STUDY NOTES ON “GOSPEL OF JOHN”
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(This study utilizes the NASB text)

Introduction – The gospel of John is the most “theological” of the four gospels. Of all the gospel writers, the apostle John is the one most commonly referred to as “the theologian.” In this gospel John gives us the penetrating gaze into the person, character and nature of Jesus Christ. John carefully defines for us who Jesus really is, what His character and nature are like, the desire of Jesus to share His life with us, and the most profound mysteries of life. The fourth gospel is filled with the deity of Christ, and gives the most extensive look into the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In contradistinction to the gospel of John, the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are far more “historical” in nature. They are referred to as the “synoptic gospels” because they are similar in matters of content and narrative; they provide us with a lot of information about the events and ministry of Jesus’ life.

1:1-5 – The deity of Christ. John’s opening echoes that of Genesis – God is the Creator of all things, both seen and unseen. John essentially says, if we want to understand who Jesus is, we must begin with the relationship He shared with the Father “before the world began” (17:5, 24). The eternally existent “Word” was the person of Jesus Christ (1:14) – He was God’s expression of Himself to humanity. He not only existed in eternity past with God, but “was God.” The term “logos” in Greek was used to speak of the principle of the universe, and the creative energy that generated the universe. Having always existed, Jesus was not a creation of God, but was Himself the “Creator of all things” – “the source of all life.” He was the very Agency through whom both physical life and spiritual life came into being – In actuality, Jesus Christ is “life itself.” He is the “light of men” who provides the guidance, direction & understanding man needs – it is one thing to simply exist, it is quite another to comprehend the true purpose of life, and to know how to live. So, Christ is “our light” (1:4), and as our light, He reveals truth. It is the very nature of light to “reveal” – as such, He is the source (revelation) of knowledge, wisdom, and salvation. The “light shines in the darkness,” but the darkness did not understand or grasp it – obviously, it was foreign to them; light and darkness are “antithetical opposites;” humanity is in the darkness of rebellion.

If Jesus is “not” God, what value does the “cross” have? Essentially, it wouldn’t have any value at all – None. Let me explain: Suppose you owed a debt that was completely beyond your ability to pay – $100 Billion! That’s some serious bucks. At any rate, you decide to take your problem to God. So you set up an appointment and go to His office on the specified day. You then proceed to tell Him your problem. After listening to you, God goes into His backroom... starts up His “printing press,” and runs off 100 million $1,000 bills – which equals $100 Billion. He then places all of the bills in 1,000 large boxes (each box containing one-hundred thousand $1,000 bills). You impressed? You should be, that’s a lot of money.

Now, what did it really “cost God” to pay your debt? In truth, all it really cost God was a little of His time and a little energy. He could have printed up for you any number of dollars, regardless of how much you owed – it would simply have taken Him a little longer. But, was there really any “sacrifice” on His part? No. None. So, what “value” would the cross have if God had simply “created” a human being – Jesus – sent Him to earth, and had Him die on the cross? Again, the answer is “None.” God could create a billion Jesus’ and have all of them die on a cross for us; still it would cost God “nothing.” Nada. Furthermore, there would be “no sacrifice” on His part.
Therefore the cross would have absolutely "no value." If that really describes what transpired – God created Jesus and had Him die for us on a cross – essentially, that would be meaningless. Where’s the "sacrificial love" in that kind of an act? He would actually be transferring the pain of death to someone else! God wouldn’t be sacrificing a thing; therefore, such love would be completely meaningless. If Jesus “is not God,” the cross would have no value whatsoever.

However, if Jesus “is God,” what value does the cross have? Principally, it means that God “loves us with an everlasting love because He sacrificed everything He had – His very life – to save us!” As such, the value of the cross is "infinite" – it is beyond all calculation. . . the value of the cross is incredibly “meaningful” – it is beyond all understanding. . . and the cross is tremendously “efficacious” – beyond all comprehension. Thus, if Jesus is God, I am saved – forever! “Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God wouldst die for me?”

The Application – Recognizing the “deity of Christ” is absolutely paramount for one to experience the divine life, and discover the ultimate purpose of life. Jesus is “our light” and the revelation we need to escape the bondage of darkness. When we place our trust in the person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit applies the work of the cross to our life, and we experience “new life” in Jesus Christ (cf. John 3:5; Titus 3:5). The reality is this: Christ is “life” – He is the Author of life – apart from Him there is “no life.” Therefore it is ludicrous to think one can experience the “abundant life” apart from Him – Scripture teaches that we are “dead” in our sins, and because of God’s great mercy we are “made alive” through Christ (cf. Eph 2:1, 5). Therefore, to experience life, we must experience Christ; conversely, to not experience Christ, is not to experience life. Jesus is “God,” and with God all things are possible (cf. Matt 19:26).

1:6-13 – The witness of John the Baptist. He was sent from God to announce the coming of Messiah. He told people that Jesus was the “light of the world” – light reveals the truth. The advent of Christ into the world is described by John as “light entering into darkness” – as light, Jesus reveals both sin and God to humanity (cf. Ps 36:9; Is 9:2; Jn 8:12; 11:25). Jesus entered the world to give it “spiritual light” – God gives true light to every man (Jn 1:9; Rom 1:20) – man can either reject or accept that light. John claims Jesus is “the truth from which all truth flows;” He is the real thing – the true light – in contradistinction to all the “false lights” that are in the world. The Jewish people didn’t see the correlation between what “Jesus taught” and “what the Scriptures taught” – they interpreted Scripture in the context of “rabbinic human traditions;” for them tradition was co-equal to the Scriptures. Those who “believed Him” became the “children of God” – the essence of which is “regeneration” by God’s Spirit. Becoming “children of God” means we “share His divine life” (6:40), and have “life in His name” (20:31).

The Application – Jesus entered into our dark world to “enlighten” our souls, that we might “walk in the light and have fellowship with God and one another” (Jn 8:12; 1 Jn 1:5-7).

1:14-18 – The Word made Flesh. “”Flesh” became the sphere of the “Supernatural” – the “Word” entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ; He veiled His “glory” in a body of flesh, and dwelled among His people. The word glory means “brightness” or “splendor” – here it refers to God’s revealed character. In the Old Testament it refers to the “luminous manifestation of God Himself.” The followers of Jesus beheld the wonder of an absolutely perfect life – one without any sin whatsoever, one full of grace and truth; that is, He was full of undeserved kindness for others, and defined reality as it really was. God’s thoughts and attitude toward mankind were fully declared by Jesus Christ. The Law was given thru Moses – it commanded men to obey & condemned them to death if they failed to do so. It told men what
was right, but didn’t give them the power to do what it commanded. Jesus came with **Grace & Truth**—He did not show grace at the expense of truth; He didn’t minimize sin; He called it what it was... and He provided a solution for it.

**The Application** — The realization that God entered into human history “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Jn 1:14; Rom 8:3; Phil 2:7; Heb 2:17), gives us the confidence that He indeed loves us, and that He can fully relate to us in all our weaknesses (Heb 4:15). That our Savior is “full of grace” is the biggest hurdle sinful believers must navigate, because it seems implausible. “**How can it be that Thou My God shouldst die for me, who caused His pain?”** It’s the question every believer must wrestle with. **It is only when we realize the wonderful truth that “God really does love us,”** regardless of the mess we may have made of our lives, that we will cultivate an **intimate relationship** with Him. Thus, the closing words of II Peter—**“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Pet 3:18). Grow in His grace!

