered in a new era and changed the very makeup of the administration over the earthly realm.

In the next five chapters of the Gospel of John, Jesus begins to introduce some of the dynamics of this change. They include: 1) a new commandment of agape love, 2) a new ministry of the Holy Spirit, 3) a new intimate and dynamic relationship with God for every believer (the wall of separation between God and man was removed on the cross) 4) the possibility for new abundant fruit bearing through every believer including common people, and 5) new dynamics of prayer and intercession. This summary barely scratches the surface of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

Do not live in darkness or deception. Every believer must step into these dynamics and walk in the newness of life. We can only experience victory as we appropriate our new position in the kingdom of light through Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Walking in the Light: John 12:33-36

“33) He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. 34) The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” 35) Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going.” 36) “Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.” (John 12:33-36)

The Light of the World was about to finish His mission. The incarnation was coming to an end. The Son of Man was about to go to the cross. For this purpose He came into the world, but His public ministry to that generation was unparalleled in human history. As John so eloquently said in 1 John 1:1-4, they got to hear, see, touch, and interact with the Christ up close and personal. But the cross would end His earthly sojourn.

I like the words of Jesus to Thomas after His resurrection; “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are those who did not see, and yet believed.” (John 20:29) If they could not believe in Him when He was walking among them, how much harder would it be after His departure?

The battle between light and darkness was going to intensify after His departure. As we saw in the previous post, Jesus accomplished much through His death and resurrection. Satan’s grip on humanity was greatly weakened, but his ability to lie, deceive, twist and manipulate still remained. He was about to double down His efforts to blind people to the truth. (See 2 Corinthians 4:3-4) The assault from the kingdom of darkness on humanity was about to take on new fervor.

Jesus was imploring people to respond to the light while it was present and shining. Dark days were coming. He entreated but left them responsible for their own actions and decisions. He did not force them. Jesus dignified people by honoring their free will.

I have no problem entreating people to embrace the gospel when the Holy Spirit is prompting them. I implore them not to ignore Him or push Him away. I have seen many over the years warm up to the Gospel for a season and then become cold, calloused, and closed. I have seen

men, women, and teens weep and even cry under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, then walk away and deceive themselves into thinking they can trust in Jesus tomorrow. Unfortunately for many of them, tomorrow never comes. The enemy soon hardens their heart and blinds their eyes.

This can happen to believers as well when they ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Over the years I have watched God wrestle with people during a message about applying some area of truth, deal with a sin or compromise, or sense God leading them to step out into some area of service or calling. Often they will verbally express good intentions but walk away uncommitted to obey or change. When God's people fail to obey the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, it gets smaller still.

Satan is not only the tempter, he is also the preventer. He tries to entice people into doing things they should not do, but he also works overtime trying to stop them from doing the good things they should do. Have you had battles getting in your daily time in the Word or in prayer? Have you intended to be patient and loving with your spouse, parents, or children only to get distracted and do nothing? Is it on your heart to go on a mission trip someday? Guess what? The preventer has a grip on you.

Jesus said it well; "Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you." "Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light." Don't close your ears to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Respond quickly and completely. As the old hymn says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: John 12:37-43

"37) But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38) This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" 39) For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40) "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." 41) These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. 42) Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43) for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." (John 12:37-43)

This text underlines the sovereignty of God. Many in Israel did not believe because God hardened their hearts in order to bring about the crucifixion. Paul talks about this theme at length in Romans 9 and 11. Paul states in Romans 9:15-21 that God has the right to do as He pleases. According to Romans 11:11-32 the rejection of Israel resulted in the Gospel spreading to the whole world.

I in no way minimize this mystery of God. To the contrary, I embrace it because it underlines the fact that God and not man is in control. Jesus made the point that the prophet Isaiah saw this

glorious truth about God. I shudder at the thought that fallen human depravity and the kingdom of darkness governs the outcome of history or the details of my life.

Though many rejected Him, in John 12:42-43 John observed the fact that many even of the rulers did believe in Him, but fear of the Pharisees silenced them. The root problem was that they "loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

I would argue that this condition is worse than unbelief. It results in willful disobedience. It comes back to the principle that Eve was deceived but Adam willfully disobeyed God. Therefore, he deserved the greater guilt and condemnation.

I confess, I sometimes fall into both of these traps. On the one hand, I worry about things that are God's responsibility and on the other hand I am way too conscious of what others might think of me if I come across over the top for Jesus. I say with Paul, "Oh what a wretched man that I am!"

But I do not live with self-condemnation or despair. Why? Because I take refuge in His unconditional love and the amazing grace of God that called me into His family and accepted me in the Beloved. I see myself as a work in progress. In myself, I have every reason for insecurity, but in the sovereignty of God I find unshakable peace. Why? Because this mystery means that my salvation rests in God and not in myself. I am His child. He promises to never leave or forsake me. He not only called and saved me, He also accepted me and sealed me with His Holy Spirit.

The end result is a sincere walk of faith. I think Augustine got it right when He said, "Pray as if it all depends on God, work as if it all depends on man." The Bible weds Divine Sovereignty with Human Responsibility into a mysterious and yet harmonious marriage. Confusion and error results when they are divorced from each other.

Interdependence of The Father and Son: John 12:44-50

"44) And Jesus cried out and said, 'He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. 45) He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. 46) I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. 47) If anyone hears My sayings 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) He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. 49) For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. 50) I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.'"

Jesus again stressed the point that He and the Father are One. Verses 44 and 45 stress their utter interdependence. To believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father and to see Jesus is to see the Father. I like the way John expressed this in John 1:18; "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

The writer of the book of Hebrews also expounded on this phenomenon in chapter 1:1-4. Let me quote it at length: “1) God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2) in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3) And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. 4) When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.”

No matter how you try to explain this interrelationship, the incarnation placed Jesus in the created realm as the manifestation and revelation of God. It was this persistent claim of being Deity that led to His crucifixion. To see Jesus is to see the Father.

Many scholars believe this has always been the role of Jesus in the godhead. They view every epiphany of God in the Old Testament as being the pre-incarnate Christ. They believe He was the One who walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. He was the One that appeared to Abraham and told of the pending judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was the One that appeared to Moses at the burning bush and later to Joshua. I agree with this view.

Notice that Jesus in verse 47 that Jesus emphasized the point that He did not come into the world to judge the world but to save the world. His work on the cross is the only basis of human salvation. He is the only way to God.

However, Jesus did not hide the fact that there would be a judgment. He pointed out that His words would be the basis of that judgment. It is vital to read, study and apply the Word of God to our lives. There will be a test and ignorance will not be an excuse for failure.

The Love Brand: John 13:1

“1) Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” (John 13:1)

John chapter thirteen literally marks the beginning of the end. Jesus and His disciples were together celebrating the Passover meal. Of the four gospels, only John expands into the details of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

No wonder John was called “the Apostle of love.” John observed that even though it was the last hour, Jesus put His disciples first. John said, “He loved them to the end.” Love would be a theme in all of John's writings.

It must not be missed that love is what motivated Jesus to go to the cross. He would not end this meal before He gave a new commandment for His followers to love one another. Agape love was the brand of Jesus and His followers.

Never miss this point, He loves you and me as well. Love did not end at the cross, it was just beginning. There is no end to the supply of God's love.

The Progressive Demise of Judas: John 13:2

"2) During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,"

This verse begs the question, "How much influence or control can the devil have in a person's life?" As the Passover meal begins, the devil merely plants a seed in the heart of Judas.

This might be equivalent to the flaming darts that Paul mentions in Ephesians 6:16. No matter, each person is responsible for what they do with their thoughts. Judas had the choice of resisting or nurturing the thought of betrayal. Having a temptation is not the same as following through with a sin.

The most amazing event in the chapter is that Jesus knew Judas was about to betray Him, and yet He lovingly washed his feet. He came to seek and save the lost. His grace was there for Judas as well had he only cried out to the Savior. I Corinthians 10:13 applied to Judas as much as to any human; "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Judas rejected the avenue of escape.

As the meal progressed, Jesus became troubled in His spirit over the one who was about to betray Him. (Vs 21) The anger over the public rebuke Judas received from Jesus in John 12:1-8 was most likely boiling in Judas. Anger always gives Satan a foothold. (See Ephesians 4:26-27) Sin never resolves itself. Greed also gripped his heart. Judas had already received the thirty pieces of silver for the betrayal. (See Matthew 26:14-16) He sold out not the Savior, but his own soul.

Then it happened: When Jesus handed Judas the morsel of bread from the Passover meal, verse 27 says, "Satan then entered into him." The bread had no redemptive value for Judas. In fact, because his heart was not right, receiving the bread opened the door for a far worse plight. Satan now entered into Judas. He was now demon-possessed with Satan himself.

The disciples were oblivious to what was happening in the spiritual realm. Jesus told Judas, "What you do, do quickly." After receiving the morsel he departed immediately to go and get the soldiers to arrest Jesus.

Only after the traitor departed did Jesus launch into His most precious teaching of the full fruits and benefits of salvation. (See John 13:31-17:26) This section did not apply to Judas. He not only rejected Jesus as Savior and Messiah, he was bent on a mission to destroy Him. He was religious but lost. He was not one of the redeemed.

The tragic narrative was not over for Judas. Matthew 27:1-10 records the story of the guilt and self-condemnation Judas endured after his betrayal. Satan turned on him and drove him to

suicide. The thief only comes but to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10) The reward is the same for all who give way to the enemy of the human soul. Satan ultimately destroys his gullible victims. Death becomes his final claim on their soul.

A New Leadership Paradigm: John 13:3-20

"3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4) got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. 5) Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6) So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7)

Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." 8) Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9) Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." 10) Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you. " 11)

For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." 12) So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know 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, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15) For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16) Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17) If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. 18) I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.' 19) From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. 20) Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

Foot washing was customary in Jewish culture back in the days of Jesus. Most people wore sandals and as they walked on the dusty roads, their feet got dirty. As they entered a house, they would take their sandals off and then a lowly servant was designated to wash the feet of every guest before they entered the house.

In the preparation for the Passover, one detail was overlooked. No provision was made for the customary foot washing task. Not one of the twelve disciples would bow to fill that lowly role. According to the other gospel accounts, the disciples had continual arguments about who among them was greatest. (See Matthew 20:20-28) This tension was the prideful backdrop as to why they would not serve one another.

To remedy the situation, Jesus rose from the meal and girded Himself with a towel and began to wash their feet. He assumed the role of the servant. I can picture Him lovingly looking each of them in the eye as He served them. The gesture spoke much louder than words.

Peter literally broke with contrition when Jesus came to Him. It was unimaginable for him that Jesus should fill this lowly role by default. Keep in mind, Peter had recently made the proclamation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:13-20), followed by the trip to the mount of transfiguration where Jesus stepped into the fullness of His future glory. (Matthew 17:1-13) Peter knew that One much higher than Caesar or any earthly king was about to wash his feet. That profound realization motivated his initial refusal.

But the humility of Jesus was even more displayed. Shortly he came to Judas, knowing full well that he had already set in motion the betrayal. He may have even been carrying the thirty pieces of silver in his money bag with the many coins he had skimmed when Jesus looked into his eyes and then proceeded to wash his feet.

The bulging money bag at his side was affirmation of his recently achieved status. He had used his position to gain wealth which is the universal measure of success and social status. He may have thought, "This poor man from Nazareth is rightfully bowing before me." The words must have stung when Jesus acknowledged that not all of them were clean. Dirty money deceives, hardens, and pollutes the human heart.

Jesus was building His own Kingdom on a different value system. He was exemplifying humility above pride, servanthood above self-exaltation, and love above arrogance. No one is worthy to serve Jesus who cannot wash the feet of all others. Jesus was setting in motion a new paradigm and not a religious sacrament. Servanthood leadership was to be the core principle upon which He would build His church.

The Mark of True Christians: John 13:31-35

"31) Therefore 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 will glorify Him immediately. 33) Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 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, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35) By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.'"

Jesus waited until Judas had left to speak more candidly with the eleven. What He was about to say did not apply to Judas. He was now possessed by a very different spirit. His leaving marked the rapidly-approaching arrest of Jesus, His mock trial, and the crucifixion. Jesus was about to deliver a message to the eleven that summarized "things that were about to come." A new era marked by the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit was about to come. This phenomenon would be the theme of the next four chapters in the Gospel of John.

He introduced this message by giving them a New Commandment which automatically fulfilled the Ten Commandments. It was the command "to Agape one another." Agape love is the God kind of love. It is a separate word in the Greek language and not to be confused with brotherly love, marital love, erotic love, or general love as in compassion. The English language lumps them all together. The Greek language is very technical and accurate.

This love is a fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22) It was the love that God displayed for mankind by sending His only begotten Son. (John 3:16) It was the kind of love Jesus modeled for His disciples. (John 13:34) It is a love the world cannot know and the flesh cannot duplicate. It is giving, sacrificial, grace-based, and holy.

Jesus went on to say that this love would be the distinguishing mark of His true followers. "By this all men will know that you are my Disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35) The indwelling Holy Spirit would be the source of this new love.

I have heard the criticism that many atrocities have been committed in the name of Christianity over the centuries. Unfortunately, it is a valid complaint. However, I would hasten to say that claiming to be a Christian and actually being a born-again Christian are two very different things. The absence of agape love is a denial of a true relationship with Jesus Christ no matter the creed or doctrinal statement of the group. True Jesus-followers are marked by agape love. (John 13:35)

Peter's Good Intentions: John 13:36-38

"36) Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

37) Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right 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, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times." (John 13:36-38)

Peter was a rugged fisherman, but he found amazing fulfillment and satisfaction in his relationship with Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus no matter where that path might lead. To highlight the depth of his devotion, Peter said; "Lord, why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for you."

I am sure that Jesus appreciated his good will, but He set the record straight. In less than 12 hours Peter was going to deny three times that he even knew Jesus. Things were going to turn bad really fast. The arrest, scourging, and crucifixion were at hand.

But let me make an important observation: Communion with Jesus through the walk in the Spirit accomplished for Peter what three years of walking with Jesus could not. Some years later after living a Spirit filled life, Peter did lay down His life for Jesus – and he did it without hesitation.

I say this to underline the potential depth of communion and relationship with God available to every born-again and Spirit-filled believer. What happened to Peter after Pentecost far surpassed what he experienced before Calvary even though he literally walked with Jesus for nearly three years.

Those three years culminated in good intentions, but the indwelling Holy Spirit transformed Peter into a new man. You and I will never enjoy the three years of walking and talking with Jesus as He was in His incarnation, but we are called into fellowship with Him through His Spirit in the fullness of His glorification.

Never minimize the potential of your calling in Christ through the Spirit. Jesus used the good intentions of Peter to launch into the most amazing preview of the coming era of the Holy Spirit found in the Bible. Jesus was about to open a door to intimate relationship with God that the Old Testament prophets could only dream about. (See 1 Peter 1:10-12)

Behold, The Bridegroom Cometh: John 14:1-3

“1) Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2) In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3) If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

As Jesus prepares His disciples for His departure, He reminds them of the Jewish betrothal and wedding custom. With a formal betrothal to a bride, the young Jewish man would leave his bride with the mission of building a place for his wife. It usually consisted of a bridal chamber or a several room addition built on his fathers house. This is what Joseph was doing when he got word that Mary was pregnant. (See Matthew 1:18-25)

When everything was ready, the groom would gather his friends and begin to celebrate and form a wedding party. The bride had to be ready at all times, because she did not know when the groom was coming. As the wedding party started walking toward the bride's home, people would call down the street, “Behold, the bridegroom is coming.”

The wedding party would stop in front of her house and the groom would go in and receive his bride and take her to the house he had prepared. Friends and relatives would hear that the ceremony was beginning and start gathering at the new residence. Often the wedding ceremony lasted up to seven days.

It is noteworthy that the public ministry of Jesus began at such a wedding ceremony. (See John 2:1-11) It was at this ceremony that Jesus performed His first miracle.

Some scholars use John 14:1-3 as a pattern for the rapture of the church followed by seven years of tribulation on earth. During that seven years they infer that Jesus is celebrating with His new bride in His Fathers house in heaven where He has prepared a place for her. It is an interesting application of the Jewish wedding custom.