**1:19-34 — The Testimony of John the Baptist.** When word came to the Jewish leaders that a man named “John” was telling people to “repent” because the Messiah was coming, they sent priests and Levites to find out who John was—He told them, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, and my message is to make straight the way of the Lord” (Is 40:3). The Jews expected “Elijah” to return to the earth prior to the coming of Christ (Mal 4:5; Deut 18:15), but John assured them he was not Elijah—“I baptize in water, but He who follows me will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” John’s baptism was an outward sign that symbolized an inward change in the hearts of His fellow-countrymen.

**The next day, John saw Jesus coming to him, and said of Him:** “Behold the **“Lamb of God”** who takes away the sin of the world!” (cf. Is 53:7, 12). The lamb was a **sacrificial animal** among the Jews. God had taught His people to “slay a lamb” and to sprinkle its blood on the altar as a sacrifice—the lamb that was killed was a **substitute** and its blood was shed so that their sins might be forgiven. The lambs slain in the OT period did not actually atone for sin; they simply pointed forward to the fact that God would one day provide a Lamb who would “take away” their sin. Godly Jews down through the ages had waited for the coming of this Lamb—now at last the time had come, and John triumphantly announced the arrival of the true **“Lamb of God.”** John never grew weary of reminding people that he was only preparing the way for “Someone” greater than himself who was coming—he was not trying to attract disciples to himself. When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, **he saw the “Spirit” descend upon Him as a dove out of heaven**—at that point he realized Jesus indeed was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus’ ministry begins in the context of John the Baptist’s ministry (cf. Mt 3:1-17; Mk 1:2-13; Lk 3:1-22). Whereas John baptized “with water,” Jesus would baptize with the “Holy Spirit”—beginning on the day of Pentecost, every believer was “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (cf. Acts 1:5; 2:4, 38; 1 Cor 12:13).

**The Application** — Like John the Baptist, do we have a deep inner desire to receive and proclaim God’s revelation? Does “our life” flow from our relation with Christ? How would you respond to the question, “**Who are you?**” (v. 22); and “**Why are you doing what you are doing?**” (v.25). John testifies that “Jesus is the Lamb of God (“Son of God”) who takes away the sin of the world” (vv. 29, 34).

**1:35-51 — The Beginning of Jesus’ Public Ministry.** When the Baptist identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” some of His disciples became Jesus’ first followers (vv. 35-37). The first three mentioned in the text that Jesus asked to “**follow Him**” were fishermen—John, Andrew and Simon Peter (v. 40 – as was his custom, John doesn’t mention his own name). Jesus knew Simon’s name without being told, and He also knew that his
character would be so changed, that he would become a “rock” (v. 42; Mt 16:13-18); hence, Jesus gave him the name “Peter” (“rock” in Greek). The next pair Jesus selects were Philip and Nathanael. Jesus’ “origin” raised doubts in Nathanael’s mind as to whether or not Jesus could be the One Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets spoke (v. 45) – “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Jesus’ origin was also a big hurdle for His Jewish opponents (cf. Jn 7:41-42, 52). Apparently, it was known as a “poor, no account kind of town.” Jesus gave Nathanael two proofs of His Messiahship – He described his character – “a man without guile” – and He told him that He had seen him “under the fig tree” when it was not humanly possible to do so. Nathaniel’s character was one of a clear heart in which there was no deceit – literally, he was “a man in whom there was nothing false” (v. 47); which was completely opposite to that of the Pharisees – “men in whom there is no truth” (8:44). Nathaniel also had a humble openness to the things of God – he was “willing to come and see” (v. 46). Because he believed, Jesus told him he would see “greater proofs than these.”

The Application – As Christians we need to be “open to the things of God” as well – are you willing to journey with Christ through uncertain times? Does “humility and honesty” characterize our inner man? When we respond to God “in faith believing” – He trusts us with “greater things” (v. 50; cf. Lk 6:38; 19:26; Gal 6:7-10; Heb 11:6; Jam 4:6). God rewards our faith.

2:1-12 – Miracle at Cana of Galilee. This story begins the revelation of the “glory” of Jesus. When Mary told Jesus that the wedding host had “run out of wine,” Jesus respectfully responded to His mother with the idiom, “What is there to me and to you?” – in this context the expression simply denotes a mild form of detachment, as opposed to a cold harsh rejection. It is part of the larger theme that Jesus divine mission is guided by His heavenly Father, and not by the agenda of any human beings, even His family (Jn 7:1-10; Mk 3:33-35; Lk 2:49). Mary had wanted to see her Son glorified, but He had to remind her that the time for that had not yet come. Mary understood what He was saying, so she simply told His servants to “do whatever Jesus ask them.” Jesus gave them instructions to fill the waterpots with water – this they did and the “miracle” occurred before any wine was drawn out and given to the master of the feast. When the host tasted it he was amazed at the “excellence of the wine.” This miracle was a “sign” that authenticated who Jesus was – He was the Christ, the Son of God. So Jesus manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him (that is, their faith was strengthened, and they trusted Him more fully – they were already believers). So at the wedding, Jesus was sensitive to a “need” and did what He could to “meet that need;” Jesus took something as ordinary as “water” and transformed it into something that was “extraordinary;” furthermore, Jesus enlisted the services of others.

It is interesting to note, Jesus chose a “wedding” to launch His ministry and do His first miracle. A wedding is an act of God that unites together two people in such a way they become “one flesh” – the same picture that describes the work of God in “uniting believers together with Christ” – in actuality, we literally become the “bride of Christ” (cf. Jn 17:21-26; Mt 25:1-13; Jn 3:29; Eph 5:22-27, 32; Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9). Similarly, Jesus turned water into “wine” – that element that represents the “blood of Christ” and the “New Covenant in His blood” whereby we become “united to Christ” (Lk 22:16-20; 1 Cor 11:25). After the wedding, Jesus and His family and disciples went to the north shore of Galilee to the city of “Capernaum.” Many scholars believe this became the home town of His family as well (v. 12). During Jesus’ earthly ministry Capernaum became His home town.
The Application – As Christians we need to be intentionally and spiritually sensitive to the “needs of others” (as God’s Spirit directs)... and sensitive and willing to use whatever “resources” are available... and sensitive to “enlist the services of others” to help meet the need.

2:13-25 – First Passover & Cleansing of the Temple. When Jesus came to the Temple to celebrate the Passover, He found that it had been turned into a “marketplace” where moneychangers were making “money” off those who came from foreign countries – it is known that these moneychangers often took unfair advantage of those who traveled from great distances. Jesus made a whip and drove the moneychangers (merchants) out of the Temple. The law permitted the poor to offer a pair of doves, since they could not afford the more expensive animals. Jesus warned His people against using religious services as a means of “getting rich.” The confrontation in the Temple culminated with Jesus quoting from Isaiah & Jeremiah – “Get this stuff out of here! How dare you turn My Father’s house into a market-place!” (cf. Is 56:7; Jer 7:11). Jesus’ disciples were reminded of Psalm 69:9 where it was predicted that when the Messiah came, He would be utterly consumed with a “zeal for the house of God.”

The Jews in the Temple challenged Him saying, “By what authority do You do these things? Show us a “sign.” The very nature of their response suggests that they were at least “open” to the possibility that Jesus might be able to defend His activity (cf. Jn 3:2). Jesus responded with another of His cryptic sayings, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” – He was speaking of the temple of His body. When He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered His words. While Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, “many believed” in Him as a result of the “signs” He was doing. Although many “professed to believe in Him,” Jesus did not believe in them – Jesus realized that many of them were simply coming to Him out of curiosity and the sensational miracles He performed. Jesus knew their hearts and He knew whether or not their faith was genuine.

The Application – Are we consumed with “God’s purpose” for the local church – Jesus was consumed with a zeal for the house of God. Are we sensitive toward to the “financially less fortunate” in our church (providing for their needs, scholarships, etc.)? Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly reaches out to the poor – He empathizes with them; He hurts for them; He strives to help them. How are we as a church showing a “spirit of compassion” toward the poor? Are any in the congregation using the church to “make money” for themselves – clearly, that is contrary to what Scripture teaches?

3:1-21 – The New Birth & Nicodemus. The Pharisee, Nicodemus, once again came to Jesus under the cover of night and makes a grand statement: “You must be from God because no one can do these signs unless God is with him.” Early on in his encounters with Jesus, Nicodemus struggled with his profession of faith; yet toward the end of Jesus’ ministry he becomes a committed follower of Christ (cf. Jn 7:50-52; 19:38-42). At this point, Jesus recognizes in him an earnest desire to know the truth, and responds to him with another cryptic saying that tests his heart: “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born again’ he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This is another of Jesus’ “emphatic” statements. Nicodemus naturally was thinking of “physical birth” vs “spiritual birth.” He asks, “How can a man be born when he is old?” Jesus explains: “Unless one is born of water (cleansed by the Word of God – 1 Pet 1:23; Jam 1:18; Ezek 36:25-28) and the Spirit (there must be a “spiritual birth” to enter the kingdom of God), he cannot enter into the kingdom of God – that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Spiritual birth takes place when a person “trusts” in the Lord Jesus. When a person is “born again,” he receives a new
nature, and is made fit for the kingdom of God. One must realize that in order to be a subject of God’s kingdom, a man must be holy, pure, and spiritual – hence, the need for the “new birth.”

**Jesus now teaches “heavenly truth” to Nicodemus** (v.14). The penalty of man’s sins must be met – “as Moses lifted up the serpent of brass in the wilderness (Num 21:4-9), even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; and whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.” When the brazen serpent was looked upon in the wilderness, a miraculous healing took place to those who had been bitten by a serpent. The truth is, everyone has been “bitten by the viper of sin” and is condemned to eternal death – those who look to Christ, however, are saved to eternal life! God’s “lifting up of the Son of Man” points to the center of His revelation – “the cross.” The cross itself is a heavenly thing – it reveals the life of heaven that Jesus has come to offer us (3:15). Since God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and love is the laying down of one’s life (1 Jn 3:16), it is precisely in the cross that we see God most clearly; that God is love is the essence of the “good news.”

**The Savior was made “sin” for us, that we might be made the “righteousness of God” in Him.** Concerning the “new birth,” God loved the world so much, that He gave His only begotten Son to pay the penalty of our sin – death – that “whoever believes” in Him will have eternal life.” Jesus didn’t come into the world to “condemn people” – He came to “save people!” Those who trust in Jesus are not condemned; but those who do not trust in Him are condemned. Jesus is the “light” who came into the world. He was the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. . . and He died for the sins of all the world. However, “those who love sin, hate the light,” because the light exposes their sinfulness – and their pride refuses to see themselves as desperately sinful. When Jesus was here in the world, sinful men were made uncomfortable by His presence because He revealed their “awful condition” by His own holiness – being sinful and proud, they loathed His righteous, holy character. Those who humble themselves to the truth are “born again” through faith in Christ. Isn’t it amazing how our “sinfulness” is such a stumbling block to being saved? Why do men insist on seeing themselves as “much better” than they are? And then actually “hate the light”? Clearly, Satan has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving.

**The Application** – Are we able to “introduce people to Christ”? Able to “explain the truth” of the gospel message? Able to give a “philosophical rationale” of spiritual light vs. spiritual darkness? able to explain the biblical truth of the “new birth”? All of this requires “being sensitive” to the current beliefs and questions of those with whom we are interacting – if we don’t know where they are in their thinking, we won’t be able to address the questions of their hearts; until those questions are answered, the barriers to “belief” remain unmoved.

**3:22-36 – John the Baptist’s Last Testimony.** Jesus had already begun His ministry and many were believing in Him and being baptized. . . this caused some of John’s disciples to question him about his ministry and baptism – essentially, “Who’s baptism was better?” John responded, “I am not the Christ; I have been sent before Him; He must increase and I must decrease; He gives the Spirit without measure; He who believes in the Son has eternal life.” The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.
In Jesus we see heaven opened and the heart of God – which is love revealed. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who do not believe in Him, the wrath of God abides upon him. What all human beings need is “birth from above” by God’s Spirit.

The Application – We must “labor ceaselessly” to point people to Christ – not to our church. We’re not trying to impress people with what we know, or how wonderful we are, or how great our church is; our job is to “point people to Christ.” With that understanding, we can only point people to Him if we “really know Him;” this means we must commit ourselves to “growing in the knowledge of Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). One of the main objections to “sharing our faith” is a lack of knowledge; thus we conclude that we don’t know enough to give an “adequate presentation of the gospel.” Therefore, because we don’t feel capable of “defending the gospel,” we simply remain silent. Another objection to sharing our faith is the “fear of rejection” – if we care more about being accepted by men, than God, we will cave in to this fear. We must prayerfully and diligently give ourselves to the work of ministry.

4:1-42 – Jesus Goes to Galilee and has an encounter with the “Woman of Samaria.” Jesus’ ministry was now exceeding that of John the Baptist. Jesus decided to depart for Galilee, on the way He passed through Samaria where he met a woman drawing water at “Jacob’s well.” While there He engaged her in conversation. The woman recognized that Jesus was a Jew, and was shocked that He would speak to a Samaritan woman. The Jews had a deep dislike for the Samaritans, because they claimed descent from “Jacob;” as such, the Samaritans looked on themselves as “true Israelites.” Crucial to both Samaritans and Jews is that the name of “Jacob” defines the people of the covenant. In actuality, the Samaritans were a mix of Jewish and heathen descent, and were considered “half-breeds” by the Jews. By asking a “favor” from the woman, Jesus had stirred her interest and curiosity. Jesus said to her, “If you knew whom you were talking to, you would have asked Him to give you ‘living water!’” She was only able to think of “literal water,” so the Lord began to explain the difference between the literal water of Jacob’s well, and the water which He would give – “Whoever drinks of literal water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst” – a well springs up within the believer to continually refresh his thirst. The contrast was vivid – all the earth can provide is not sufficient to fill the human heart. When the woman heard of this marvelous water, she immediately wanted to have it – but she was still thinking of “literal water;” she did not want to come out to the well every day to draw water. She did not realize that what Jesus had been speaking about was “spiritual water,” that He was referring to all the blessings which come to a human soul through faith in Him.

At this point, there is an abrupt change in conversation – Jesus told her to “Go, call your husband and have him come here.” The Lord knew she was “living in sin,” and salvation required she must acknowledge her “sinfulness” – Jesus was going to lead her step by step through the process. Only those who know themselves to be “lost” can be saved. Salvation requires “repentance” and “faith in Christ.” The woman tried to withhold the truth without telling a lie – she said, “I have no husband.” Jesus confirmed that, and how startled she must have been when He recited her past history. She had had “five husbands” and the man with whom she was now living was “not her husband.” When her life was laid open before her, the woman realized that the One speaking to her was not an ordinary person – the highest estimation she could form of Him was that He was a “prophet.” It seems at this point the woman is “convicted of her sins,” so she changed the subject to “where one worships” – Mount Gerizim (Samaritans) or Jerusalem (Jews). Jesus used her comment to correct her understanding of worship, and the fact that “salvation is of the Jews.” “But an hour is fast approaching,” He said,
“when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in “spirit and truth” – Essentially, Jesus told her that true worship means a believer enters the presence of God by faith and that is where he praises and worships Him; and this can happen anywhere at anytime. The Jews had reduced worship to “outward forms and ceremonies,” but theirs was a not a worship of the spirit; it was outward vs inward. The Samaritans had a form of worship as well, but it had no scriptural authority; their worship forms and ordinances were of their own invention; thus it was false. Jesus told the woman that “worship must be in spirit and truth” – as such, He was rebuking both Jews and Samaritans. Worship is not a matter of going through a “series of rituals” – it must include a broken and contrite heart.