The significance of this text is that Jesus was preparing His bride. According to Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul said every believer is “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” In the Greek this has the idea of an engagement ring which is given to the bride as a promise that the wedding day would come.

It is noteworthy that in John 14 Jesus begins to talk about the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit. The betrothal was about to begin. Jesus was preparing His bride. He loves her so much He was about to lay His life down for her.

Ephesians 5:25-27 can be looked at as a commentary on John 14:1-3. When these two texts are combined they are profound. Jesus is now preparing His bride and someday as promised

He will come back to receive her to Himself. Even a casual Bible student can see how this fits into Revelation 19 and the marriage feast of the Lamb.

By the way, Revelation 21-22 gives a glimpse of the dwelling place Jesus is preparing for His bride. In the meanwhile, it should be the focus of the bride to make herself ready. (See Revelation 19:7-8) Matthew 25:1-13 adds significant beauty to this picture of a Jewish wedding ceremony. It is of utmost importance that the bride always be dressed in readiness for that glorious day.

In summary, Jesus was actually encouraging His disciples to not be troubled at what was about to transpire. He was preparing them for the next phase which was the betrothal period. He was hinting at the soon-to-come engagement ring of the Holy Spirit. He was promising that He was going to prepare a place for them and that He was coming back to receive them to Himself. He was emphasizing that He was in control.

The Only Way to God: John 14:4-6

"4) And you know the way where I am going." 5) Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do 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 but through Me."

In the previous three verses Jesus had told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them. He tried to prepare them for His pending death, burial, and resurrection, but they were either in denial or just not listening. (See Matthew 16:21 and John 12:27-32 as examples)

When Jesus said, "And you know the way where I am going" (John 14:4), He assumed they were tracking with what was about to happen. But when Thomas spoke up it shows the extent to which they were not connecting the dots. "Lord, we do not know where you are going, how do we know the way?" (John 14:5)

Thomas may have been thinking Jesus was going to slip away to the wilderness or back to Capernaum to avoid conflict and go into hiding. After all, Jesus had miraculously escaped death a few other times. (See John 7:35, 8:59, 10:40-42). But this was going to be different. His time had come. It was the Passover. The stage was set.

Jesus responded to Thomas with the most profound answer; "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through me." Jesus had no intention to go into hiding. He was going to His Father.

Some people mistakenly believe that all religions lead to God. This verse tears that teaching to shreds. Jesus is very exclusive and very emphatic. He is the only way, the only truth, and the only life. There is no other way to God but through Him.

Greater Works: John 14:12-15

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will

I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:12-15)

The Holy Spirit can duplicate the work of the Son, just like the Son can duplicate the work of the Father. The ministry of Jesus was about to be duplicated many times over through the body of Christ.

There is a question if "greater works" means quality or quantity. A reading of the book of Acts seems to support quantity. God performed amazing signs and wonders through the Apostles, but they did not eclipse what Jesus had done but were more of the same. (See Hebrews 2:1-4)

The Mystery of Prayer and Greater Works: John 14:12-14

"12) Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. 13) Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14) If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." (John 14:12-14)

The new era of the Holy Spirit would also mark a new era for prayer. Jesus was about to tear down the dividing wall between God and man and open direct access to the very throne of God.

In the Old Testament, the common person had to go through the priest to petition God. Even then there was a complicated sacrificial system in place. But the work of Jesus on the cross changed everything.

I like the way Hebrews 4:14-16 describes what Jesus accomplished; "14) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16) Let us therefore, draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The name of Jesus gives us open access to the throne room of God.

But it gets even better. According to Romans 8:26-28, both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are intercessors on our behalf. They intercede for the saints according to the will of God. This helps explain why all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

But it gets even better. The cross did not end the ministry of Jesus, it multiplied it. "The One" was now working through "the many." Greater works were about to be done because the presence of Jesus in the world through the Holy Spirit was about to be multiplied many times over through His church.

Let me summarize a theological truth that is very difficult to comprehend. According to Philippians 2:5-7, when Jesus underwent the incarnation and took on human form, He was restricted to time and space. Let that sink in. It had huge implications and limitations.

That's why when you read the Gospels, you discover that the works of Jesus happened for the most part in His immediate presence. Sure, there were a few instances where He healed people over a distance, but that was rare. Though His signs and wonders definitely had Divine finger prints on them, they were small in terms of volume. Why? Because they were restricted to His immediate presence.

But let's take another huge step forward. The Bible indicates that the incarnation had long-lasting implications for Jesus. For example, when Jesus was before Caiaphas, the following exchange unfolded; "63) But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64) Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."" (Matthew 26:63-64) Notice that Jesus said that "hereafter" He would be seated at the right hand of Power. He was still restricted to "place" though I would argue that "time" was in a new dimension.

Compare this to what Stephen said when he was being stoned; "56) and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.""

(Acts 7:56) Notice that Jesus was still confined to "place." I confess, this is a brain teaser, but it explains why the Promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16 was so profound and crucial. We are about to explore a phenomenon that the Apostle Paul called a "mystery." (Colossians 1:26-27) It is every bit as complex as the doctrine of the trinity.

Though because of the incarnation, Jesus is restricted to "place" in a body, His Spirit indwells every believer. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer "into" Christ and places Christ "in" every believer. (See Galatians 2:20, Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 1:24-29)

Through His Spirit, Jesus now abides "in" every believer. Jesus was about to birth His church. His works were about to be multiplied many times over through His people all around the world. Keep in mind, Jesus was and is the One doing the work, but it would be through His church. That's why anything accomplished through prayer is in His Name. He receives all the glory because He is still the one doing the works.

The Promise of the Spirit: John 14:16-18

"16) And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17) that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 19) "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:16-18)

Notice that His going resulted in the Holy Spirit coming. The Holy Spirit came as a result of Jesus asking the Father to send Him. This was the very first request Jesus asked of the Father after His ascension to the right hand of the Power on high. The big question is, "Why did Jesus view this as so important?"

The answer is found in the name Jesus assigned to the Spirit. He called Him "The Helper." He was going to be in that role forever. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would come upon a select person for a specific task. There was no guarantee as to how long He would stay. That's why David prayed in Psalm 51:11-12; "11) Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. 12) Restore to me the joy of Thy Salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit."

The new era of the Spirit would be marked by every believer being sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit, and His remaining forever. The work of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection and ascension marked the beginning of something new.

The bottom line is that we as people cannot obey God or live glorifying Him without the Holy Spirit. We need Divine help. What better way to meet that need than to fill every believer with the Holy Spirit? The walk in the Spirit is a continual, growing, obeying, and yielding process. The potential is amazing and it will last into eternity!

But notice that Jesus also called Him the "Spirit of truth." I believe there is connection in this name with what Jesus claimed in John 14:6 when He said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me." They are both true. They are one and the same.

Notice in verse 17 that the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit. His presence is based on personally knowing Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was going to abide in every believer. The word "abide" means both to "set up residence in" and "stay there forever." He may become grieved by sin in the life of a believer, but He is not packing His bag and leaving as in the Old Testament.

This sets the stage for John 14:18. Jesus promised that He would not leave them as orphans, but He would come to them. The presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer is equivalent to the presence of Jesus Christ. It was the fulfillment of the promise that "I will come to you."

Paul expounded on this mystery in Galatians 2:20-21 when he said; " (20) I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

When these two verses are examined we discover that we can either choose to live legalistic lives based on self-effort and trying to keep the Law (Vs 21); or live by grace through faith in the abiding Christ. (Vs 20) This summarizes the difference between the Old wine skins and the New wine skins.

Jesus was introducing His Disciples to something very new and radical. The world is under the Law and it is the basis of universal judgment. The born-again Christian has Jesus Christ living in them through the Holy Spirit and that is the basis of forgiveness, salvation, transformation, empowered living, comfort, peace, and security.

Christ “In” the Believer: John 14:18-21

“18) I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19) After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20) In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21) He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” (John 14:18-21)

Jesus promised that He was not going to abandon His disciples. He was going to come back to them. He now foretells the benefits of His death, resurrection, and glorification. His coming back was going to be even more magnificent, because His Spirit would not be restricted to one location. He would be with each of them at all times and at all places around the world. Wow! How could that happen?

Verse 20 introduces the mystery. Just as He was in the Father, He said, “and you in Me and I in you.” We touched on this previously. Paul talked about it in many passages, one of which is Colossians 1:24-29. Verse 29 summarizes by saying; “to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of the mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

He would not leave them as orphans because He was going to be “in” them. His Spirit was going to seal (Ephesians 1:13-14) and indwell every true believer. (Galatians 2:20) Every believer is baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13) This mystery makes the walk in the Spirit possible (Galatians 5:16-26), spiritual gifts functional (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12 and Ephesians 4), empowered living a reality (Acts 1:8), and results in the love of God to be poured out through His Spirit in every believer. (Romans 5:5) We are barely scratching the surface. There is so much more to this mystery!

But this is what makes it possible for mere people to keep His commandments. His commandments are based on His character. The indwelling Holy Spirit has the same character and seeks to produce fruits that are in keeping with that character in the life of every true believer. (Galatians 5:22-23)

John would later come back to this theme in His first Epistle. (See 1 John 2:3-11) Keeping His commandments is the result of Agape love flowing in the life of every believer. His new commandment to love one another (John 13:34-35) is by no means an empty mandate. His indwelling Spirit is the source of that love and of the potential for a new life.

The daily walk in the Spirit is the goal of every believer. It is the pathway toward maturity, but it is not easy. The world, the flesh, and the devil are there to distract and impair our progress. It takes grace, faith, obedience, persistence, and prayer to move the believer forward toward maturity. There will be trials, personal failures, and detours along the way. But Jesus is faithful, His grace is sufficient, and He is present to ensure the victory as we lean on Him.

Trust and Obey: John 14:22-24

“22) Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" 23) Jesus answered and said to 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 abode with him. 24) He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.”

Judas was a fairly common name. That ended with the betrayal of Christ. Some names have been ruined indefinitely by the reputation of the one carrying that name. Beware what you do to your name.

This Judas was the same as Thaddaeus the brother of James. Together they were half brothers of Jesus Himself. He later was known simply as “Jude” and was indeed the author of the small Epistle by that name.

Notice that Jesus returned to the theme that love and obedience are intertwined. He said, “If anyone loves me, He will keep my word.” The result was that the Father would love that person as well and “We will come to him and make our abode with him.” (Vs 23)

This verse might sound insignificant, but it points to the mystery of the trinity. To have the Holy Spirit within you is to have Jesus within you. To have Jesus within you is to have the Father within you. This is actually one of the few verses in the Bible that talks about the Father setting up His abode in a born-again believer.

The bottom line is that obedience does not earn salvation but rather confirms salvation. Those who know God keep His word. The old Hymn said it well, “Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.”

The Divine Teacher: John 14:25-26

“25) These things I have spoken to you while abiding 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 said to you.” (John 14:25-26)

One of the primary ministries of the Holy Spirit is that of a teacher. He was not only going to help the disciples remember everything Jesus said and taught, He was going to teach them new things. He is the Divine Illuminator of biblical truth and the provider of divine wisdom and insight. Let’s briefly survey a few other Scriptures on this subject.

According to James 1:5, He gives wisdom to those who ask. According to 1 Corinthians 2:10-16, He reveals the deep things of God to His people. According to 1 Corinthians 12:8, He can give both words of wisdom and words of knowledge. According to 1 John 2:27, He is the anointing that teaches all things. According to 2 Corinthians 3:14-18, the Word of God is closed and senseless to the unbelieving but opened and vibrant to the Spirit-Filled.

This teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit was about to open a whole new world to the church and to every believer. However, it must be emphasized that He is the Spirit of Truth. (John 14:17) His teaching is not random or without boundaries. He is always within the parameters of the

Word of God and subject to Scripture. This is to protect against false teachers and deceitful workers who twist and distort the truth.

Let me share a brief testimonial. I am very dependent on this ministry of the Holy Spirit. I love memorizing Scripture and meditating on full passages. I daily take time to ruminate on Scripture. It's during these times that the Holy Spirit provides precious insights and imparts nuggets of truth.

At the same time, I have had formal theological training and a solid foundation of hermeneutics and hold myself to high standards of biblical interpretation. I avoid letting my emotions, personal experience, or proof texting become my lens of truth. I try to be diligent to stay within the context of a passage and the full counsel of Scripture.

I also recognize the value of biblical scholars and theologians to ensure that I am rightly dividing the word of truth. Every believer needs boundaries when it comes to studying the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is not the author of confusion or error. This is also why I enjoy listening to sermons or reading books from gifted preachers and teachers. I do not always agree with them, but it helps sharpen my understanding of Scripture.

As the years have come and gone, my time in Scripture has become my most cherished daily pursuit. I enjoy nothing more than communing with God through long hours in His Word. There is always something new to learn and more insights to gain. I am thankful for and dependent on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

A New Peace: John 14:27

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." (John 14:27)

Jesus was moving into the most troubling of times and yet He was imparting peace to His disciples. One of the prophecies about the Messiah is that He would be the "Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6 is a must-read. Jesus fulfilled every name in this verse.

Notice that His peace was not going to be like the world's peace. The world looks at peace as the absence of war or conflict in the midst of great tension. By contrast, Jesus was offering inner tranquility and calmness of the human soul despite outer circumstances. You cannot have the peace of God until you know the God of peace.

But the context of this verse is tied to the coming of the Holy Spirit. This peace would be a direct fruit of His inner ministry and work in the life of the believer. Notice that Galatians 5:22 places peace as the third fruit of the Spirit. He brings it into the believers life just like He brings agape love and joy.

But this does not mean the believer will automatically be overwhelmed with God's peace in every situation. Philippians 4:4-7 ties this peace to prayer and submission in the face of our trials. Paul states in this text that the benefit of wrestling with God in prayer through our trials is that God's peace will become a "garrison guard" to protect us from our own racing thoughts and

random emotions. When this sinks in it becomes one of those “wow” texts in the New Testament.

But this subject is not finished yet. Colossians 3:15 is in the center of a context which believers are responsible to do in their walk with God. This verse says, “15) And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.” This verse needs to be studied in the full context of Colossians 3:12-17. You and I do not need to invent peace. If you know Jesus it is already there! Our job is to set aside our fears and anxiety and let peace rule. We need to consciously let Jesus stand up and calm the storms in our life.

(For thousands and thousands of years, Jewish people have used the word “shalom” –often repeated twice– as a greeting both when coming and going. We translate this word as “peace,” but the true meaning is much deeper. It means not just peace, but a restoration of an overall sense of wholeness and completeness in mind, body, and all that we are. There’s a sense of perfection and holiness associated with “shalom.” Of course, the book of John was written in Greek, but the concept of the “peace of Christ” would have had deep meaning for Jewish believers.) -dj

The True Vine and the Vinedresser: John 15:1-2

“1) 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 bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:1-2)

Jesus now launches into another “I AM” claim. This time He said “I am the true vine.” Nearly every Jewish family had a vine or a vineyard. This was a universal illustration.

Some vines were old and stretched long distances to provide fruit, shade, and beauty for landscaping. One vine could produce hundreds of clusters of valuable grapes each growing season while decorating an entire courtyard or building. Over time, a skilled vinedresser could literally “train” a vine to do amazing things throughout the courtyard.

I remember a trip to Eastern Europe years ago where I sat in such a courtyard with a distinguished host. The timing was perfect, for the meal featured fresh squeezed grapes that were picked from the clusters hanging overhead. We spent considerable time musing over John 15 during this time of fellowship together in the courtyard.

This analogy was also significant because the Old Testament often compared the Jewish people to a vine God had planted and cared for. (See Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalms 80:8-16, Joel 1:7, Jeremiah 2:21, and Ezekiel 19:10) God was presented as the vinedresser for His people in these texts. When Jesus said, “I am the true vine”, He was claiming to be the origin and source of life for Israel.

As you can see, Jesus was making a very beautiful claim in this text. He compared Himself to the true vine and His Father to the vinedresser. The two went hand-in-hand to ensure abundant and quality grapes that were the pride and life-line for the family of Israel.