Jesus’ conversation stirred-up within her a desire for the “Messiah to come” – because He would teach all things. Jesus then said to her, “I who speak to you am He.” Literally, Jesus said, “I AM speaking to you” or “Jehovah is the One who is speaking to you.” At this point, the woman left her waterpot and went into the city and said to the men, “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; is this not the Christ?” She raised the question in their minds of the possibility that this Man was indeed the Messiah – so that they would go and find out for themselves. The heart to effective evangelism is “inviting the person to come to Jesus.” The testimony of the woman was effective – it was “transparent” and “honest” and “confidently shared.” The resultant effect: the people of her village left their homes and went to find Jesus.

The Application – We must be willing to “cross cultural barriers” for the sake of the gospel; that means understanding the “belief system” of those with whom we’re interacting, and being sensitive to “their questions and their needs,” so that we know how to direct the conversation. Conversely, we must be able to give a “contextual explanation of the gospel” – notice that Jesus didn’t use a “four spiritual laws” methodology; Jesus walked with her thru “where she was,” by answering the questions of her own mind and heart, before leading her to “faith in Messiah.” Obviously, Jesus was God and He “knew her situation” before He talked to her; nevertheless, there is much we can learn from the “process” He employed to reach her.

While the Samaritan woman was away, the disciples encouraged Jesus to “eat.” He told them that “He had food to eat that they didn’t know about.” Jesus’ disciples were still very ignorant of who Jesus really was, and what He was all about – they had yet to see Him as the revelation of the Father. Jesus is not only God’s presence on earth, but also the model of discipleship. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who set Me, and to accomplish His work” (Jn 6:27) – the great aim and object of His life was to do the will of God. This was His will for His followers as well – Jesus also wanted them to see that “the fields are white for harvest!” That is the work Jesus wanted His disciples to immediately and diligently commit themselves. Jesus used the physical fact of harvest to teach a “spiritual truth” – the disciples should not think that harvest time was still in the distance. They could not afford to spend their lives in quest of physical food and clothing.

Today, the Lord says to those of us who follow Him, “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields.” Believers not only earn wages in this life, but also father fruit for eternity as well – service for Christ has both temporal and eternal rewards, including the “joy” of seeing souls come to Christ. “One sows and another reaps” – there are multiple contributions made to the spiritual development of a single soul. Jesus was sending His disciples into areas that had already been prepared by others (4:38); they had to understand that they were entering into other men’s labors. Jesus describes a division of labor for those who are a part of a common enterprise. The ministry
of the gospel is dependent upon the efforts of earlier laborers. The disciples work is but an extension of Jesus’ own work (Jn 20:21). From that city many Samaritans “believed” in Him because of the woman’s testimony. This should be an encouragement to each of us to be simple, courageous and direct in witnessing for Christ. No two conversions are alike – some believed because of the testimony of the woman, and others because of the words of Jesus Himself. God uses multiple means to bring sinners to Himself.

The Application – What is the “number one priority” of our life? Doing the will of God? or doing our own thing? Are we truly convinced that “the fields are white for harvest”? if so, we will aggressively do the work of harvesting, right? Are we aware that others have already been sowing seed in the lives of those with whom we’re interacting? Are we aware we may be the one who is privileged to harvest? or that we may simply be one who sows and cultivates – regardless, we must be open to “sowing and harvesting.” What is our “eternal food/diet”? Are we “spiritually malnourished”? Just as we pray for daily bread, we also need to pray for “spiritual nourishment,” remembering we “share in God’s very life” (Jn 6:53-58). Regarding the woman, she simply told her neighbors “all she knew” – even though that wasn’t very much – and many came to faith in Christ. Are we holding back from “sowing seeds” because we don’t feel we know enough? or are too fearful to saying anything?

4:43-54 – Healing a Nobleman’s Son. There was a certain royal official whose son was “sick” at Capernaum – he went to Jesus and requested of Him to come and heal his son. Jesus responded to all who were gathered, “Unless you people see ‘signs and wonders’, you simply will not believe.” The official begged Jesus to save his child. Jesus sent him home with the promise, “Your son lives” – without any physical proof the man “believed” that his son had been healed. This should encourage Christians in their prayer lives. We have a mighty God who hears our requests and who is able to work out His purposes in any part of the world at any time – time and distance are no barriers to God. Jesus is not as pleased with a faith that is based on miracles, as He is with faith that is based on His Word alone (cf. Rom 10:17).

The Application – Are we “sensitive” to the needs of others? Are we “compassionate” with those in need? Do we “intercede on behalf of others” when they are in need? Paul writes, “Do not merely look out after your own personal interests, but look out after the interests of others” (Phil 2:4). The expression “look out” as related to others, is a compound word from which we get our term “scope” (see a fuller explanation of this term in the “application section” of John 5:1-17). Paul here is telling us to give careful attention to scoping out the needs of others, with the expressed purpose of helping meet those needs.

5:1-17 – The Healing of the “paralytic” at the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus again went to Jerusalem, and while He was there He met a man who had been a paralytic for 38 years. In loving compassion, Jesus took the initiative and said to him, “Do you wish to get well?” The man responded, “I have no one to put me into the pool when it is ‘stirred up’ so that I can be healed.” Jesus said to him, “Arise, take up your pallet and walk” – and immediately the man became well. It is much the same with “salvation” – God finds each of us as “helpless” as this man, in desperate need of “spiritual healing;” God waits to hear the confession from our own lips that we are lost, that we need Him, and that we accept Him as our Savior. The truth of the matter is, God desires to heal us completely. When we are saved we are not only to “rise,” but we are also to “walk.” The Lord Jesus delivers and heals us from the plague of sin, and then
He expects us to “walk in a manner worthy of Him” (Eph 4:1; Col 1:10). It is reassuring to know that God never tells us to do something He does not give us the power to do – and that power is His Holy Spirit.

The Application – Are we “sensitive” to those in need? Are we moved with “loving compassion” to help meet their need? Do we take the “initiative” when we discover a need? Do we “genuinely care” for the hurting in this world? If we do, we will “enter into their world and do what we want to do. If we’re really “need meeters,” we will sacrifice the time and the energy and the resources needed to meet that need. We are not only told to “rise” as sinners by turning to Christ, but also to “walk in a manner worthy of Christ;” in doing so, we will be “need meeters.” The “big bridge” we need to cross over in all this is “becoming a need meeter” – as believers, most of us have a pretty good understanding of what our responsibilities are – but “doing” what we’re supposed to do is the “bridge” we struggle with crossing over (cf. Jam 1:22). This is where we must become “intentional” in our faith; and that requires not only “looking out for others in need,” but also “taking the time” to help meet that need. Once again, consider Paul’s words: “Don’t merely look out after your own interests, but also look out for the interests/needs of others” (Phil 2:4); the word “look out” is the Greek word “episcopis,” from which we get our word “scope” combined with the preposition “upon” – hence, we’re supposed to “scope out” / “look upon” others and see what their interests/needs are. This requires intentionality. Therefore, when we see someone in need, we need to “prayerfully plan how we can help meet that need;” we need to “team up with a brother/sister to help meet that need” – someone to whom we can also be held accountable. Go to the leaders/pastors of your church and find out “who needs help,” and determine if you can be a “need meeter.” It starts with “you” taking the initiative.

The paralytic was healed on the “Sabbath.” The Jewish leaders were very strict about carrying out their “religious observances;” they clung rigidly to the letter of the law, yet they frequently failed to show mercy and compassion in doing so. When they questioned the paralytic Jesus healed, he told the Jewish leaders that he was simply told to “take up his pallet and walk.” Instead of the Jews even being minimally excited for the man, their focus was to be angry with Jesus for doing this on the Sabbath. Here the wicked heart of man is exposed – Jesus had performed a great act of healing and these Jews were infuriated, because He did this miracle on the Sabbath. They were “cold blooded religionists,” more interested in ceremonial observances than the blessing and welfare of their fellow man. The irony in all this is that it was the “Creator of the Sabbath” who performed the miracle! The Lord Jesus had not broken the Sabbath – the law forbade menial work on that day, but it did not prohibit the performance of acts of necessity or mercy. Jesus responded to the religious leaders that “He and His Father were still working” – even now. When sin entered the world, God’s rest was disturbed, and He hasn’t stopped working since. He continues to work ceaselessly to bring men and women back into fellowship with Himself. Furthermore, Jesus is also engaged in His Father’s business, and His love and grace have not been limited to six days a week. When Jesus later found the man He had healed, He told him to “Go and sin no more, lest something far worse befall you.” Jesus here was warning him of hell and future judgment should he decide to not walk in faith.

The Application – Make sure that our faith is not just “cerebral” – it needs to be “relational” as well; relational in that it cultivates intimacy with Christ, and relational in that it expresses love to others (seeking their well-being – cf. Gal 5:6; Eph 2:10; 3:17; 4:16). If our faith is only cerebral, there is a “disconnect” there somewhere; if that be the case, you must “study to show yourself approved.”
5:18-24 – Jesus’s Equality with God. When Jesus spoke of God as “His Father,” the Jews realized that He was claiming to be “equal with God” – and to them that was blasphemy! But the fact is, Jesus and the Father are equal! Jesus responds to the Jewish leaders by saying that He is “completely dependent” upon the Father, that He does nothing of Himself – as such, He does not exist autonomously from the Father. Jesus said, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing.” So while the Lord claimed equality with the Father, He did not claim to be independent of Him. Jesus’ whole life is in the Father – there is not the slightest taint of sin or self-governance in Him. Jesus is actually the full revelation of the Father (cf. Jn 15:15; 16:13, 15; 17:10). The Lord Jesus clearly intended the Jews to think of Him as “equal with the Father.” Jesus claimed to do the very things which He sees the Father do – which was an assertion of His equality with God. Jesus did not deny the charge, but rather set forth another proof of the fact that He and the Father are one. Jesus said, “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.” Jesus is also omnipotent, and His human will is completely in harmony with the Father’s will. He goes on to say that “the Father has given all judgment to the Son.” The Father is also equally fully committed to His Son, and all He does is revealed in His Son. How strange was this situation – here was Judge of all creation standing before these Jews, asserting His authority, and yet they did not recognize Him! He then gives the reason God has given “this authority” to the Son – “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” Furthermore, He states, “If one does not honor the son, he does not honor the Father who sent Him.” It is useless to claim “love for God” if one does not love the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus then said, “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.” The Lord began the verse with the words “most assuredly” – “Truly, truly” (emphatic!).

**The Application** – Because Jesus is God, we must submit ourselves to Him, and honor Him in all that we do. To hear the word of the Lord means not only to “listen to it,” but also to receive it, to believe it, to obey it, to do it – “faith without works is useless” (Jam 1:22, 2:20); that would be like a candle without a flame, a balloon without air, a cell-phone without a battery, eyeglasses without lenses; it would be akin to completely disregarding “stoplights” when driving – such action is the antithesis of their designed essence, and disclaims their alleged purpose. By definition, faith requires adherence to the stated proposition. Therefore, faith requires that we be “divinely intentional” in our living – faith is never mere words or ideas; it always includes the activity proposed. Jesus said, “He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life” – when we rest upon and truly believe the proposition, the Spirit of God actuates and credits the stated reality to our account. The “eternal life” we receive when we place our faith in Jesus Christ is “the spiritual life of the Savior imparted to us” when we’re born again. Conversely, since Jesus died for our sins, we are no longer subjects for eternal judgment.

5:25-29 – Two Resurrections. “Truly, truly (emphatic!), I say to you, an hour is coming [and now is] when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live!” – they pass from death unto life when they truly believe the gospel. The Father has given Jesus the “authority” to judge the world, because He is the Son of Man. God came into this world in the person of Jesus Christ and was rejected and crucified as a Man; when He comes again He will come to judge. He is Son of God & Son of Man – since He is both God and Man, He is perfectly qualified to judge. Jesus not only gives life, but He also judges – the two are interrelated, for to have life is to escape condemnation (v.24). The Son gets His authority from the Father – both to give life and to judge (cf. Matt 13:41; 25:31-46). Jesus said, “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His (My?) voice, and
shall come forth either to a resurrection of life, or to a resurrection of judgment – hence, we will be raised to “eternal life” or to “condemnation.” What a solemn truth. In the KEYNOTE ADDRESS of John 5, Jesus gives the heart of His revelation – He claims to have the divine prerogatives of “life giver” & “judge.” These two rights will be depicted throughout the rest of the gospel, beginning in John chapter 6 with the description of Jesus as the “Bread of Life” – the one who not only gives life but also sustains it.

The Application – We must each recognize who Jesus is, and respond in “faith” by believing the good news of Jesus Christ and the Cross; and when He returns, we shall be resurrected to life eternal!

5:30-47 – The Four Witnesses to Jesus as the son of God. Jesus begins by calling attention to several witnesses who confirm His identity (vv. 31-40), even though the Jewish leaders don’t receive them. As such, Jesus goes on to explain why they’re not acceptable to them – they seek “human praise” rather than the “praise of God” (vv. 41-47). This section reveals more about the nature of belief and unbelief, and provides insight into the witness that God gives Himself. Jesus speaks as if He were on trial – “I can do nothing on My own initiative” – He was perfectly obedient to the Father in everything He did; as such, He could do no wrong. He had not the slightest taint of sin or self-governance in Him. Jewish legal procedure was based upon the examination of witnesses – according to Law there had to be “at least two or three witnesses” (Deut 19:15). And it was later specified that “no one can bear witness to himself” (cf. m. Ketubot 2:9); though in some circumstances this was unavoidable. The main focus was on the “reliability of the witnesses.” The question was not so much, “How can he prove it?” as, “Whose word can we trust?” So the “character of the witness” was of paramount importance. Jesus was well aware of the demands of the Jews, and knew full-well that they would reject His list of witnesses – even though His primary witness was God the Father Himself! and it’s only “His Father’s witness” that Jesus cares about. Jesus points to several witnesses – John the Baptist, Jesus’ works, Jesus’ words, and Scripture – but they are all really only expressions of the one valid witness – the Father. The Jewish leaders failed to hear the witness of Scripture because of “their hearts” (vv. 41-44) – they cared too much for the “praise of men” instead of the “praise of God.” If our primary concern is not God’s honor and praise, we will fail to discern His word – only the “humble” seek God’s praise. Note the “four witnesses” to His deity:

1. **The witness of John the Baptist** (vv. 33-35) – John the Baptist was sent from God and testified that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messiah and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He bore witness to the “truth,” and was consumed with pointing men to Jesus Christ, not himself. The Lord paid tribute to John as a burning and shining lamp. Initially, the Jewish people flocked to John the Baptist, and accepted him as a popular religious teacher – they rejoiced temporarily, but there was no repentance. Incredibly, they received the forerunner, but rejected the King!