As you can surmise, pruning was as much an art as it was a skill. It was essential to the lifespan and fruitfulness of the vine. Jesus was saying that God assumes this central role in the life of His people. They become the expression of His ability as a vinedresser. They are literally featured to the praise of the glory of the vinedresser.

The insights in this parable are many and deep, but the focus and starting point is the interrelationship between the Father and Son. We must not venture further into this analogy until this vital relationship is burned into our minds. Everything that follows is dependent on the vine and the vine dresser. They are the theme and main subject of this text.

Life Pruning: John 15:2

“2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”

Pruning accomplishes two purposes. First, it removes fruitless and wasteful branches. Even as Jesus was speaking this parable, Judas was being pruned from among the disciples. His true nature and allegiance were being revealed.

Over the years, I have watched many branches stray away from Christ never to return because they were not really from Him. They hung around for a while and even knew some Christian lingo, but they did not abide in Him or produce any real fruit. Their heart and character were secretly attached to the things of this world. The perseverance of the saints is a solid doctrine of Scripture.

Second, pruning in the life of a genuine believer stimulates new growth and more fruitfulness. Trials can be painful and even hard to understand, but over time the results are amazing. Let me illustrate:

As a young teenager, I worked for three summers on a Christmas tree farm. During late July and early August each year, we would prune the new growth on every branch of every tree on the farm. What happened was amazing. Within a few months the pruned bud healed over and produced several new branches where there had only been one. Instead of one long shoot, there were now several new branches each of which became a new shoot. After several years the tree was full and lush and took on the desired look. It was a stark contrast to the unpruned trees that looked naked, barren, and even gangly.

According to this text, God fulfills a pruning process in the lives of His people. He turns our trials into new growth. Where the enemy intended to hurt or destroy us, God brings healing. Over time, new beauty and fruitfulness begin to emerge from our wounds. Soon our lives are full and lush. As grace meets our wounds new growth emerges. Over time we turn out to the praise of His glory. The secret is simply to abide in Him and let the process unfold.

The Sap Of Life: John 15:3

“3) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

God's Word is powerful. In this parable of the True Vine, Jesus presents His word as the sap of life in the vine. It is what delivers the life-giving and fruit-growing nourishment to the branches. It is powerful and accomplishes a profound result in people who meditate on it continually. This should not be a surprise because, according to both Genesis 1:3 and John 1:1-3, the Word spoke the universe into existence.

When Jesus said "you are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you", He used the word clean as in "clean" versus "unclean" items for Israel under law. It should be noted that God's word cleanses and purifies and makes clean. It transforms unclean, defiled, and corrupt people into clean, purified, and fruitful people. He was talking about the core transformation of people from unclean to clean. God's Word received and believed has a profound cleansing effect on people.

The question is, "does the balance of Scripture teach this principle?" Let me briefly present this case: 1) Psalm chapter 1:1-6 makes this point in contrasting the person who meditates on God's Word to those who feed on the counsel of the wicked. 2) Isaiah 55:6-13 screams this principle and promises that God's Word will not return void but will accomplish profound things. 3) God's Word is the truth that renews the mind in Ephesians 4:21-24. The result of this process produces a new self that is in the likeness of God. 4) Notice in Ephesians 5:26-27 the continual washing of water with the Word is the beautification process that Jesus uses on His bride in preparation for wedding day. 5) Hebrews 4:12 states that the Word of God is like a sword that deeply penetrates the soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and the thoughts and intentions of the heart. In other words, the Word of God actively affects every level of the person from body, soul, and spirit.

Notice John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." The whole verse hinges on the word "if." There will be a stark contrast between those who abide in God's Word and those who do not. The question is "why?"

The answer is that God's Word is the sap of life for all of creation. According to Colossians 2:8, to be a Christian and substitute the lies, philosophy, and psychology of the world for the Word of God is disastrous. It is a pathway back to bondage and defilement even for the Christian. By contrast, 2 Peter 1:3-4 presents how God's precious and magnificent promises usher the believer into being a partaker of the divine nature and escaping the corruption that is in the world by lusts.

I recently discovered the work of a Christian Scientist by the name of Dr Caroline Leaf. Her research is nothing short of phenomenal. In her four-part presentation, "How to Detox your Brain" she gives scientific evidence that God's Word grafted into the mind can actually change brain matter. I encourage you to watch the presentation on YouTube for yourself.

So what is my point? Jesus was saying something very powerful and very profound in John 15:3. By comparing the Word of God to the Sap in a vine, Jesus was expounding on the most basic principle of life. God's Word is the truth of reality and source of life!

The Call to Abiding: John 15:4-5

“4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5)I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

It was a lesson I learned early in life. Whenever a branch or flower is cut from a plant, it begins to wilt quickly. It no longer has the sap of life flowing in it. It soon shrivels and dies. The wild flowers I picked on Saturday were not fit to present to my favorite teacher on Monday. It would have conveyed the wrong message. Even as a young boy I had the good sense to throw them away. They looked terrible.

Jesus was stressing the same point. Unless we abide in Him we begin to shrivel and die as well. Apart from Him we cannot bear fruit. There is no new growth. Apart from Him we can do nothing. Why? Because Jesus is the source of life.

I recently did a quick scan of the New Testament and discovered over 70 qualities of vibrant kingdom life that originate in Christ. They include such things as Him being the Word, Life, Light, Glory, Grace, Truth, Love, Bread from Heaven, True Manna, Living Water, Light of the World, True Food, True Drink, Joy, The Door, The Good Shepherd, The Resurrection and the Life, The Way, The Truth, The Life, Peace, Freedom, Hope, Trust, Patience, Holiness, Meekness, Humility, Power, The Rock, Lamb of God, and many more. You might recognize many of these from the Gospel of John. These are qualities associated with the Kingdom of Light and human redemption.

By contrast, Satan's domain and the flesh are just the opposite. They are the source of toxic qualities like deception, lies, anger, bitterness, hatred, fear, wrath, exploitation, abuse, hurts, neglect, murder, violence, rage, bondage, darkness, immorality, addictions, sorcery, depression, pride, envy, self promotion, despair, jealousy, vengeance and many other negative things. Satan comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. These are qualities associated with the kingdom of darkness and human depravity.

So the question is simple: “Which vine are you attached to?” Are you drinking from the vine of the Spirit or the vine of the flesh? Are you following Jesus or Satan? Is your spirit nutrition coming from the Word or the world? What well are you drinking from? Are you saturating yourself with truth or deception?

The flesh cannot produce kingdom fruit. It is counterproductive to come to Jesus and remain attached to the toxic vine of the flesh and the world. It will lead to ruin and death. You will dry up. It will result in depression and a host of other abnormalities. If you want the abundant life you need to abide in Christ.

Tested by Fire: John 15:6

“6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”

The obvious question is “Does this verse teach that a genuine born-again Christian can lose their salvation?” I do not think that is the case for two reasons. First, this parable was given prior

to the work of Christ on the cross and may have related more to the nation of Israel. (See John 1:11-12) Many were departing from Him and not abiding in Him or His teaching.

Second, it must be noted that the branches were thrown into the fire. As we shall see in a moment from another text dedicated to this question, that does not necessarily relate to eternal damnation. Jesus was talking in this parable more about this life and the benefits of walking in the Spirit rather than straying from Him and living in the strength of the flesh.

It is sad to say, but there are many Christians who put faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, but reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit. By default, they are left drinking from a vine of self-effort and legalism. How can I say this? Because John 15 is sandwiched between chapters 14 and 16 and the amazing promise of the coming Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 does a much better job of answering the question of whether or not a born-again Christian can lose their salvation. (I will let you read the text from your own Bible.) Paul makes it clear in this text that the key issue is having the right foundation and not what kind of building is erected. The potential is there for every believer to build a stellar life, but some fall short.

In verse 14, he clearly states that the quality of life will be tested with fire and rewards will be based on what comes through the fire. Then he says; “15) If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.” Why is this? Because justification is based on faith in the work of Christ on the cross and not our works.

But do not think this is an excuse to coast through this life. I can think of nothing worse than standing before Jesus naked and empty-handed when He returns. It is more than coincidence that in 1 John 2:28 the Apostle John picks up this very same issue and wording related to “abide in Him.” Listen to what John says; “28) Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”

Standing in His presence will be like going through a cleansing fire. His glory will burn away everything that is not eternal or rooted in His Spirit. The gold, silver, and precious stones of faith will remain. The wood, hay, and stubble of the flesh will be reduced to ashes. Many will shrink away from Him naked and barren on that day in total shame. How much better to hear those words, “Well done good and faithful servant.”

Bearing Much Fruit: John 15:7-8

“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 is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”

Those who abide in Christ and are saturated with His word pray Christ-centered prayers. Those who are absorbed with themselves and live in the flesh pray self-centered prayers. Prayer is not about twisting the arm of God to get my way. Prayer is about promoting Christ and His ways.

When we abide in the vine we think, speak, and act in accordance with the vine. We are harmonized with Him so closely that our prayers are an expression of Him and His will.

Nothing glorifies the Father more than the branches bearing much fruit. Keep in mind, He is the vinedresser and has abundant fruit-bearing as His objective. (John 15:1-2) He is for us and not against us. He uses everything that happens in our life to promote the goal of producing abundant fruit through our lives.

It is easy to get off track and lose our focus. He is not talking about promoting our fun or pleasure. That is futility and not fruitfulness. It is helpful to read this text with Galatians 5:13-26 as a backdrop. He calls us to freedom in the Spirit and not indulgence in the flesh. The more we focus on self, the less we abide in Christ. The more we abide in Christ, the less we focus on self.

As we focus on Christ, fruit begins to emerge through our character and in our conversations. It soon shows up in our relationships and we begin to see Divine doors opening where there were formerly walls. Soon mountains begin to move and amazing things start to happen! The Gospel is promoted as Jesus is lifted up and God starts drawing people to us so we can speak into their lives. As we abide in Him amazing things start happening through us. Soon the “greater works than these begin to unfold.”

This summarizes the normal walk in the Spirit. The book of Acts should be the ordinary and not the extraordinary. Why? Because the Father is glorified when the branches bear much fruit. Jesus is the true vine and the Father is the vinedresser.

Please understand this: The Vine that is Jesus Christ is alive and dynamic and He is stretching around the world. New growth is happening daily as many more branches are being formed and more fruit is being produced! These are days of great things in God's vineyard. Our job is to harmonize with the vine and focus on fruit-bearing for His glory.

Abide in Agape Love: John 15:9-11

“9) Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also 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 so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

Agape Love was a radically new concept introduced by Jesus Christ. I call it the “God kind of Love.” It is Divine in origin and is an attribute of God. 1 John 4:7-8 goes so far as to say this love is both “from God” and that “God is love.” This is a stark contrast to brotherly love, compassion, or erotic love.

Agape love is the kind of love the Father has for Jesus and Jesus has for us. Jesus commands us to abide in agape love. The Holy Spirit is the inner source of this Divine love in every believer. (See Romans 5:5) He literally pours it abroad in the heart of every believer. It is the first fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The result of abiding in this love is that joy will be in us and in turn Jesus will be filled with joy over us. (See vs 11) Love and joy go hand in hand. There is something powerful about agape love. It is accepting, healing, and transforming!

Paul defined this kind of love in 1 Corinthians 13 as the “more excellent way.” He pointed out that agape love surpasses the power of words, human intelligence, feats of personal sacrifice, deeds of courage, and even acts of faith. He went on to say, “4) Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5) does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8) Love never fails...” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a)

When doing comparative religion studies, this is the quality that separates Christianity from every other world religion. Many religions are driven by guilt, fear, or force of violence. True Christianity is based on this Jesus kind of love.

Unfortunately, the fake church has often gotten it wrong over the years. The flesh cannot duplicate agape love. It does not flow from legalism, liturgy, sacraments, or denominational zeal.

It comes from abiding in Christ and yielding to the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. This is a key nutrient that flows from the True Vine into the branches. This is what produces “much fruit” in the true followers of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus commands every believer to abide in. Love is the only pathway to joy.

Beloved, Let us Love One Another: John 15:12-13

“12) This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13) Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

Once again Jesus gives the command to love one another. And then, as if to set the stage for what He was about to do, He qualified the sacrificial nature of agape love. He stressed that true love was willing to lay down its life for its friends.

This message resonated more with the Beloved Apostle John than with the rest of the disciples. He is the one who would later pen 1 John 4:7-21. (I will let you read this text on your own.) Love was the Central theme to his writings. The above context begins with those powerful words; “7) Beloved, let us love one another...”

And yet there was a strange twist to the story; only John survived to die of old age. It may be argued that it is harder to consistently live out the call to “love one another” than it is to die for someone.

Though hard to determine the actual place and circumstances of his death, one account places him in the catacombs under Rome. According to this account, they would carry the aged John to the assemblies on a cot. He would gather his strength and raise himself up to address the believers. His message was always the same; “Beloved, let us love one another.”

He did indeed lay aside His own life to live out the call to love right down to the last words that he uttered. According to this tradition, His last words were, "Beloved, let us love one another."

Friendship with God: John 15:14-15

"14) You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15) No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Jesus now introduces an amazing concept. It can be summarized as "friendship with God." In the entire Old Testament, only Abraham (2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23) and Moses (Exodus 33:11) attained that status. The wall of separation between God and man because of human sin was indeed nearly impenetrable in the Old Testament.

But Jesus was about to change all of that. His work on the cross was going to remove the sin barrier forever – thus making friendship with God possible! In John 15:14-15, Jesus affirmed His eleven disciples as His friends. If it were limited to only those eleven, that would be 5 1/2 times more people than all of the Old Testament put together. That in itself is amazing! But, it can be argued that John 17:13-26 extends this status to all believers. 1 John 1:1-4 certainly makes that point. We have been called into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

One of the core characteristics of friendship is open communications. In John 15:15 Jesus said He communicated with His disciples all that the Father communicated with Him. Jesus wants to communicate with every believer through His Spirit and through His Word. Verses like 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Philippians 3:7-11, Hebrews 4:16 and 1 John 1:1-10 are nearly beyond comprehension.

Words cannot describe the depth of intimate fellowship and relationship with God any believer can build because of what Jesus has done for us. But friendships must not be taken lightly, they must be built. I beg you to set aside quality time daily to build your relationship with God and your walk in the Spirit. The potential is unfathomable!

Chosen With Purpose: John 15:16-7

"16) You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17) This I command you, that you love one another."

The Doctrine of election is a brain teaser. I cannot explain it, but it is taught in the Bible. Verse 16 is a good example. We did not choose Jesus; He chose us. It almost sounds like some strange twist in quantum mechanics. Those who choose Him are there because they were chosen by Him. It always happens that way!

But the One who is doing the choosing always has a purpose. In this case it is that we might go and bear lasting fruit and love one another. In Ephesians 1:3-6 the list is a bit different and longer. It includes that we might be holy and blameless before Him. He doesn't choose us because we are good or holy, rather He chooses us to make us good and holy.

I don't waste time arguing Calvinism or Arminianism. They both coexist in the Bible without conflict. Divine Sovereignty and human responsibility are taught side by side. I am just thankful that Jesus saved me and filled me with His Spirit and gives me grace and strength to live day-by-day. I could never earn my salvation. I'm not good enough. I'm saved because of what Jesus did on the cross for me and I put all of my faith in Him.

Walking in the Sandals of Jesus: John 15:18-21

"18) If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19) If you were of the world, the world would love 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 slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21) But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

The more we become like Jesus, the more the world will treat us like it treated Jesus. Darkness does not embrace light. Sin does not embrace righteousness. The kingdom of darkness does not tolerate the kingdom of light, rather it hates it. So Satan targets godly Christians for ridicule, persecution, and destruction.

This phenomenon holds true in every culture around the world. Cain will always try to destroy righteous Able. It is ok to be good, it is not ok to be godly. It is ok to be religious, but it is not ok to openly live out the Christian life. Why is this?

I believe Paul nailed it in Ephesians 6:10-13. Spiritual warfare is a reality. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, instead we wrestle against the realm of darkness and demonic influences of wickedness. As one pilot from WWII told me, "we knew we were over the target when flack started to fly and shells were exploding around us."