2. **The witness of His works** (v. 36) – The “miracles” Jesus performed authenticated who He was; thus substantiating His message. Though others throughout history have been able to perform miracles of a kind; those Jesus performed were unique in character, scope, and number, and were far greater than the trivial ones done by others – Jesus even raised people from the dead! Furthermore, they were the very works/signs which were “prophesied” in the OT concerning the Messiah.

3. **The witness of the Father** (vv. 32, 37-38) – The voice of God the Father was heard from heaven stating that Jesus was “His beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” In a very real way, those who believed on Christ saw the Form of God; unbelievers merely looked upon Him as another man like themselves – their hearts were hardened; as a result, their ears were dull of hearing.
4. **The witness of the OT Scriptures (vv.39-47)** – The Jews felt that they had “eternal life” as a result of “searching the Scriptures” – that is, in searching the scriptures, they thought they were receiving eternal life. They did not realize that the OT Scriptures that told about the coming of the Messiah were actually telling about Jesus. Jesus said, “The Scriptures testify of Me!” The reason people reject Jesus is that “they love sin more than the Savior!” They loved themselves rather than God! Thus, the fault lies with their own “will.” Again, most sinners “fully embrace” who they are – they think they’re ok! (at least moderately attractive), so when you tell them they are “ugly” (sinful), that really makes them angry! Jesus said, “If men really loved God, they would have loved Him whom He sent! Amazingly enough, when the “antichrist” comes, they will accept him – as a result they will come under severe judgment from God (1 Jn 2:18); the “antichrist” will obviously tell them things “they want to hear!” Men are more interested in the “approval of their fellow man” then the approval of God! They were afraid of what their friends would say if they left Judaism. In order to believe on the Lord Jesus, one must desire “God’s approval” more than anyone else’s. He must seek the honor and the glory that comes only from God” (v. 44). The Jews took great pride in the “Torah” – the books of Moses – but they did not obey the words of Moses, as verse 46 shows. The Lord Jesus put the writings of Moses on the same level of authority as His own words – “all Scriptures is given by inspiration of God.” The fact is, if the Jews had believed the words of Moses, they would have believed the Lord Jesus also – because Moses wrote about the coming of Christ (cf. Deut 18:15, 18). Jesus said, “If you do not believe his writings, how will you believe Me?” Jesus concludes with a warning – rejecting “God’s ultimate messenger” puts them in grave danger (Deu 18:19). God actually used MOSES as “their accuser” (v.45); as such He will also be “their judge.” God will use Moses as a witness against them, as in the past (cf. Deut 31:19-29). Despite their claims they really did not believe Moses; they honored Him as a teacher, but they rejected his teaching.

**The Application** – Believe in the “deity of Christ” for all the reasons mentioned above, as well as all those stated elsewhere in the Bible. If you find it difficult to “believe,” prayerfully examine your heart and your “love for sin” (living a self-centered life). To help remedy this problem, study the Word regarding the “sinfulness of the human heart,” and the need to “turn from your sin to Christ.” That Jesus is the “ultimate revelation” of God, gives the Christian confidence. Jesus will either be our “cornerstone” or our “stumbling stone.” Do we accept His testimony? May we receive the “grace” to benefit from His witness.

6:1-14 – Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand. In the KEYNOTE ADDRESS of John chapter five, Jesus gives the “heart of His revelation,” in which He claims to have the divine prerogatives of “life giver” and “judge.” These two rights will be depicted throughout the rest of the gospel, beginning here in John chapter 6 with the description of Jesus as the “Bread of Life” – the one who not only gives life but also sustains life. We also see “judgment” taking place as people are unable to receive this revelation. First the Jewish leaders and then most of Jesus’ disciples are offended rather than enlightened. By the end of this chapter only the “Twelve” are left. The revelation up to this point is “too difficult to accept” even for most of Jesus’ disciples (cf. Jn 6:60-71). As God “tested” His people in the wilderness, so here the Son tests the hearts of His followers – and as was the case with Israel, many grumbled and failed. The message for us today is that God continues to “test the hearts” of His people – though such testing isn’t comfortable, it achieves a deepening of our faith by revealing our own weaknesses and God’s all-sufficiency.

**Here at the beginning of John chapter six, a great multitude gathers to see the “great miracles” of healing Jesus was performing on the sick.** Jesus and His disciples had gone to the other side of the
Sea of Galilee to the city of Tiberias. Jesus was concerned that the multitude had something to eat, so He asked Philip, “Where are we to buy bread to feed these people?” Jesus said this to “test him” because He already knew what He had planned to do – He was teaching Philip a very valuable lesson and test his faith. Philip responded by saying that it would take at least 200 denarii to feed the people. Andrew at this point interjects, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?” In this scenario, Philip calls attention to the “enormity of the problem” (v. 5), and Andrew points to the “meagerness of the resources” (v. 9). Jesus responds by telling His disciples to have the people sit down and “incline on the grass” – He wanted the people to relax and be comfortable; all told, there were about five thousand men (plus women and children). Jesus “took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed it to everyone – He did likewise with the fish. When they were finished eating, they gathered up “twelve baskets of leftovers” – notice here, the Lord didn’t waste anything. Also notice, Jesus didn’t do everything Himself – He enlisted the service of others. It’s been well said – “You do what you can do; I’ll do what I can do; and the Lord will do what we cannot do.” The main message here is this – “little is much if God is in it!”

The multitude obviously recognized that Jesus just performed an “incredible miracle.” The entire situation can’t help but raise questions in the mind of the reader. I wonder “how good” everything tasted? Would it have been “incredibly good”? We’ve all had “fresh baked bread” and said, “Man that’s good!” How do you think “this bread” (and fish) tasted? How do you think the people responded to the “quality” of the food? Do you think it was “mediocre or absolutely incredible”? Do you think the Lord accentuated their “taste-buds” at that moment? What do you think their verbal response was – “Oh, my gosh, that’s good?” I can’t imagine the miracle wasn’t a “mind blowing experience” in every way. Whatever their overall response, when the people saw the “sign” they acknowledged that Jesus was the Prophet the Scriptures said would be coming into the world – they had been waiting for an earthly monarch (Messiah). The “faith” the people professed here was not genuine, because they were not willing to “admit that Jesus was the Son of God,” “confess their sins,” or “accept Him as Savior” – yet interestingly enough, they wanted to make Him “their King!” (v. 15).

The Application – Are we sensitive to the “physical and spiritual needs” of those around us? What steps are we willing to take to “help them”? Do we just focus on “our resources,” and if we think their insufficient, simply walk away? Or do we take it a step further, and see what resources we can get to help meet their need? Do we enlist the “services of others” in trying to meet someone’s need? Jesus was also concerned for their comfort – are we? or do we consider that just an “unimportant luxury”? How are we with “leftovers” – do we throw out perfectly good food? How about other things? The primary message here is “little is much if God is in it.” That’s a profound statement. Maybe all we can bring to a situation is “prayer” – if that be the case, isn’t God capable of doing a “great work” with “what little we have to offer”? Imagine what the church would be like if believers simply lived by this motto: “Let’s do all we can do! and trust God to do all we cannot do!”

6:15–25 – Jesus Walks on the Water. Jesus perceived that the people wanted to make Him “King,” so He withdrew again to the mountains to be alone (to pray?), and His disciples went down to the sea to get into a boat to cross over to Capernaum. After rowing about 3-4 miles, they beheld Jesus walking on the sea, and they became frightened. Jesus said to them, “It is I, do not be afraid.” Once again we are reminded that Jesus is Lord over all things, even the physical elements of the universe. After His disciples received Him into the boat, they proceeded to cross the sea. There was no further incident on this account.
The Application – Why is it that even saved humanity becomes “fearful” so easily – why is it that believers become “fearful” of what they don’t know? When something negative happens to us, our first response is to “become fearful.” When we come down with a “problematic illness,” we become frightened. When we “lose our jobs,” we become frightened. When we get a “court summons,” we become frightened. Our “initial response” as believers should be to immediately have a “Christ focus” rather than a “problem focus” – like Peter, in Matthew 14, we are prone to look at the “waves” rather than “Christ;” it’s only when we get scared out of our wits, that we turn to Christ and cry out. As God’s children we need to ever be mindful that God is sovereign over all things.

6:26–40 – Jesus is the “Bread of Life.” The multitude followed Jesus to Capernaum, and He responded to them saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” The crowd focused on the “physical realm” – in John gospel the physical and the spiritual are interconnected – “the Word became flesh” (1:14). These people worked hard for their daily bread; when they found a miraculous source of food this was great news. Jesus then tries to redirect their attention: “Do not work for food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.” Spiritual food nourishes real life, divine life, life that continues forever. The people were interested in “doing the works of God,” so Jesus said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” Our primary work is being receptive to God. Many Christians, as John Wesley said, have just enough religion to be miserable – that is, they are not experiencing the “abiding life” (John 15). The people than asked Jesus to “perform a sign” that they might see and believe in Him – they were suggesting something along the lines of “manna” that their forefathers had received in the wilderness; apparently, they wanted an unending supply of this bread. Jesus responded, “It is My Father who give you the ‘true bread’ out of heaven, and that bread gives you “life.” The people then asked for this bread, and Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will never go hungry.” Jesus claims here to be the Bread one needs in order to have life – He alone satisfies the “spiritual hunger” of the soul. But even though you have “seen Me,” yet you do not believe (v.36). “All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me – I have come down from heaven to do the will of Him who sent Me.” “Know this – of all the Father gives to Me, I will lose none; and all of them shall be raised up on the last day; this is the will of My Father – everyone who believes in Me has eternal life.”

The Application – Be sure you are “pursuing Christ” (not “earthly, temporal things”), because only that which is eternal has lasting value. Those who are interested in doing the “will of God” must “believe in Christ” – for He is the “true bread” that comes down out of heaven to give us “life;” Jesus is the “bread of life” who satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst, and gives us “eternal life.” Again, the problem here is exercising faith beyond merely “hearing and agreeing with the Word” – it involves “doing what God says to do” (Jam 1:22). Our spiritual pursuits must include “obedience to His Word,” and “standing upon the truths of Scripture” – this means we must “continually affirm truth” in our hearts and minds. Sometimes we must “claim God’s promises” – at other times we must “act upon what Scripture says;” in both instances, we must “affirm the truth” – that is, fully concur with the law of God in our inner man. Articulate it out loud, and affirm it over and over again, until the truth of God’s Word brings peace and rest to your soul. A constant exercise of faith in Christ is the most important and difficult part of walking in obedience before God. Christ tells that He is the “true Bread” – He is to the soul, what Bread is to the body; He nourishes and supports the spiritual life. If there are “doubts,” we must reflect upon what Scripture teaches – again articulate it out loud – re-identify with it, and affirm it over and over again in your heart, until “God’s peace” stills your anxious soul. Satan will place “doubts” in your mind, no matter how spiritual you may think you are;
you must counter those temptations by “affirming the truth” over and over until it settles your spirit. Dearly beloved, there are no short cuts.

6:41-59 – Jesus’ Words to the Jews. The Jews really struggled with Jesus’ claim of being “the bread of life that came down out of heaven” (vv. 41, 48). Obviously, Jesus’ claim of “divine origin” was just too much for them to accept. The only way to stop struggling with grumbling about this reality is to be receptive to Jesus’ teaching about Himself – Jesus says these Jews were actually “judging themselves” by their response. The children of Israel also grumbled at the Lord’s salvation in the wilderness (cf. Ex 15-17; Num 14-17; 21:4-5; Deut 1:27; Ps 106:25). Thus, Jesus responded to them, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and everyone who listens to and learns from the Father comes to Me” (44).

To listen and learn require “humility” – faith itself includes receptive openness to God; thus drawing and receptivity are “intimately interwoven.” Salvation is the work of God in a person’s heart – it is not a human endeavor (cf. Jn 1:13). Incidentally, these things Jesus said to the people in the synagogue as He taught in city of Capernaum. Jesus concludes this section by returning to the story of God’s provision of “manna” in the wilderness (48-50). He repeats His claim to be the “Bread of Life” – the food Jesus talks about results in “living forever” (v.51). It is God’s own life that is shared through this bread. Jesus goes on to say, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven” – Jesus here defines the bread as “His flesh” (v.51; 1:14). As such, He says, “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 – he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.” The truth is, apart from the life He offers, we are dead. Jesus said, “My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink – he who abides in Me partakes of My flesh and My blood. . . and he shall live forever.” (v.55).

The eating and drinking has to do with “shared life” – In the physical realm one of the most powerful examples of shared life is eating and drinking. When we ingest plant and animal life, molecules of life are transferred to us, thereby nourishing our lives. Our union with the Son enables us to share His life. Our life is entirely dependent upon Jesus. The language of eating & drinking is a very graphic way of saying that men must take Christ into their innermost being. Genuine belief means we spiritually identify with (and partake in) the body and blood of Christ, because therein is our salvation (cf. 1 Cor 11:24-25). Thus, here we have reference to the deepest New Testament teaching about the sacrament, the Eucharist (cf. Matt 26:26-28). Frequently, Jesus spoke to people with parables and metaphor – when He would explain their meaning, He intended everyone to understand; when He didn’t clarify its meaning, He meant to “conceal the truth” from unbelievers – thus, only believers would be able to understand what He was saying (cf. 1 Cor 2:14; Jn 14:17). What we have here in John 6 is “spiritual truth” that only believers can identify with and understand. The unbelieving world was so ignorant about Christian doctrine during the early days of the church, they actually accused Christians of cannibalism – eating flesh and drinking blood. Understanding the “spiritual truths” of Scripture requires the operative work of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:14). So, this passage is referring to Christ’s death and our life in Him, as is the Eucharist. It is fitting that the Eucharist is alluded to here, though the primary reference is to Jesus’ death and the life He offers. Obviously, this teaching is unclear to those with whom Jesus is conversing. This cryptic message was given in the Capernaum synagogue (v.59), where the Eternal Word Himself gave “manna” a greater revelation.

The Application – Christ’s Flesh and Blood are meat and drink to the soul – eating and drinking refers to believing and partaking of Christ; we live by Him as our bodies live by food. We need to fully identify with Jesus as being the “bread of life,” and our need to take Christ in to our innermost
being. Obviously, it is paramount for the believer to really understand what this means. Because this is a “difficult truth,” every believer needs to continually study and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (cf. 2 Pet 3:18) – so that he might better understand what it means to make Christ “their life.”