So it is for the Christian in this life. Don't be shocked when it happens. On the other hand, don't do stupid things to provoke it. Some Christians suffer because of poor people skills. They are vocal, judgmental, condemning, and arrogant.

Remember, the context of John 15 is abiding in agape love, not wallowing in self righteousness. There is a major difference between the two. The first plants seeds and builds bridges. The second throws verbal bombs and builds walls of resentment.

Without Excuse: John 15:22-25

"22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23) He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24) If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. 25) But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'" (John 15:22-25)

There were two primary lines of evidence that validated the claim of Jesus Christ of being the Messiah. First was His teaching and second was His miracles. What He said and what He did

were both out of the ordinary. They placed Him in a unique category. They complimented each other. They pointed to His Divine origin. They conveyed a consistent message. They were rooted in love. There was nothing in them that evoked the response of hatred or rejection.

Jesus was making a profound point in these verses. His words, His works, and His sacrifice on the cross to pay the penalty of human sin removed all excuses. Salvation by grace through faith is so simple the smallest child can qualify and so extensive the worst sinner is a candidate. Rejection of Jesus Christ leaves people without excuse. They will one day stand before God with one justifiable verdict: "GUILTY."

Apart from Christ, people could have argued that fallen human nature was not capable of keeping the Law. (Romans 3:19-20) But, because of the incarnation, the words, the works, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as a payment for sin, and the resulting gospel of salvation by grace through faith, people can no longer argue that anyone is disqualified. (Romans 3:21-26) The bottom line is that humanity no longer has an excuse for sin or for a lifestyle of depravity. Salvation is now a free gift and the invitation is extended to all!

Spirit-Filled Witness: John 15:26-27

"26) When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, 27) and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)

The Apostles had a very unique ministry. Because they were with Jesus from the beginning they were able to share and validate the stories from His public ministry. 1 John 1:1-4 is a profound illustration of this mission. Let me share those verses because they illustrate how seriously the Apostles took this command from Jesus.

"1) What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life- 2) and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us- 3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4) These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete."

Notice how John emphasized that they had "heard, seen, and touched" the Word of life. They literally spent three years traveling with Jesus. They heard and saw everything. If He was a fake they would have seen through Him.

After Pentecost they became "Spirit-Filled" witnesses. He brought details to their memory and connected some of the dots they missed as things were unfolding. The Holy Spirit picked up where Jesus left off. He continued the teacher role.

So how does this apply to us today? I believe the Holy Spirit helps us remember biblical texts we have studied, sermons we have heard and then He teaches or illuminates us to biblical truth as well. He is still the teacher. (See 1 John 3:27) We are now in the age of the indwelling Holy Spirit. These are very special times.

However, I must share the caution given by one of my Bible college professors prior to a test. He said it was not valid to pray, “Lord, help me remember what I haven’t studied.” I took that advice to heart.

Walking in Both Sandals of Jesus: John 16:1-4

“1) These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. 2) They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3) These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. 4) These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

God is good, but we live in a fallen world filled with bad people. In this text Jesus was warning His disciples that persecution awaited them. He did this to keep them from stumbling.

In the previous two chapters, Jesus promised them greater works and greater fruit. In this chapter He was preparing them for greater suffering and greater persecution. They were about to walk in both of His sandals. On one foot would be glory, power, and fruitfulness and on the other foot would be scorn, suffering, and persecution. The Holy Spirit is both our Helper and our Comforter.

This is one of the many Scriptures that invalidates the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel preached by some modern false teachers. God can and does bless His people, but we are also soldiers in a spiritual warfare. For a teaching to be a biblical doctrine, it needs to be universally applicable to all people, in all places, and at all times. Jesus was not promising His disciples health, wealth, and prosperity. He was preparing them for suffering. Many of them lost everything including their lives for the sake of Jesus and the gospel.

I appreciate the fact that the teaching of Jesus was truthful and balanced. He was preparing them for the full spectrum of the Christian life. You and I must be prepared to walk in both sandals of Jesus as well. We are in the world but not of the world. Something better is coming.

The Advantage: John 16:5-7

“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) But 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.”

Jesus now returns to the theme that started this message in John 14:1-6. He was going back to His Father. But He was going with a mission to prepare a place for His followers.

The reality of His imminent death had not yet sunk in. Filling in the blanks would be part of the mission of the Holy Spirit. (John 14:26) In John 16:7, Jesus refers to “the advantage” of His leaving. He had to go so the Holy Spirit could come. He promised to send Him.

It was hard for them to imagine what He was saying. What could be better than Jesus in bodily form living, walking, talking, and ministering among them? The answer was “the Helper living in them and ministering through them!”

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was going to accomplish much more than human redemption, it was going to usher in the new era of Spirit filled and empowered living. A new dispensation was about to begin, never previously known to mankind. The Helper was about to indwell every believer.

Let me paraphrase theologically what Jesus was saying to His Disciples: “I know this is hard for you to believe, but I want this truth to sink in. I am about to be crucified and die on a cross, but this is to your advantage. I am about to do much more than pay for human sin, I am going to remove the barrier between God and mankind that has persisted since the fall of Adam and Eve. Yes, I am about to step on the head of the serpent!

Then after my resurrection, I am going ascend to my Father and oversee the sending of the Holy Spirit who is going to personally indwell each and every one of my followers. Even though difficult times await you from those who hate Me, the Holy Spirit is going to help you in ways you cannot comprehend. Let Me share a few of them.

When the Spirit of Truth comes, He is personally going to indwell each one of my followers. He is going to teach you. He is going to sanctify and transform you. He is going to guide you. He is going to help you. He is going to comfort you. He is going to anoint you. He is going to empower you. He is going to work through you. He is going to fill you with spiritual gifts. He is going to turn you into mighty witnesses for me.

Then He is going to convict the lost world of their sin. He is going to save millions of lost people around the world from every nation and tribe and tongue and turn them into one flock with one shepherd. He is going to build my Church and transform her into a beautiful bride who is eagerly waiting My return. Then, when I have finished preparing a place for you, I am going to come back and hold a wedding ceremony that I have been planning since before I laid the foundation of the world.”

This is just a slight peak at what Jesus referred to as “The Advantage.”

Conviction and Conversion: John 16:8-11

“8) And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9) concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10) and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; 11) and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

Even though I am an evangelist, I have never felt the need to be critical, condemning, or judgmental with people. When I share or preach the Gospel, I am diligent to talk about sin and the eternal consequences of being lost, but I let the Holy Spirit do the convicting. My job is to speak the truth in love. The Holy Spirit's job is to bring conviction, contrition, and repentance.

The Holy Spirit is very good at His job. I have watched the hardest sinners break down and weep at the consciousness of their sin as they cry out for God to have mercy on them. I do not believe there can be conversion without contrition. I do not believe there is redemption without personal repentance. In Romans 26:20, Paul made it clear that he called the lost to repentance. It was the standard practice in his preaching ministry.

I shudder at the realization that many of our churches today refuse to preach on sin or make people feel uncomfortable. They are basically saying they do not want people to be under conviction. They want people to be happy and to feel good. They exist to affirm people. But it is impossible for someone to believe they are in need of being saved if they do not realize they are lost and in danger of eternal judgment.

Read the text! It says the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. People need to come face-to-face with their own sinfulness. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 is profound. It says; "9) I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10) For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

When Christians share the truth of the gospel in absolute love, it invites the Holy Spirit to wrestle with the sinner and bring them to repentance. Conversion is not a rational decision of the human mind, it is a wrestling with the conviction of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. That process leads to repentance and crying out to God for mercy and forgiveness. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convert the lost. We are but messengers who share the gospel.

But woe to us if we soft-peddle sin and tell people that God accepts them just as they are with no need of confession or repentance. That is a false gospel. It is a distorted message. It is a perversion of truth. This is what Paul warned Timothy about in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. People can be religious and lost. Our mission is not to reach the unchurched. It is to reach the unsaved even if they are sitting in a church with a false pretense of salvation.

Our job is to walk people into the presence of a Holy God and leave them wrestling with the Holy Spirit about their lost and sinful condition. We need to be equally as diligent to point them to Jesus and the love of God that has made a way of salvation. This places us in the birthing room as the Holy Spirit brings them to confession, repentance, and conversion. There is no greater joy in ministry than seeing the load of sin and guilt fall away at the foot of the cross.

Over the years I have witnessed the Holy Spirit bring many to conversion. Some were obviously lost and sinful, but I have also watched the Holy Spirit move a number of pastors, elders, and deacons from rational religion to genuine conversion.

I wonder, is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart through this message? Is He graciously pointing out your lost and sinful condition even though you may be very religious? Why not respond to the Holy Spirit and cry out to Jesus for salvation? Invite Him to forgive your sin and come into your life. Repent and change your ways.

The Personal Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Believers: John 16:12-15

“12) I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13) But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 13) He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 14) All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.”

There was much more to teach the disciples, but the earthly ministry of Jesus was coming to an end. They were not ready for some things. Growth takes time. Maturity comes one step at a time. It cannot be forced. But the good news was that the Holy Spirit was going to pick up where Jesus left off. He was going to guide them into all the truth and disclose to them what was to come.

The obvious question is, “What about those who were not with Jesus from the beginning?” “How were they to learn and grow?” These are good questions. The answer might be in the mystery of the Apostle Paul. How did he receive such revelation and insight into Jesus Christ and doctrinal truth? He was not even converted until well after the day of Pentecost, and yet God used him to write much of the New Testament.

We have pieces of the puzzle scattered throughout his writings. Texts like Galatians 1:13-2:2 and Philippians 3:4-16 present an amazing picture of his conversion and growth process. After his conversion he spent three years in Arabia growing and learning. (Galatians 1:17) As a former Pharisee the Holy Spirit was most likely revealing Jesus to Him through the study of the Old Testament. He then spent time with Peter and James learning from them. (See Galatians 1:18-19)

But that’s still not the full picture. We also have Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 2:6-13 where Paul credits the Holy Spirit with an inner teaching ministry. Verse 12 is especially significant because it harmonizes with what Jesus was saying in John 16:12-15. The indwelling Spirit of God was teaching him.

The climax for Paul might have been recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6 where he relates an experience of being caught up to the third heaven or paradise and heard inexpressible words. He never did relate what he saw or heard during that experience. I am confident the revelation was beyond what many people are prepared to hear.

Instead, Paul prays some amazing things for new believers. These prayers are recorded in Ephesians 1:15-23, Ephesians 3:14-21 and Colossians 1:9-12. You will have to study these prayers on your own, but in summary, Paul was praying that God would give every true believer a spirit of wisdom and revelation into the knowledge of Christ. (See Ephesians 1:17) Paul was asking God to fulfill the promises Jesus made to His disciples in John 16:12-15 for every Christian.

Salvation is an event, but sanctification and growth is a lifelong process. The Holy Spirit oversees this process in every believer. I came to Jesus very sinful and broken. Healing takes time. But here is the good news: The Holy Spirit wants to develop a very personal and intimate

relationship with each one of us. We must welcome this relationship and learn how to discern His voice. That is what Jesus was promising His disciples. Welcome to the walk in the Spirit. Embrace it!

The Coming Crucifixion and Resurrection: John 16:16-22

"16) A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." 17) Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" 18) So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." 19) Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, '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, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. 21) Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. 22) Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

These verses illustrate the extent to which the disciples did not fully comprehend what was about to happen with the death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus had told them several times, but it had not registered. It was the best of times for them traveling with Jesus and partaking of His miracles and teaching. But that was about to change really fast.

Within hours Judas was going to come with the mob to arrest Jesus. He had a meeting to keep with the cross and human redemption. He wanted the disciples to know they were about to move into the most sorrowful time of their lives, but that sorrow would be followed by great joy with the resurrection.

Jesus compared it to labor and childbirth. The pain of labor gives way to the joy of the new baby. Salvation and the new walk in the Spirit would more than make up for the sorrow of the crucifixion. The disciples were heading into a storm with huge emotional trauma. Jesus wanted them to know the storm clouds would roll away and be replaced with something glorious.

There may be an application for us in this text. When storms come we need to trust that something better is coming. One day it will be standing for eternity in the presence of Jesus. As the old hymn says, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus."

Another similar situation awaits us with regard to the second coming of Christ. Scripture talks about it over and over, but many live as if it will never happen. We need to be dressed in readiness.

Praying in the Name of Jesus: John 16:23-28

"23) In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24) Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. " 25) These things I

have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26) In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; 27) for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. 28) I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.'"

He has touched on this previously in the past three chapters, but a whole new dimension of prayer was about to be opened. His followers were going to use His name to intercede with the Father. Why? Because Jesus was about to remove the sin barrier between God and man and open the door to the very throne room God. (Read Hebrews 4:14-16)

The Name of Jesus is powerful because it represents everything He is, everything He has done, and everything that He will do in the future. It is the Name that is above every name. (See Philippians 2:5-11)

I admit that prayer is one of the weaknesses in my Christian life. It has taken on new priorities the past year, but I have much more to learn and experience in this realm. Communion with God in prolonged and intimate prayer is one of the yearnings of my heart.

I long for the kind of relationship with God that Moses finally arrived at. (See Exodus 33:17-23) Even though there were plenty of external challenges, in this encounter He set those aside to focus on God. There is a huge lesson in this text. It is easy to get so focused on our needs, circumstances and prayer requests that we lose focus on God.

I am beginning to realize that praying in the Name of Jesus is far more than just mindlessly dropping His Name in prayer. It is entering into the fullness of who He is. Peter touched on it in passing in 2 Peter 1:2. Grace and peace are multiplied to us in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In other words, effective praying grows out of a deepening relationship with God. Prayer is not about prayer; it is about God.

Notice that John said prayer is based on love. That translates to intimacy with God. The Father loves us and wants the walls of separation between us and Him to be pulled down. That was a crucial objective to the ministry of Jesus on the cross. He came to remove human alienation with God. He came to facilitate unimaginable intimacy with God.

Coming Tribulation: John 16:29-33

"29) His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. 30) Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God." 31) Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32) Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33) These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.'"

I am not sure that Jesus was speaking more plainly than previously. Rather, I think His message was finally starting to sink in. He was about to leave this world and go back to the Father. They started to understand the full scope of His knowledge. He knew the past, present, and the future. Jesus was omniscient.

Now, for the first time He begins to prepare His disciples for what they were about to face. They were about to be scattered and leave Him to face the cross alone. Only the beloved Apostle John would be there in the crowd at the foot of the cross. (John 19:26-27)

They were about to face “tribulation.” The word means “to break, to crush, to press, to compress, to squeeze.” It has in it the idea of intense testing. The world is not a welcoming place for those who love Jesus Christ and live out kingdom values based on biblical principles.

The god of this world, fallen human nature, and a secular value system does not embrace biblical truth. The gulf between biblical Christianity and the world has never been wider than today. From their radically different view or origins to the resulting value of life and human morality, they are in tense opposition to each other.

The Bible paints a tragic picture of the end times when the intolerance of the world toward Christianity will become so intense that it will result in “great tribulation.” (See Revelation 7:14) It will be a time of intense persecution and martyrdom that will surpass anything seen in the history of the Church.

Jesus wanted His disciples of the first century (and every age thereafter) to fix their focus on Him alone for peace, grace, and victory. Having worked with the persecuted Church around the world, I discover they have a purity, focus, joy, and tranquility missing in the western church. As mentioned, the word “tribulation” basically means “testing.” The persecuted church has been purified through fire. Their faith is like gold.

This is where the self-centered and hedonistic church of Laodicea in the end times will be exposed and many will fall away. (Revelation 3:14-22) The message of biblical Christianity is not about health, wealth, and prosperity. Though God can and does bless those He loves, He also prepares His own for the suffering that will come at the hands of an anti-Christ and secular world system.

There is a very well-defined and broadly developed Doctrine of Suffering in the New Testament. By all means enjoy the roses of knowing Jesus, but expect thorns. They will come for every Christian. Jesus was crucified with a crown of thorns on His head. It is a fit picture of what the fallen world has in store for Christians.

Jesus Begins His High Priestly Prayer: John 17:1-5

“1) Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, 2) even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. 3) And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4) I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou have given Me to do. 5)

And now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”

Many call John 17 “The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus.” In verse 1, He very clearly shifts His attention from speaking to His disciples to speaking to His Father. He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said,” Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify Thee.”

This reminds us that God has a calendar system and a clock. It is accurate down to the very week, day, hour, minute, and even second. It has been keeping time for all eternity past prior to day four of creation when our solar system began to function as a clock. (See Genesis 1:14-19)

There were some monumental events on God's calendar and clock throughout history. The flood of Noah's day was one big event on God's calendar. (See Genesis 7:11) The birth of Jesus Christ was another. (See Galatians 4:4) In this prayer in John 17, Jesus was aware that His arrest, trial, and crucifixion were also fixed on God's clock. Jesus used the same terms of “day” and “hour” to talk about His second coming. (Matthew 24:42-51) It has long been on the Fathers calendar. (See also 2 Peter 3:5-13)

(A more detailed study of time in the Bible would reveal many more things God has on His clock, but that study is beyond the scope of this text.)

Jesus knew that the Father was about to glorify Him. As hard as it is to comprehend, the crucifixion was going to be a promotion. Jesus was about to step into the office of “Savior of the World.” He was about to become the “Redeemer of Mankind.” He was about to wrestle the keys of death away from the Devil and become “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS!” (See Revelation 19:16)

If you read the text carefully, it says that He was given authority over all mankind, but He would only give eternal life to those given Him by the Father. (See verse 2) We are forced to surmise from this verse that He is Lord of all, but Redeemer only of the elect given Him by the Father.

Verse 3 goes on to clarify that eternal life is based on “knowing Him.” It is a “grace-faith” based relationship. It is intimate and personal. But, by default we are forced to conclude there are many who do not know Him nor will they share in this eternal life. It is a warning often repeated in the New Testament.

The next two verses are equally as profound. Jesus emphasized that He accomplished the work on earth that the Father sent Him to do. He finished His mission. Hence, He was looking forward to something very phenomenal; “5) And now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”

I confess, I cannot wrap my mind around what Jesus was talking about in this verse. It is a mystery! He seemed to be looking forward by looking back to reality as it was prior to the creation of time, matter, and the physical universe. He insinuates that the godhead shared a different glorious inter-relationship prior to creation. This is another biblical clue that glories beyond imagination await us in eternity.

Three-Fold Power: John 17:6-8

“(6) I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7) Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”

(John 17:6-8)

This is the New Testament equivalent of Moses standing before the burning bush and asking “what is your name?” (Exodus 3:13-15) Jesus made it clear that they knew “The Name.” This may be one of the Names of the Father such as “Jehovah”; or the Name of Jesus Christ. The implication was that they were being commissioned to live in the power of “The Name.” It is an expression of ownership. They belonged to God.

He also revealed “the Word ” to them. They were being called to a life of obedience to God's Divine Word. According to Hebrews 4:12, the Word of God is sharp and powerful. If you read the full context of John 14-17 an amazing picture comes into focus. They were about to be endowed with three-fold power. They were given the Power of the Name, the Power of the Word, and the Power of the Holy Spirit.

There is no excuse for a believer to live a shallow and defeated life. The Christian life is a calling to lay aside the flesh, the deceptive philosophies of the world and every connection to the defeated god (or gods) of darkness and put on the fullness of Creator God. We are called to walk in light, truth, and love!

I would argue that we are more equipped than Moses was when he was sent back to Egypt to deliver Israel from slavery. Jesus was basically saying that His Basic Training of the Disciples was complete. After Pentecost, they were ready to step up and take over.

Jesus Praying for His Own: John 17:9-12

“(9) I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; 10) and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11) I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. 12) While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.”

Jesus now begins to pray for His people. He is concerned about His flock. He cares for His vineyard. He takes care of His own. According to this context, He “keeps them” or He “protects them.” Paul goes so far in Romans 8:28 to say that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. He never abandons His own. These verses bring me great comfort. But there is a flip side to this coin.

Notice in verse 9 Jesus says, "I do not ask on behalf of the world." This may be a hard truth to accept, but not all people belong to God. The Bible calls them the wicked, the ungodly, and the lost. They represent people who are tied to Satan's lies, plans, and purposes. They are in the kingdom of darkness. They not only reject Christ, they hate Him, and they despise Christians. Jesus made it clear that Judas belonged to this group as the son of perdition and that is why he perished.

But never take lightly the grace, mercy, and love of God. He is very patient, wanting all people to come to repentance and salvation. (Read 2 Peter 3:8-9) He came to seek and to save the lost. But time runs out for every non-Christian. Those who die apart from Christ will indeed perish without excuse. The lost are eternally lost.

In the World, But Not Of the World: John 17:13-19

"13) But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14) I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15) I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16) They are not of the world, even 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, I also have sent them into the world. 19) For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."

As Jesus was preparing to go to the Father, He began praying for His disciples who were left behind. He made it clear in these verses that they had His Word, just as in chapters 14 and 16 He promises that He would send the Helper. Though He was leaving them to go to the Father, there was cause for joy.

But notice that Jesus clearly understood that this fallen world would not be a friendly place for His followers. They would be hated as He was hated. Yet they had a mission to bring the gospel of hope to lost humanity. It would have been so much easier to just take them out of the world, but that would have ended the mission. Instead, He asked the Father to keep them from the evil one. These verses capsulize the spiritual warfare that awaited the church.

From our vantage point today we can look back through the pages of history and discover that the warfare was intense in every generation. Many argue that it is escalating today on nearly every front. Yet the Father remains true to this plea of the Son to keep His bride from the evil one.

Deep insight into this request of Jesus is developed in Ephesians 5:25-27. As you read these verses, notice how the Word was going to "sanctify" and "cleanse" the church for the return of Christ. The Father was going to use the trials of the world and the Word to make the church beautiful for the wedding day to come. Jesus was asking the Father to guard this process.

We have reason to take comfort in this request of Jesus. We were on His heart and in His mind as He prepared to go to the cross. According to Romans 8:27, Jesus is still in this intercessory role on our behalf. He loves His church. He intercedes for us individually. Because of that fact,

the Father causes everything to work together for good in the life of every believer. (Romans 8:28-30)

Praying for You and for Me: John 17:20-21

“20) I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21) that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.”

Guess what? Before Jesus went to the cross He was praying for you and for me! He was praying for every believer that would eventually come to Jesus Christ as the gospel spread around the world and down through the centuries! This is a timeless prayer. Jesus embraced the whole body of Christ that would eventually come to Him.

What He prays can be categorized under the heading of “quantum theology.” This is where I place those great mysteries of God that the human mind cannot comprehend. He is praying for more than being “one” such as in unity of thought and mind. He is actually praying that we might be one with God and each other as He and the Father are one.

This piggy-backs on the idea of being “in Christ” metaphysically. Paul developed the theme in Romans 6:1-11 that we were “in Christ” through His death, burial, and resurrection. In the same unfathomable sense Jesus was now praying that we will be “one” with the Father and the Son. They are separate and distinct from each other and yet one with each other. I cannot explain it and I don’t fully comprehend the implications of it, but our baptism into the family of God means that we have a new identity and a new nature available to us.

Let me say it this way, after being born again, our identity is no longer connected to Adam in the fall, rather it is connected to Christ in His resurrection and glorification. We are in every way adopted into the Family of God with all of the benefits and rights of sonship. (Galatians 4:6) We are sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit and He is transforming us into new creations. (2 Corinthians 5:17) I sense that Jesus was praying for all of this and much more in these two verses.

It is a prayer that transcends time and space. It embraced the eleven disciples with Him during this prayer ... and all who would eventually come to Him through the gospel proclaimed throughout the world and the ages. I am greatly impacted by the realization that Jesus was praying for you and me as He prepared to go to the cross. These verses have always blessed me and given me great acceptance, identity, affirmation, belonging, and purpose. To think that God invites us into His Divine fullness. I confess, my finite mind is now cracking under the implications of this Divinely inspired prayer. How can we as mere mortals be “one” with God? This is not a mundane truth.

The Love Story Portion of the Prayer: John 17:22-26

“22) The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. 24) Father, I desire that

they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25) "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26) and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

This is a love story. Notice in verse 22, Jesus is eager to share His glory with His followers. There is only one way that can happen. This is describing a bride entering into the glory of her groom as it relates to a royal wedding. Let's put it in perspective: We are but mere peasants loved by the King! He is inviting us to share the glories of His royalty as His bride!

(The theme and idea of Jesus as rightful, righteous, and glorious King stretches throughout the entire Bible. He is King of Creation (Genesis 1), King even when Israel demands an earthly king (Samuel 1), born into the world as the new-born King with the angel armies announcing His royal birth (Luke 2), crucified with the title "King of the Jews" written in three languages and nailed to His cross, (John 19:21 and Mark 15:26) and will return as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS! (Revelation 19:16) As such, He is a true Sovereign with everything and everyone subject – *including the defeated enemy of our souls* – to His authority, His reign, and His rule! As our King, He is worthy of and due our allegiance and everlasting fidelity!) -dj

This portion of the prayer is like the Song of Solomon with all of its suspense and intrigue as the king fell in love with a mere shepherd girl. In that Old Testament book, the king longed for his new found love, lowly as she was. She had no idea of His full identity until His wedding entourage arrived to escort her to the palace. During an extended time of absence, they longed for each other.

In this prayer, Jesus is longing for His bride to be with Him. (Vs 24) Nothing was going to be more difficult for Him than the long separation from His bride that lay in front of them. He wanted to introduce her to His Father for He knew that the Father would welcome and cherish her as well.

Jesus is waiting in Heaven right now for the wedding day. You and I are on His mind and in His heart day and night. He longs for us. Revelation 19 shares the amazing story of what is about to unfold. It far surpasses the Song of Solomon on every level.

Stop and let the full implications of this portion of the prayer sink in. You are loved by the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS! At the moment of salvation, He betrothed you to Himself. The Holy Spirit was given to you to seal the betrothal as an engagement ring. See Ephesians 1:13-14. Notice especially how the end goal in these two verses relates to "the praise of His glory."

At our point in history the final touches are being put in place for the grand celebration. Behold, He is coming quickly!. Trim your lamps and prepare for His return. (Matthew 25:1-13) Let the beautification process within you begin. Let the Holy Spirit do His work. (Ephesians 5:25-27, Titus 3:5-7) Start changing the way you view Jesus and the way you view yourself. No matter your past life, you have a new identity!

The Contrast: John 18:1-3

“1) When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. 2) Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. 3) Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.”

After finishing the upper room discourse, Jesus proceeded with the eleven to the Garden of Gethsemane where he was in deep prayer and agony. Mathews' account totally skips the details of the upper room discourse that Jesus gave to His disciples after the Passover meal. (John 13:31-17:26) John skips over the way Jesus prayed and agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane. (See Matthew 26:36-40) I cherish the fact that we have four Gospels to fill in every detail of the life, works, and messages of Jesus.

Notice that Judas departed from Jesus and the twelve in John 13:30. That means as Jesus was giving many promises to the eleven about the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit and fruitfulness in the age to come, Judas was absent. Instead, He was busy putting in place the details of the betrayal. The next time Judas saw Jesus, he betrayed Him with a kiss.

This may sound like a small detail, but none of the promises made to the eleven applied to the son of perdition. (See John 17:12) He was never a true believer and he never put saving faith in Jesus. He was undoubtedly intrigued by Jesus but not to the point of personal contrition over his lost condition and need for salvation. He had the money bag and he was a thief. He was following Jesus as a means of selfish gain and not personal transformation.

This may sound trivial, but I glean great comfort from these three verses. These verses give great assurance and security to those who genuinely know Jesus, but they scream a sobering warning to those who are merely religious.

The difference between Judas and the eleven was not that he was excessively bad and they were good. They were all sinners. Peter sinned deeply when he denied that He knew Jesus. All but John abandoned Him during His darkest hour. The difference was that the eleven sincerely loved and believed in Jesus while Judas rejected Jesus as the Savior and Messiah. He saw no personal need to believe in Him or receive Him by faith. (John 1:12)

Jesus does not demand perfection of those who come to Him. The healthy do not need a physician. The basis of salvation is sincere belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. His Holy Spirit is given to sanctify and clean up the repentant sinner. Salvation is an event that starts the life long process of sanctification. I see salvation as a personal faith response to the Divine promptings of the Holy Spirit drawing a sinner to Jesus and the Gospel. (John 1:11-13; John 3:16-18; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:8-10, Romans 10:9-11)

An Unusual Arrest: John 18:3-6

“3) Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4) So Jesus, knowing all the

things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" 5) They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He. " And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. 6) So when He said to them, "I am He, " they drew back and fell to the ground."

Judas now arrives at the Garden of Gethsemane accompanied by a Roman cohort. We have no idea how many soldiers were actually with him. Many translations simply say "a band of soldiers" and yet it was a great multitude. (Mathew 26:47)

It was most likely a mixed group carrying lanterns and armed with swords and clubs. Mathew 26:52 notes that the slave of the high priest was among them. Notice, there were present some officers from the chief priests and Pharisees and a good number of Roman soldiers most likely from the temple guard. The Roman soldiers were present because the officers from the priests and Pharisees had previously failed to bring Jesus to the Jewish counsel. (John 7:45-53) The Roman soldiers were a guarantee against failure.

Verse 4 states that Jesus knew exactly what was about to happen to Him. He did not seek to run or flee. Rather He went forth and faced the mob. He volunteered for the mission at hand. Matthew 26:48-49 records that it was at this point that Judas approached Jesus and kissed him. It was the sign of betrayal. Judas was being true-to-form.

Jesus then asked, "Whom do you seek?" They responded "Jesus the Nazarene." When He responded "I am He", John records that "the whole group drew back and fell to the ground." (See John 18:6) I believe two things from this event. First, there is power in the Name of Jesus. Second, Jesus was demonstrating that He was in control of both Himself and the situation.

Let me elaborate: According to Matthew 26:53, it was at this point that Jesus told the mob that He could appeal to His Father who would immediately put twelve legions of angels at His disposal. By contrast the "great company" of men that came to arrest Jesus suddenly seemed very small and ill-equipped. John 18:6 may be giving us a glimpse of the battle raging within Jesus Himself. He decided to forego angelic intervention and submit to His Father's plan. However, He did take the occasion to knock them all to the ground to set the record straight that He was in control. Satan was clueless, but human redemption was about to be accomplished.

Christians and the Sword: John 18:7-11

"7) Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." 8) Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," 9) to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." 10) Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. 10) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

This text opens a very controversial discussion. Is self defense justified for the Christian? Should Christians arm themselves? Was Peter right in his action to draw his sword and swing at the slave of the high priest?

Before answering those questions, we need to do a quick harmony of the story from all four Gospels. Initially, this might add to our confusion of the subject.

From Luke 22:35-38 we discover why Peter had a sword with him. "35) And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, " No, nothing." 36) And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. 37) For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS ' ; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." 38) They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."

I take it from these verses that a change was about to take place. Up to that point Jesus was responsible for the safety of His disciples from bad actors. With Him leaving them, they would have to learn common sense self-defense. Therefore, he told them to carry a sword from that point forward for self-defense.

But there are another few verses that need to be consulted. Notice Luke 27:51; "But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed Him."" Then according to Matthew 26:52 he told Peter; "Put your sword back in its place; for those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." There is not doubt that Jesus had compassion and did not want the situation to escalate. Jesus is about healing and not hurting. His followers were to be known by love and not violence. (John 13:34-35)

He then said in Luke 22:52-53, "... Have you come out with swords and clubs as against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me, but this hour and the power of darkness is yours." Jesus made it clear that they were not wrestling against flesh and blood, but the powers of darkness. Those battles are fought in the prayer closet with totally different weapons. The disciples had just slept through that battle.

When I pull all of these scriptures together, I come up with the following seven guidelines. There is latitude for godly people to differ in how they prepare and apply the question of self-defense as long as they are within the following broad parameters.

1. The followers of Jesus are to be known by love and not violence. The gospel is never to be spread by force or through force of arms. We are to respect the dignity of all people.
2. Jesus implied that self-defense against wicked people and bad actors is an individual responsibility. Jesus advised His disciples to carry a self-defensive weapon. (Of the eleven, only two carried swords.)
3. The church is to win the battles of spiritual warfare in the prayer closet and not on the battlefield. However, it might be wise to follow the example of Jesus and have a security team in place who have been properly trained.
4. Government is entrusted with the power of the sword for national defense, civil defense, and criminal justice. Government should allow for personal self-defense. (Notice that the

soldiers had no problem with Peter carrying a sword for self defense, as long as he put it back in its sheath in their presence.)

5. When official government authority shows up on the scene, you better submit to them or you may perish. (With the rebuke of Jesus, Peter wisely submitted and put his sword back in the sheath.)
6. When Jesus said, "Those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword", He was warning about taking up the sword against God-ordained authority and not against bad or wicked people who mean you or your family harm.
7. In the course of spreading the gospel and living godly in this present world, persecution will come. When it comes to suffering for the gospel, there is a cup from which we must drink just as Jesus did in the context of these Scriptures. This will sometimes be a fuzzy line to discern.

We are now ready to answer our opening questions. Jesus encouraged His disciples to arm themselves for self-defense, but He rebuked Peter for stepping over the line and attacking ordained authority. Christians are always to submit to the civil laws that govern these situations where they live. These Scriptures are actually given to provoke this conversation and help clarify the issue.

The High Priesthood: John 18:12-14

"12) So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, 13) and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. 14) Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people."

The priesthood and the Sanhedrin were led by a small and tight group. Notice they took Jesus to Annas first. His house may have been nearest to them. He also had great authority and influence in the Jewish nation. According to Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, he had himself been a long-time high priest. He also had five sons who had successively enjoyed the office. At this point, his son in-law, Caiaphas was in the office. Though there were many descendants of Aaron by this point, one family controlled the office of high priest.

Is it any wonder that the slave of Caiaphas was also in the arresting party? No doubt, the officers who accompanied the Roman cohort were also from the Jewish counsel known as the Sanhedrin. This was an inside job and did not represent the desire of the people. It was done under the cover of darkness while most families were home celebrating the Passover.

I share this information so that you might understand how human politics and corruption often gets in the driver's seat of religious institutions. Jesus was about to suffer at the hands of human depravity that was in control of the religious establishment of Judaism. They had placed themselves in the seat of Moses.

Something new was coming. Jesus was about to replace the whole system with His Church. (See Matthew 16:17-20) The body of Christ is an amazing New Testament phenomenon that we do not have time or space to develop in this format. Let it be sufficient to say that more was happening in the backdrop of these few verses than meets the eye. The very priesthood was about to be changed.

Condemned by Silence: John 18:15-18

“15) Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, 16) but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. 17) Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." 18) Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.”

To his credit, at least Simon Peter followed the mob that arrested Jesus. Notice there was a slave girl in charge of the door. When she recognized Peter she asked him of his identity. At some point, even she had been observing Jesus and His disciples during His ministry from a distance. Most likely out of fear, Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus. Before we get too critical of Peter, it must be noted that the other disciples had fled for their lives.

Many believe the disciple that sought admission for Peter was John. That is entirely possible. But there is another theory. Notice that the disciple was known to the high priest. He was seated among the officers to hear the outcome. It is possible that the other disciple was none other than Judas himself who sought admission for Peter. The gospels indicate that Judas was surprised at the outcome and afterward felt remorse. (See Matthew 27:1-5) He wanted the money but not the outcome. With the outcome his money suddenly meant nothing to him. He was likely sitting in the background listening to the proceedings.

It was cold enough that the slaves and the officers made a fire of charcoal to warm themselves. They did not have first-class seating, because they were not the key players in the story. Though Peter was sitting among them, this group may not have been hostile toward Jesus. These may have been the very same officers who listened to Jesus speak earlier in the Gospel and were amazed at His message. (See John 7:45-46) They were most likely there out of duty and not desire.

So what can be learned from this story? I would suggest that fear, greed, and a sense of duty that dampens the human conscience makes for spineless bench fellows. As they were looking for witnesses to come forward, not one in the crowd from this gathering was willing to speak up on behalf of Jesus. They stood by silently and watched an innocent man being condemned.

At some point, all of us must face our fears, greed, and cowardice. Courage is imparted by the Holy Spirit and does not come easily. At least Peter was radically changed after Pentecost.

Judas lost all hope. Church history generally agrees that all of the disciples but Judas and John were martyred.

(According to the theologian Tertullian, Roman emperor Domitian ordered John to be boiled to death in oil, but John continued to preach from within the pot. Tertullian says He miraculously escaped unscathed.) -dj

The First Interrogation: John 18:19-24

“19) The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 20) Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. 21) Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.” 22) When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” 23) Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” 24) So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.”

This is an interesting first round of interrogation. Notice the former high priest questioned Jesus about “His disciples and His teaching.” It may have been from jealousy. Annas as a former high priest was set aside from the people. He thrived on ruling over people, but he was isolated from them. He had very little contact with common people.

By contrast, Jesus had a large public following. He had a group of committed disciples and He taught openly in a very large geographical region. He spent His entire ministry out and among the people. Annas and the religious elite seldom strayed from their highly-secured compounds. This was in fact the greatest fear the religious leaders had in arresting Jesus. They feared a riot from the people. (Mark 14:1-2)

We now discover that Jesus left behind a dynamic model for ministry. We are to share the gospel abundantly and make disciples of those who respond. He wants us to meet the needs of people and treat them with love, respect, and dignity. He displayed a relational model of ministry. Stagnant religious rites and rituals steeped in cold tradition are very ineffectual at impacting people compared to relational ministry.

Notice that one of the officers struck Jesus because he viewed Him as being disrespectful to Annas. Established religion demands respect. It functions out of a position of institutional authority. By contrast, Jesus won the hearts of the people by loving them, ministering to them and rubbing shoulders with them. The fear of force is dim compared to the power of connected love and the gospel.

Peters Root Problem: John 18:25-27

“25) Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You are not also one of His disciples, are you?” He denied it, and said, “I am not.” 26) One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” 27) Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.”

This was a tragic failure for Peter. Just hours earlier during the meal, Peter had said to Jesus, "Lord, why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for you." (John 13:37)

I believe he sincerely meant it. After all, was it not Peter who drew the sword and was ready to defend Jesus against the crowd that came to arrest Him? I do not see Peter as a coward. Jesus responded to Peter, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a cock shall not crow, until you deny me three times." (John 13:38)

So what changed in Peter? Why the denial? I believe the crowd changed. Peter was no longer among other disciples, followers of Jesus, or supporters. He was now standing in the midst of critics and hostile enemies of Jesus. He was standing alone among people of a radically negative opinion of Jesus. This was new turf for Peter.

There are two things that every believer must overcome. One is the fear of man and the other is the desire to please people. It is easy to stand for Jesus in church. It is hard to live for Jesus in the secular market place where life unfolds daily. Yet learning how to do this consistently and appropriately with love, respect, and dignity is the beginning of Christian influence and ministry. This is where the Holy Spirit equips us for effective witness.

To Peter's credit, once he settled the issue of his love for Jesus (John 21) and was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), he became a courageous leader. In the end, he did lay down his life for Jesus.

The Passover Lamb: John 18:28-32

"28) Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. 29) Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" 30) They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." 31) So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," 32) to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die."

The Passover was a major holiday for the Jews. The religious leaders should have been at home keeping the Passover celebration with their families. They were concerned not to defile themselves by going into the Roman Praetorium, but they were fine being defiled with condemning an innocent man to death.

The words of John the Baptist were now being fulfilled. Way back in John 1:29 he introduced Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus had to die on the Passover. The Chief priest had to be involved. Jesus was none other than the true Passover Lamb.

That is the irony of this whole story. Without them realizing, they were fulfilling the picture of the biblical prophecy. They were sacrificing the very Lamb of God on the Passover. The timing was perfect. They were blind to what they were doing.

The Mystery About Pilate: John 18:33-36

“33) Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34) Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35) Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."”

This is a very unusual exchange. When Jesus initially came before Pilate, the Jewish leaders did not even send a charge against Him. According to verses 29-31, Pilate basically sent a question back to the Jewish counsel asking; “So why is this guy here?” They never really gave a solid accusation. According to Luke 23:2-3 they charged Him with refusing to pay taxes to Caesar and claiming to be a king.

This led to the question Pilate had for Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Look at verse 34; “Jesus answered, ‘Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about me?’” It seems that Pilate was more intrigued by Jesus than threatened by Him. Was God stirring within Him? Pilate simply pointed out that he was not a Jew and that Jewish nation, the chief priests to be exact, were the ones who delivered Jesus up to the Romans. The point is that Jesus was rejected by His own people.

Jesus then made the astounding observation that His kingdom was not of this world – it was not of this realm. (Vs 36) He ruled over a spiritual kingdom. It is often called the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Light.

As the conversation unfolded, Pilate seemed to warm up toward Jesus. He not only sought His release but he proclaimed that he found no guilt in Him. Pilate ultimately washed his hands of the sentence and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood." (See Matthew 27:23-25)

There is no doubt from the events recorded in the Gospels that Pilate strongly disagreed with the Jewish leaders about any guilt in Jesus and sought several ways to release Him. Pilate was finally backed into a corner over the fact that Jesus claimed to be a King and that was technically an insurrection against Rome.

I have always been intrigued by Pilate. It seems that He was actually drawn to Jesus. Church history gives hints that Pilate and his wife may have later become believers themselves after his governorship ended. Only eternity will answer that mystery, but there is no doubt the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus fell squarely on the Jewish religious leaders. Matthew 27:25 records these tragic words from the Jewish leaders; “His blood be upon us and our children.”

(This is easily one of the most ironic moments in the Bible, as God says there can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22) which goes back to the ground crying out for blood when Cain killed Abel.(Genesis 4:10) The Jewish leaders said this to show they felt no guilt for the death of Jesus, but it is only through the blood of Jesus that we all have forgiveness.) –dj

Barabbas Released: John 18:38-40

"38) Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him. 39) But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" 40) So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber."

It was at this point that Pilate tried again to seek the release of Jesus for he knew it was because of envy and jealousy that they delivered Him up. (See Matthew 27:18) It was at this very moment that his wife sent a note to him about a dream she had during the night. She warned Pilate to "have nothing to do with that righteous man." (Matthew 27:19) He was determined to find a way to release Jesus.

So he sat on the judgment seat and offered to release a criminal to them in honor of the Passover. He happened to be holding a notorious criminal called Barabbas. He was a robber. He offered the crowd either Jesus or Barabbas. I believe Pilate thought for sure they would ask for innocent Jesus in place of guilty Barabbas.

Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. To his dismay, the crowd cried out that they wanted Barabbas released and Jesus crucified. This is the ultimate picture of Jesus being the substitute payment for sinful man. He literally took the place of Barabbas on the cross. I believe the third cross that night was for Barnabas. His sentence was intended to be carried out. But instead, innocent Jesus died in place of the guilty Barabbas.

I cannot imagine how this turn of events must have impacted Barnabas. Against all hope and with a Roman sentence of condemnation about to be carried out, Barabbas was suddenly set free as the King of Jews took his place on the cross. It is a picture of grace and mercy rolled together. Just hours before his death by crucifixion, Barabbas was suddenly set free!

But Jesus did far more than take the place of Barabbas. He took the place of guilty humanity. He died for the sins of all of us. He paid for your sins and my sins. He was indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

The Scourging: John 19:1-7

"1) Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. 2) And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; 3) and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. 4) Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." 5) Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!" 6) So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" 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 by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.""

Th scourging amounted to torture. It included mocking, beating, whipping, and humiliation. It can be argued that in the case of Jesus it was more severe than most because they were ridiculing His claim of being God. The King of the Jews was enduring the wrath of Rome.

They stripped Him of clothing and then blindfolded Him. As different soldiers punched and beat Him they asked Him to prophecy who hit him. Then they stretched Him out and took a whip of several strands to His back. Each leather strand had broken glass or pieces of sharp metal protruding. As they whipped Him, the glass cut into His back opening up His flesh. Some argue that the back of His legs were also whipped in this fashion.

Then in the case of Jesus, they wove a crown of thorns and forced it onto His head literally cutting like razor blades into His scalp. They then place a purple robe over his cut flesh as they mocked Him as King of the Jews. Thus they presented Him to the people.

Both Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 foretold the details of the crucifixion. He was beaten beyond recognition. Isaiah 53:3-7 says; “3) He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4) Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5) But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6) All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. 7) He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.”

Pilate then brought Him out and said; “Behold, the Man!” He did this to emphasize His humanity and prove that Rome repudiated any claim of Deity. He was also seeking sympathy from the crowd.

It was at this point that the religious leaders stirred up the crowd to cry out for His crucifixion. Their chorus rang out in the night like an angry mob. Pilate was still intent on releasing Jesus, but all hope was fading quickly. Jesus stood before His accusers, rejected, humiliated, bruised, beaten, and mangled. Portions of His beard had been pulled out and blood trickled from every part of His body. He was beaten beyond recognition. His eyes were most likely bruised most of the way closed like a mangled boxer. Keep in mind, He was both beaten and whipped.

He Himself was innocent and remained silent. Much more was happening than a wrongful death. The Flawless Passover Lamb was being sacrificed. The wrath of heaven and earth was being poured out on Him in place of the people. The sentence of death was being carried out for the sins of humanity. (Romans 3:23 & 6:23) Human redemption was being accomplished. It was the darkest moment of human history that paved the way for the forgiveness and healing of the nations.

Problems With a Crucifixion: John 19:6-7

"6) So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" 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 by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.""

There are a few things about these two verses that are troublesome. First, crucifixion was not a Jewish method of capital punishment. The usual method was stoning or sometimes hanging. (See Deuteronomy 21:22-23) A person hung on a tree was considered cursed. Paul uses this fact in Galatians 3:13-14 to expound an amazing truth. Listen to these two verses; "13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "- 14) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." What the religious leaders meant for evil, God used for good to open the doors of salvation to all people including the Gentiles.

Second, the religious leaders pointed to an Old Testament Law to justify their demand that Jesus should be crucified. The only problem was that they twisted the Law. Let me quote Leviticus 24:15-16 to illustrate the problem; "15) You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. 16) Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.'" They accused Jesus of blasphemy, but He never once cursed God or His Name. Jesus simply claimed to be the Son of God or the Messiah. Notice also, the penalty for blasphemy was stoning and not crucifixion.

In reality, it was the religious leaders who were blaspheming God and His plan of Redemption. They were willfully ignorant of the many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. (See Isaiah 7:14-15 and Isaiah 9:6-7 as examples of willful ignorance.) Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. He was indeed the Son of God. He was crucified not for any wrong He had done but solely for Who He claimed to be.

Political Checkmate: John 19:-16

"8) Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; 9) and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10) So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" 11) Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." 12) As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." 13) Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14) Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" 15) So 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 then handed Him over to them to be crucified." (John 19:8-16)

When everything was said and done, the religious leaders of the Jews played the political card on Pilate. He was intent on finding a way to release Jesus until the religious leaders dropped the name "Caesar." They were threatening to charge Pilate with insurrection against Rome if he released Jesus. Checkmate! They backed Pilate into a political corner with no place to turn.

Notice that not a single charge against Jesus became the basis of His condemnation. He was an innocent man. In the end, a corrupt political maneuver by the Jewish religious leaders resulted in Jesus being condemned to crucifixion. Religion lost its innocence when it embraced corruption to put Jesus on the cross.

Many people say to me, "Terry, you seem like a very religious man." My response is; "I don't like religion, I just love Jesus." Religion is man-made, a personal relationship with Jesus is heaven-made.

However, let me hasten to say that I do not give up on the church though it has many flaws. I love verse 11 where Jesus pointed out to Pilate that heaven was in control. I have learned over the years that human failure can and does show up in the church, but Jesus is still in control.

Horrible Beyond Description: John 19:17-19

"17) They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. 18) There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between. 19) Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." (John 19:17-19)

John skips many of the details of the crucifixion recorded in the other Gospels. He did record the fact that Jesus carried His own cross. Keep in mind, he had already been scourged. His skin was ripped open and He was bleeding. He was exhausted. It is not surprising that He fell under the load of the cross and needed help carrying it up the final ascent to Golgotha. (See Luke 23:26-32)

There are two views of the actual crucifixion. One has the vertical beam standing in place and they stretched out His arms and nailed both wrists to the horizontal beam. Then they hoisted Him up by that beam and either nailed or tied it in place. Then they pulled up His feet and nailed them in place. No matter how He moved He was in pain. If He pulled with His arms His wrists were in pain. If He pushing from His feet the pain in His lower limbs were unbearable.

The second view has the full cross laying on the ground and they nailed both hands and then His feet in place. With the hole dug for the cross to fall into, they then hoisted the full cross and dropped the base into the hole. Again the pain would have been unimaginable.

The Roman crucifixion was considered the cruelest kind of death devised in the ancient world. It is sad to imagine, but hundreds of people met their demise in the Roman Empire by crucifixion.

It is more than coincidental that the Jewish leaders picked Roman crucifixion to kill the Messiah. There was no compassion in this kind of death.

John was the disciple who stood at the foot of the cross and witnessed the whole ordeal. He did not want to relive the horrible scene by describing it in detail. After all, John was the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was a slow, painful, and shameful way to die.

There was only one thing that held Jesus to the cross. At any moment He could have flexed His Divine muscle and come down from the cross, but love held Him there. Human sin needed to be atoned for by a death. He died for you and me.

Pilate Gets the Final Word: John 19:19-22

"19) Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.'" 20) Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek. 21) So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" 22) Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'"

These verses have always intrigued me. The sign that Pilate placed on the cross of Jesus was absolutely true and totally irritated the Jewish religious leaders. He took full advantage of having the final word even though the religious leaders tried to get him to change the wording.

The sign read, "Jesus the Nazarene, The King of the Jews." It was written in three languages. Literally everyone in Jerusalem could read the sign for it was in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Verse 20 says that many Jews read this inscription for the place that Jesus was crucified was near the city. Why three languages? It was the Passover and Pilate wanted the message to be read by both local residents and pilgrims from the whole region.

Why is this significant? Well, three days later the King of the Jews rose from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 the Apostle Paul defines the three points of the Gospel. Notice the first point, "That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures..." Pilate nailed that point to the cross in three languages. God used Pilate to proclaim the first point of the Gospel to the whole world. He ensured that the whole world was looking and watching.

Prophecy Fulfilled: John 19:23-24

"23) Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. 24) So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be'; this was to fulfill the Scripture: 'THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS.'"

I have often mentioned that Jesus Christ fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies. This one is from Psalm 22:16-18. There is no question that this Psalm was talking about the crucifixion of

Christ. The context is amazing, but verse 18 specifically says; "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." Why is this important?

This was done by the Roman soldiers who knew nothing about this prophecy or Jewish writings. That means they did not plan this on their own accord, but they exactly fulfilled Scripture. The prophecy was made hundreds of years before the crucifixion of Christ. Psalm 22 is often referred to as a Messianic Psalm. It opens with those amazing words Jesus uttered from the cross, "1) My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

So was this coincidence or Divine providence? Is the Bible just another book or the result of Divine inspiration? Is this another line of evidence that points to the true identity of Jesus Christ? When the evidence is stacked together the verdict becomes clear: Jesus Christ is the only person in all of history who has or ever will fulfill all the prophecies for being the Messiah. Jesus Christ was exactly Who He claimed to be.

The Great Cross Commission: John 19:25-27

"25) Therefore the soldiers did these things. 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 then 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!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household."

This scene was heart-breaking for His mother, His aunt, and the two other women who were devoted followers. They stood at the foot of the cross and beheld the full crucifixion. With them was also the disciple John. All others had fled.

The words of Simeon the prophet are now fulfilled from many years earlier when Jesus was dedicated in the temple. Let me quote them; "34) And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed- 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul-to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'" (Luke 2:34-35) The soul of His mother was being pierced beyond measure as her Son suffered before her on the cross.

It was at this point that Jesus entrusted His mother into the care of the Apostle John. Even on the cross He thought not about Himself. As the eldest Son, the care of His widowed mother was His responsibility. He could find no one more trustworthy for the task than the beloved disciple John. Jesus knew He was not imposing. You never know when need is going to hit close to home. It certainly did for Jesus at this moment.

This was a marvelous illustration of the depth of trust and love between Jesus and the disciple whom He loved. Think about it: With this act of entrusting the care of His family to John, he may have become the mentor of both James and Jude who were half-brothers of Jesus. They in turn both became significant leaders in the early church. What an illustration of the dynamic of relational discipleship!

Church history does not tell how long John filled this role. After the church in Jerusalem started it may have picked up some of the slack. We know that the early church had a huge ministry to widows, orphans, and the homeless. I stress this point because compassion ministry was a huge part of the early church. This might be called "The Commission From the Cross." I believe every follower of Jesus is to become His hands and feet to care for a broken and hurting world in His absence. Our Gospel is to be punctuated with deeds of love and kindness.

It is Finished: John 19:28-30

"28) After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, 'I am thirsty.' 29) A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. 30) Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

When Jesus said, "I am thirsty", the end was near. He was dehydrated not only from the prayer in the garden when His sweat turned into drops of blood, but also from the scourging. His last intake of any kind of liquid may well have been during the supper in the upper room when He took the wine with His disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper.

Psalms 69:21 may be the Scripture that John referenced in this text. It says, "They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The record in both Matthew and Mark says that at this point they took a sponge and put some sour wine on it to offer him a drink on the end of a reed, but He refused. Instead He cried out "It is finished" and breathed His last.

The words "It is finished" were the same as saying "paid in full." They appeared at the end of a mortgage when the last payment was made. Jesus was saying that the redemption of man was complete. The debt for human sin had been paid in full. As sad as this appears on the surface, it is beautiful. Jesus just stepped on the head of the serpent, and he didn't even see it coming.

Knitting the Whole Bible Together: John 19:31-37

"31) Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), 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 man and of the other who was crucified with Him; 33) but coming to Jesus, when they 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 immediately blood and water came out. 35) And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. 36) For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.' 37) And again another Scripture says, 'THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.'"

We again see the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. The Passover was intended to celebrate freedom from slavery and the atrocities that came with it in Egypt. But according to verse 31, the Jewish leaders requested Pilate to break the legs of those being crucified so they could take them down from the crosses and suffer their final fate in sheer agony. Why? So the

sight of men dying cruel deaths might not cast disdain on the Passover Sabbath. Ironically, they were sending these men to the kind of suffering Israel endured under Egypt.

However, two very significant things happened in this text that fulfilled even more prophecy. First, because Jesus had already expired, they did not break his legs. This fulfilled the Passover lamb requirement of Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12. During the Passover not a bone of the Passover lamb could be broken. This was extremely significant for Jesus to be the true Passover lamb. It also fulfilled Psalm 34:20.

The second thing that happened was also providential. One of the soldiers when he came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, thrust a spear in His side, and immediately there came out blood with water. This fulfilled Zechariah 12:10. The New American Standard Version says; "... they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and will mourn for Him..." Underline the word "Me" in your thinking. This is absolutely profound.

Revelation 1:7 adds even more meaning to this providential act; "7) 'BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.'" This was not a random act from a soldier. It was a direct fulfillment of prophecy. Take a moment and compare Revelation 1:7 with what Jesus told the chief priest in Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62. This claim is exactly why Jesus was finally accused of the blasphemy that led to His condemnation by the religious leaders.

Let me make an observation: These seven verses in the Gospel of John are literally knitting together the whole Bible from Exodus to Revelation. If you add Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 22:8 into the mix, then Genesis to Revelation are tied together on the cross. In other words, Jesus was exactly Who He claimed to be!

A Barren Funeral Ceremony: John 19:38-42

"38) After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. 39) Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. 40) So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings 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) Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

After Jesus died, a rich man named Joseph from Arimathea (See Matthew 27:57) who had become a secret disciple of Jesus went to Pilate to ask for the body. When Pilate confirmed that Jesus was dead, he surrendered the body to Joseph.

Joining him was none other than Nicodemus, the leader of the Jews who Jesus had a lengthy conversation with in John 3:1-21. It seems that the seeds of that conversation took root in the soul of Nicodemus and he joined Joseph to prepare the body for burial. It was no longer a secret that either Joseph or Nicodemus had become followers of Jesus. I cannot be critical of

these two men for following Jesus secretly. After all, not one of the disciples was there to help. They had all fled.

Notice that they brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes. Altogether there was about one hundred pounds of the mixture. Undoubtedly it was very expensive. I am sure that they willingly paid for the burial.

It was a customary Jewish preparation for burial. Common people were buried the same day in which they died as can be seen from Lazarus in John Chapter 11. They selected a new tomb in a garden nearby. Some believe the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, but there is no way to confirm that point. It was, however, a new tomb. That was it. So ended the public ministry of Jesus Christ. It was finished!

Here is the sad part of the story, Jesus never had a funeral service. He helped hundreds and ministers to thousands, but had only two people show up for his burial. In my book, that fact is one of the biggest tragedies to this story. It is absolutely incomprehensible.

But I cannot imagine the cloud of despair and perplexity that settled over the region. Other things had also happened. The darkness from the ninth hour. The earthquake. The veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. It was a very eerie Passover.

(The veil of the temple was what separated the main temple from the Holy of Holies. Inside the Holy of Holies was God's territory. This is where the Ark of the Covenant with the actual stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them was kept. This is where God actually dwelt.

Only one human being was allowed back there and only once a year to make sacrifice for the sins of the people. The only individual allowed into the very presence of God was the High Priest and he had to be an actual descendant of Aaron. He had to have purified himself thoroughly through a long list of requirements and regulations or he would die in the presence of God.

The veil in the temple in Jerusalem was made according to very specific requirements given in the book of Exodus. It was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide. It was woven of 72 cords, each composed of 24 threads of fine twisted linen in blue and purple and scarlet. It took 12,000 snails of a very certain species to make a single thimble-full of the dye required to produce those colors in the threads of the veil. It had beautiful scenes of cherubim and other heavenly themes woven into it. Production of a single veil for the temple required the work of 82 young ladies specially trained for the purpose working for six months. When finished, the veil was four inches thick and required 300 priests to move it around. It hung from a solid stone lintel weighing 60,000 pounds.

And God tore it in two precisely when Jesus died:

“At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead.” Matthew 27:51 & 52 (NLT)

In that moment, all who would believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior were granted direct access to God. All the sacrifices all the priests had made for all the years prior to that were done –over because the perfect sacrifice had been made for us. No longer would the veil be necessary because our relationship with God had been forever healed and made whole and holy.

And through His sacrifice, through His death on that cross, we are granted the right to not only come before that throne, but to come before it boldly.

“So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.” Hebrews 4:14-16 (NLT)

Boldly. – The Greek word used is παρρησίας (parrēsias) and it means all out-spokenness, i.e. frankness, bluntness, publicity; by implication, assurance.) -dj

Filling in a Gap in the Story: Matthew 27:62-66

“62) Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, 63) and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' 64) Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first.' 65) Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.' 66) And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.” Even though this is a study of the Gospel of John, we need to slip over to the Gospel of Matthew to fill in a blank in the story as John recorded it. He mentioned nothing of a very important part of the story. The chief priests and Pharisees took precautionary measures to secure the tomb. They went to Pilate to express their concern that the disciples might try to steal and hide the body of Jesus. Pilate granted their request. They most likely took the very Roman guard that had arrested Jesus a day earlier. It was the temple guard that was under their jurisdiction. Pilate gave them permission to make the grave as secure as they knew how. They not only placed the guard, they also “set a seal on the stone.” This was most likely the official seal of Rome. There was no way the knee-knocking and fear-driven disciples who didn’t even show up to claim the body or help with the burial suddenly got the courage to overpower the Roman guard and then steal the body. What a strange turn of events. By taking these precautions the chief priests and Pharisees actually added huge credence to the Supernatural nature of the resurrection. When God wants to do something extra special, He makes it exceedingly difficult.

Between His Death and Resurrection: Ephesians 4:8-10“8) Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.

9) Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10) He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)" The big question is "what was Jesus doing between His death and resurrection? Was He just laying in the tomb in a non-conscious state? The answer is that He was very busy. Let's look at some amazing Scriptures that fill in the blanks.

According to Ephesians 4:9-10, Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth. What did He accomplish? Well, He took the keys of death away from the devil. Take a moment and look at Revelation 1:18 Jesus said, "... I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." His death on the cross canceled out the debt of human sin and disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public display of them. (See Colossians 1:13-15) Satan lost his power over humanity. He thought He defeated Jesus on the cross but he was defeated by the cross.

But notice Ephesians 4:8 says that "He led captive a host of captives." Prior to the work of Jesus on the cross, the Old Testament saints were held captive. Luke 16:19-31 describes what happened to all people prior to the work of Jesus on the cross. The Old Testament saints were held in a compartment of Hades called "Abraham's bosom." After Jesus flexed His divine muscle and took the keys of death from the devil, He shook hell's gates and said, "Lift up your heads, the King is coming through!" Then He reached out and embraced all of the Old Testament saints and emptied Abraham's bosom. Then He ascended with them. Jesus changed everything.

Abraham's bosom is now empty. When a Christian dies "to be absent from the body is immediately to be present with the Lord." (See 2 Corinthians 5:4-9) It can be argued that Jesus accomplished more between His death and resurrection than during His entire public ministry. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is Alpha and Omega. He is my Savior and Lord.

Angelic Intervention: Matthew 28:1-7

"1) Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2) And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3) And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4) The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. 5) The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6) He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7) Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.""

Matthew includes a few details of the resurrection that John leaves out. Early on the morning of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to visit the tomb. Evidently, as they got close they were startled by a severe earthquake. An angel of the Lord had descended and rolled away the stone and was sitting upon it. The angel was not concerned

about the seal of Rome on the tomb. His appearance was like lightning and His face was white as snow.

When the guards experienced the earthquake and saw the angel, they shook for fear and became like dead men. This was more than mere fainting. It was similar to what happened in Acts 5:19-20 and Acts 12:7-11 when the Apostles and later Peter was released from prison by angelic intervention. In both of those cases the guards became unconscious as well.

It appears that angels were often present in the life and ministry of Jesus. They were present at His birth announcements to both Mary and Joseph. A multitude of them were present at His birth and appeared to the shepherds. Angels came and ministered to Jesus after His temptations in the wilderness. Now we discover they were present at His resurrection. It doesn't surprise me because Jesus is the Lord of Hosts.

Notice that the angel that was present at the resurrection was adversarial to the guards but friendly toward the women. He not only spoke to them, the angel also announced the fact of the resurrection. I see this as a Divine sign. Heaven was speaking.

The Significance of the Resurrection: John 20:1-10

“1) Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2) So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3) So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4) The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5) and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6) And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7) and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8) So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9) For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10) So the disciples went away again to their own homes.”

The Gospel message was now complete. Jesus was alive. He had defeated death and risen from the dead. The disciples were as surprised by the empty tomb as everyone else. They had a foot race to the tomb at the news of it being empty.

Only one thing remained. He was about to begin His post-resurrection appearances. Paul chronicled this in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. He mentioned that at one point the resurrected Christ appeared to more than 500 people at one time. Seeing is believing!

So why was the resurrection so important? Romans 1:4 hits the nail on the head; “4) who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead...” This was the final proof of His Deity. It put Jesus Christ in a category all of His own.

As I mentioned much earlier in this series, there was nothing unique about the physical death of Jesus Christ. All people who had lived ever in history died at some point. Many were crucified in

Rome. A few like Lazarus had been raised from the dead only to die again at a later date. But Jesus Christ rose from the dead never to die again. He is alive. He is the source of eternal life. He is God.

When you study comparative religions this is the point that separated Christianity from every other world religion. Buddha is dead. Mohammad is dead and in a grave. Islam celebrates at his tomb every year. Confucius is dead. Karl Max the founder of Communism is dead. But the tomb of Jesus Christ is empty. This is the difference that makes all the difference!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 for Paul's full argument on the significance of the resurrection of Christ. He is our hope of eternal life.

From Skeptics to Believers: John 20:11-18

"11) But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12) and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13) And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14) When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and 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 Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). 17) Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" 18) Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her."

When Peter and John departed, Mary Magdalene lingered behind at the tomb. She was weeping from sorrow for she thought the Romans or Jewish religious leaders had taken the body. Notice verse 13 and 15. Let me quote what she said together to emphasize this point. "13)...Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 15)... Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Her mind was so stuck on the usual and ordinary she could not comprehend the extraordinary. She thought the angels in the tomb were mere men and Jesus was the Gardener. The thought of a resurrection didn't even enter her mind.

There is a huge lesson in this portion of Scripture. Don't be so stuck on naturalism that you deny the supernatural record of Scripture. People do this all the time. They try to explain away the literal record of creation, the fall, the longevity of man prior to the flood, the story of the flood of Noah's day, the signs and wonders under Moses, the supernatural Exodus, and even the miracles of Jesus Himself.

It wasn't until Jesus finally spoke to her by name that she realized Who He was. Jesus was alive. The resurrection happened. After clinging to Jesus for a moment, she ran and reported the news to the disciples.

It is significant to recognize that the disciples themselves were the first skeptics of the resurrection. It was His many post resurrection appearances that convinced them of the validity of the resurrection and His true identity. They became believers the same way we do. They had to accept the truth of the Gospel and its full message. (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-11) They were persuaded by the evidence.

Notice that this is contrary to the message from the critics. They present the story that the disciples were deceivers who stole the body of Jesus and then died trying to cover up a lie. The true story is that they were won over by the evidence and became witnesses for the glory of God and the spread of the Gospel. They moved from skeptics to believers.

Early Defeat Leads to Amazing Rebuilding: Matthew 28:11-15; John 20:19-23

"11) Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12) And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13) and said, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' 14) And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." 15) And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day." (Matthew 28:11-15)

Matthew records that the guards quickly made their way back to the city and reported to the chief priests what had happened. It was time for damage control. The chief priests called together the elders and came up with an amusing plot. They offered the soldiers a large sum of money to claim that the disciples stole away the body of Jesus at night while they were sleeping.

But there was a huge flaw with this story. Had the guards lost the body of Jesus while sleeping it would have been a capital offense. Notice in Acts 12:18-19, the guards who were charged with watching Peter were led away to execution when it was determined that he escaped. The same fate would have awaited these guards had the disciples pulled off the ridiculous claim of stealing the body of Jesus.

Satan loves to spin the truth. The chief priest won over the governor. The soldiers retired rich. The fictitious story gained some traction and discredited the claim of the resurrection. The plot had a devastating effect on the disciples.

As we return to the record in the Gospel of John, we discover that initially the disciples were scared and went into hiding. They were in a room behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Let's face it, "Team Jesus" had gotten slaughtered in the early season tournament and were ready to pack it in and quit. They were scattering quickly. Jesus had some very serious rebuilding to do just to hold the team together. Let's look at His first locker room talk with His disciples that first evening:

Jesus Appears to the Disciples: John 20:19-23

“19) So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21) So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."”

Fear is a terrible thing, but God had another plan. He was about to pour out His Holy Spirit and breathe boldness and courage into His disciples. The whole team rebuilding process from the Resurrection to Pentecost took around seven weeks.

After the day of Pentecost, they emerged as a totally different team. They would move from seclusion and into the public square and preach the resurrection even to the peril of their own lives. They were soon to become such changed men and such a united team that nothing could stop them.

So let me make an application. Have you ever failed or burned out? Do your knees knock together with fear? Are you hiding behind closed doors? Maybe you’ve packed it in and are ready to quit.

Here is the solution: Ask God to bring you through a personal rebuilding process. Follow the amazing steps of rebuilding that Jesus walked His disciples through during those seven amazing weeks between the Resurrection and Pentecost. Stay tuned as we start looking at the rebuilding process Jesus walked His disciple thought beginning with the next post.

Huddle #1: Jesus Addresses Fear: John 20:19-23

“19) So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21) So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."”

The resurrected Jesus started immediately rebuilding His defeated and discouraged team. His first step was to address their paralyzing fear. His disciples were hiding from the Jews behind closed doors. They were out of sight and hoping they were out of mind.

Suddenly, Jesus stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” They desperately needed peace to displace their fear. Then Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The third fruit of the Spirit is peace. (See Galatians 5:22)

But there is also the fear that comes from personal guilt. It is accompanied by the subtle worry that our past sins and mistakes might catch up with us, so Jesus dealt with forgiveness. (See vs 23) There is nothing more liberating than having guilt totally removed. Forgiveness is powerful. It sets the captives free.

Fear and guilt go hand in hand. So does forgiveness and peace. Keep in mind, the work of Jesus on the cross is the basis of forgiving all sin and removing all guilt. This helps us understand verse 23. Jesus is the only way to have your sins forgiven. For those who reject Jesus, their sins are retained.

Do you need to go back and deal with unconfessed sin? Are you needlessly carrying guilt? Isn't it time to turn it over to Jesus? There is no other means of forgiveness than a personal relationship with Him.

Huddle #2: Jesus Addresses Doubt: John 20:24-31

"24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25) So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26) After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27) Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28) Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."" (John 20:24-29)

Keep in mind, Jesus was on a mission to help His team recover from terrible defeat and discouragement. This was His second team huddle after His resurrection. During His first meeting He dealt with fear. During this second meeting He was going to deal with doubt.

Let's be honest – Thomas wasn't the only one struggling with doubt, but he was honest enough to admit it. All of the disciples were initially skeptical about the resurrection. I like the way Jesus appeared to Thomas in this text and said; "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Jesus knew the struggle Thomas was having. He knows our struggles as well. Thomas was absolutely blown away. His response was, "My Lord and my God!" All doubts were gone.

Then in verse 29 Jesus spoke of those who hadn't seen and yet believed. That would include you and me. I have met skeptics over the years. Some have said things like; "If Jesus appeared to me as He did to Thomas... then I would believe." I point out that Thomas was representing every skeptic in this story.

Then I usually respond that Jesus has done much more for you and me than He did for Thomas. They usually look at me a bit perplexed and ask, "What are you talking about?" I then point them to verses 30-31 in the text. "30) Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31) but these have been written

so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31)

These verses were written for the sake of every Thomas that would come thereafter. You see, John was promising the greatest defense of the person and work of Jesus Christ ever given. I believe he was pointing to the completion of the full Bible, both Old and New Testament.

When you hold a Bible in your hand you have the full revelation of God from Genesis to Revelation. Thomas didn't have a Bible to study. The Old Testament books were in individual scrolls and only available to scribes, Rabbis, or priests. Most synagogues only had a handful of scrolls of individual books of the Old Testament. The New Testament hadn't been written yet. From our vantage point in history, we can survey the whole biblical record and it is readily available for everyone to read. It truly is a treasure.

Jesus invites us to bring our doubts to Him. He invites us to study the whole story from Genesis to Revelation. He wants us to know Him as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, and the First and the Last. The Bible contains the full story. All the evidence is in this one book. The full case for Jesus Christ is contained between the two covers of the Bible. We have something far more than the early Christians ever imagined. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and then begin reading your Bible daily. If you seek you will find!

Huddle #3: Jesus Addresses Misplaced Priorities: John 21:1-8

“1) After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2) Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and 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 also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4) But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5) So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6) And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch. " So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7) Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8) But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.” (John 21:1-8)

Jesus is about to have His third huddle with His team. To set up the story, Peter decided to go back to what he was doing before Jesus walked into his life. (See Matthew 4:18-20) But the big problem was that Peter was dragging six of the other Apostles with him into complacency. Peter was an influential leader, but he was influencing them the wrong way. When Peter said “I’m going fishing”, it could be translated as “I’m going back to fishing.” In other words, Peter may have been toying with the idea of restarting his commercial fishing business.

Verse 11 adds some credibility to this view. Jesus told Peter to bring the fish he had caught. Then verse says, “11) Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.” Those 153 large fish represented enough equity to restart his fishing operation. But there was more to the story. It says “the nets were not torn.” This was a miracle. I’ve worked on commercial fishing in Alaska with modern nets. We spent every other day repairing nets. So what was happening?

Jesus was graciously giving Peter a way out. In other words, Jesus was saying to Peter and the other disciples that they needed to be all in and focused or go back to fishing. Jesus was giving them a choice. They needed to set their priorities.

Here is the deal: Jesus needed a team of devoted leaders and not a motley group of half-hearted followers. Nothing is worse than lukewarm Christians. Going back doesn’t work. They had fished all night and caught nothing until Jesus showed up. Walking with Jesus and then trying to go back to your old life will never be fulfilling. It will be barren and empty.

During this third appearance with His disciples Jesus was addressing displaced priorities. He was calling his team to commitment. Jesus wants you and me to be sold out as well. As the story unfolds Peter’s real problem is exposed. Stay tuned for the next huddle.

Huddle #4: Enjoying Time Together: John 21:12-14

“12) Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. 13) Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14) This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.”

Huddle #4 is going to surprise you. Keep in mind, Peter had recently messed up really bad and denied three times that he even knew Jesus. The disciples were full of fear and doubt. They had been hiding and now they were in full retreat with very messed up priorities. They had just spent the night out on the lake in a fishing boat. I’m sure they were tired and exhausted.

So what did Jesus do? He did the most unexpected thing. He cooked them breakfast and served them a meal. He hung out with them. He had fun with them. He relaxed with them. He enjoyed them. He delighted in them. He encouraged them. He took an essential step in helping them rebuild.

In Huddle #4 Jesus enjoyed time together with His Disciples. He accepted and affirmed them. He expressed unconditional love and acceptance of them. He wanted them to be secure in their relationship with Him. There is so much to learn from this story.

Don’t make the mistake of going through life trying to earn God’s love, acceptance, and approval. Don’t give up if you mess up. It’s not about performance, it’s about relationship. Accept the fact that Jesus loves you and delights in you!

Don't reduce your Christian life to rules, legalism, or cold rituals. Learn how to be still and enjoy Jesus. Pull down the walls of your own making between you and God. Accept the fact that He created you and delights in you. After all, He invites you to enjoy eternity with Him. Why not start enjoying Him now? Enjoy the meals He is trying to serve you!

Huddle #5: A Personal Agape Encounter: John 21:15-17

"15) So 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, "Tend My lambs." 16) He said to him again 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, "Shepherd 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

The story now takes an unexpected turn. In front of the other Disciples, Jesus had a one-on-one discussion or huddle with Peter. He was about to get very personal with Peter and expose his root problem.

He asked him three times; "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" The question was very specific in the Greek language. The first two times Jesus asked; "Simon, son of John, do you agape me?" In other words, "Do you love me with the God kind of love?"

Peter responded by saying; Yes, Lord, You know that I Love you." But if you put on your Greek glasses you would discover something interesting. Peter responded by saying, "I phileo you." This is a brotherly kindness, caring, or respect between two people of common interest, but it often holds them at arm's length just outside of a rather large personal bubble.

The third time Jesus asked; "Simon, son of John, do you phileo me?" This grieved Peter because Jesus just exposed Him. By adopting Peter's wording, Jesus was emphasizing that Peter's love for Him was far inferior to His love for Peter. I suspect this is the case with many of us.

Peter had a problem both receiving and giving genuine love. I believe Peter needed inner healing. He needed to see himself as lovable. Peter had a love gap between himself and Jesus and other people. Until this gap was bridged by the healing power of God, it was going to be nearly impossible for Peter to love the people God was calling him to serve. He was not ready to tend lambs or shepherd sheep.

Many people have been hurt or wounded to the point of being in Peter's sandals. These people don't love themselves and therefore they don't see themselves as lovable. They don't know how to give or receive love. They are comfortable with surface and distant relationships, but they don't want anyone getting too close to them. They can handle "phileo love" but they are threatened by "agape love." If Peter was going to be a leader, he needed an agape love awakening in his life. He needed to be made whole.

Maybe you are struggling with a huge love gap in your life. Healing and progress will not come until you let Jesus reach into your love gap. It is part of His plan for your personal rebuilding. I believe Jesus wants to have a personal "Agape Huddle" with each one of us. It is part of His healing process for our lives. He loves us too much to leave us cold, calloused, hurt, and wounded. He wants us to be conduits of His love. I can testify that Jesus has done a huge work in this area in my life. He wants to do the same in yours.

Huddle #6: Self Denial: John 21:18-19

"18) Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go. " 19) Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21:18-19)

It has been said, "If you don't have a cause worth dying for, you don't have a cause worth living for!" This time Jesus was going to raise the stake for Peter to follow Him. He made it obvious that if Peter was going to follow Jesus it would cost him his life. In fact, Jesus described a crucifixion. He was telling Peter, "If you follow me it is going to cost you your life." Then He said "Follow Me!"

In Huddle #6 Jesus is talking about self-denial. It is impossible to serve God or others unless you are willing to put them before yourself. After issuing the call, Jesus just turned and walked away. How did Peter do?

Church history tells us he became totally dedicated to Jesus and his call. A number of years later he was arrested and given the choice to deny Jesus and keep his life or remain loyal to Jesus and face death by crucifixion.

His response was, "I am not worthy to die like my Savior, if you must crucify me, then crucify me upside down." That's exactly how Peter died. Where did he find such courage? He settled the issue years earlier when he counted the cost before following Jesus a second time.

Paul said it best in Acts 20:24; "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." Laying down one's life for Jesus is as much about living daily for Him as it is about dying for Him. It simply means that Jesus is first in everything.

Huddle #7: Jesus Warns Against Comparison: John 21:20-23

"20) Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21) So Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" 22) Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" 23) Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

In this final team-building huddle in the gospel of John, Jesus warns Peter against comparison. God has a unique plan for each of our lives. Some will go down the path of wealth and some modest means. Some may experience blessing and good health and some might go through severe health trials. Jesus told Peter that he would be martyred, but God had a very different plan for John. Both of them would fulfill an essential purpose for the glory of God.

I have met many believers over the years that have great gifts, but are discontent because they wanted to have other gifts or abilities. I've met scholars and great speakers who wanted to be singers. I've met engineers who wished they could be athletes, and mathematicians who wanted to be artists. I've met short people who wanted to be tall, and tall people who wanted to be shorter. One big area is with marriage. I've met many single people who were questioning God because they were still single, and married people who wanted to get divorced.

I've met gifted pastors of small churches who suffered from a sense of failure even though they were serving in very difficult fields. Comparison is never good. On the one hand it can lead to jealousy and discontent. On the other hand, it can lead to pride and arrogance. Why not rather accept the fact that God has a unique plan for you and delight in Him? Let's face it, comparison is nothing short of anger and discontent toward God.

Jesus was telling Peter to stop comparing. He needed to fix his eyes on Jesus and follow Him. You and I have much to learn from this conversation Jesus had with Peter. We need to rejoice in what God does through others while being totally consecrated to Jesus as we follow Him in our lives. The goal is not to be famous, the goal is to be faithful.

Books Beyond Number: John 21:24-25

"24) This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. 25) And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."

John closed his Gospel by identifying himself and vouching for the truthfulness of his record. This is very similar to what he said in 1 John 1:1-4. It is worth your reading.

However, verse 25 is mind-boggling. He basically said that if everything Jesus did was written in detail, the world itself could not contain all the books. Was John talking about what Jesus had done during His public ministry? Maybe. We know there are three other Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But let's face it, that's a far cry from the world not being able to contain them. So what else might have John been hinting at?

Well, keep the claim John made about the identity of Jesus Christ in mind when you read this verse. In chapter one he presented Jesus as the God of Creation. He presented Him as the member of the Godhead that has always explained God to the created realm. As such, He was seen all through history and the Old Testament. He existed for all eternity past which means He pre-existed creation. I wonder how many books could be written on the mystery of what God did for all eternity past?

He also created the universe with billions of stars, galaxies, and solar systems. He calls them all by name. Beyond that, He created the laws of physics, genetics, and every discipline of science including the entire biosphere filled with all life forms on planet earth.

So how much space would it take to house a library that contains all knowledge and truth in the universe? Doubtless, that would require a lot of books filled with an unimaginable number of words. Hmmm, that's how John started his Gospel; "In the beginning was the Word..." (John 1:1) In a way, he ends the Gospel of John in a similar way. Let me paraphrase; "In the end were volumes of books which could not be counted... and Jesus was responsible for them all."