When you fully identify with what Christ, you will find Him to be the spiritual food your soul needs. Remember, “Jesus is life” (Jn 1:4; 11:25; 14:6) – there is life in none other but Christ. When we backslide a bit or turn away for a time . . . remember “first principles,” and reaffirm them.

6:60-65 – Jesus’ Words to the Disciples. Jesus’ claim to be the “Bread of Life” divided His followers. Many of them responded, “This teaching is difficult to understand – who can accept it?” Jesus knew their hearts and was conscious of their grumbling at what He taught, so He said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble?” The “soil” of one’s heart determines whether or not seed takes root and bears fruit. Many of Jesus’ followers were not “genuinely humble” as true disciples are – being humbly docile makes one “open” to listen and receive His Word, and the leading of the Spirit; without a humble heart we are prone to groan and grumble if we don’t understand something. The fact is, none of Jesus’ teaching makes sense unless one realizes who Jesus really is. Cryptic messages, like “eating flesh,” require the “Holy Spirit” to properly interpret (1 Cor 2:14). Jesus’ words are not just human teaching, but the teachings of God (Jn 3:34).

By the way, here we see “light” revealing the “darkness” of the human heart. As believers, we are to trust even when we are puzzled. The “light” reveals the true depth of our faith and love. God knows the condition of our hearts and sends circumstances that reveal our hearts to us. When faced with “difficult circumstances,” we will either “despair,” or become more deeply dependent upon God and develop a “deeper faith.” “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing – the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” The “life” Jesus speaks of is God’s own eternal life, which can only come from God Himself; if we do not receive the “Bread of Life” we will remain dead (cf. Eph 2:1-5). “There are some among you who do not believe,” said Jesus; “for this reason I tell you that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.” Judas had the most intimate access to Jesus possible, yet He lacked humble trust and love for Jesus. The human heart is capable of seeing God in all His beauty, and yet still reject Him. Have we met God in such a way that we trust His character even when we do not understand His words and His deeds? This is an extension of his discussion in vv.41-59 – the disciples at this point didn’t understand what Jesus had said. It wasn’t until the resurrection, that they understood.

The Application – The key teaching here is: “The Spirit gives life; and the flesh profits nothing” – as believers we must grow in our understanding of the work of God in our lives, and in understanding it, affirm it in our hearts. We have to learn to “rest in the truths” of Scriptures, and when we are feeling “spiritually challenged,” we need to affirm the reality of what the Bible teaches. Furthermore, we must be careful not to “beat ourselves up” over our seeming inability to fully grasp all Scripture teaches – as believers, we will continually be “challenged in our faith;” rather than become frustrated and throw in the towel, so to speak, we need to “pursue Christ” in prayer and the study of His Word. Remember, Jesus’ disciples also grumbled and were frustrated because they found some things too difficult to understand. The truth is, there are “great depths” to much of what Scripture teaches – that’s why Paul told Timothy: “Be diligent to present ourselves approved to God, as workmen who need not be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Biblical truth isn’t for the “weak at heart” – so diligently “discipline yourself” in these matters (1 Tim 1:18; 4:7; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:6). Grow in Christ! (2 Pet 3:18); keep your eyes on Him! (Heb 12:2); not on yourself! By the way, the “performance trap” is self-defeating – Jesus knows your flesh is good for nothing! If you don’t know that, you’re going to learn that as well! God will bring circumstances into your life to show you just
how good your flesh really is... don’t expect your flesh to be spiritually productive... because nothing could be further from the truth (Rom 7:18).

6:66-71 – Peter’s Confession of Faith. As a result of Jesus’ teaching in the foregoing section, many who followed Him withdrew and no longer walked with Him. Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Can you imagine what His disciples were thinking at this point? Here they were, “way in over their heads spiritually speaking” – it must have been like a “grade school child” sitting in on a “post-graduate course” on metaphysics; the fact is, they had almost no idea what Jesus just taught; as such, they were confused and grumbled about it... but they had also grown close to Him in the preceding months, and had a great affection for Him... and they had seen things that boggled their imaginations. Simon Peter speaks up as usual: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” The twelve had come to faith in Christ at a point in time in the past, and have continued to hang-in there with Him – the “results” continue. Jesus did not directly respond to Peter’s statement; instead He said, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” Perhaps the twelve were thinking all of this was “their doing;” when in reality, it was all of God! God was at work in their hearts – and there was no way in the world He was going to “stop that work!” All of the “elect of God” go through the entire sanctifying process of being made into Christ’s image – this is a work the Holy Spirit does, and there isn’t “one person chosen of God” that He doesn’t ultimately conform to the perfect likeness of His Son (Cf. Jn 6:39; Rom 8:29; Phil 1:6). By the way, not only are the followers of Christ a mixed lot, so were the twelve.

The Application – Reflect upon Jesus’ statement to the twelve: “Do you also want to go away?” And then consider Peter’s response: “To whom shall we go? You alone know the words of life.” Imagine you’re one of the twelve – how would you have responded? Can you identify with the twelve? They represent a consensus of believers – what they experienced is “common to us all.” Clearly, the disciples were “troubled in their spirits” – yet they had already figured out that “no one but Jesus” had the words of life; so, leaving Christ was not an option – hopefully, you concur in your inner man with that statement. If not, study the person and work of Jesus Christ, because that is “foundational” to the problem we’re discussing here. Every believer needs to learn to “work through his or her spiritual frustrations and anxieties” (Cf. Phil 4:6-7). Prayer and the Word are essential for arriving at a “peaceful resolution” to moments of doubt and frustration.

7:1-53 – Jesus Teaches at the “Feast of Booths.” Jesus had to lay low in Galilee because of death threats by the Jews in Judea. As Jesus’ claims became clearer, controversy increased among His followers, and the “rift” between Himself and the Jewish leaders intensified; by the end of John chapter eight, the opposition’s hostility turns violent – there are eleven references in John 7-8 to “death threats” and attempts to “arrest Jesus.” His “blood brothers,” however, told Him to go to Judea so that everyone might behold the works He was doing – “show yourself to the world” – perhaps if Jesus performed another “sign,” they might give Him a second chance – besides, if Jesus wants to be a public figure, He should show Himself to the world. It should be noted here – recognizing that Jesus is a “miracle worker” doesn’t make one a believer. The next verse says that “His brothers” were not yet believing in Him. Jesus rejected their suggestion saying, “My time is not yet at hand – the world hates Me because I testify that its deeds are evil.”
It was time for the “Feast of Tabernacles,” so Jesus went up to Judea “in secret” – He would also leave it in secret (Jn 8:59). Jesus simply followed His Father’s instruction. The Feast of Tabernacles was a feast of thanksgiving commemorating God’s gracious provision for the children of Israel both past and present. In these two chapters Jesus is revealed as the fulfillment of the major themes of this feast – the very God to whom they are giving thanks in this wonderful feast has come into their midst (8:58). It came about that everyone was looking for Him in Jerusalem, and they were debating as to who He was; some said “He was a good man;” other said “He was leading people astray.” When it was the midst of the feast, Jesus went up into the Temple, and began to teach – and the multitudes marveled at His wisdom; they all wondered where Jesus got all His learning and wisdom – obviously His Father gave it to Him. Jesus responded, “My teaching is not Mine, but is from Him who sent Me – if any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God or not.” One who is “centered in God” rather than himself will be able to recognize God’s voice; if we are not, we will not recognize His voice. Furthermore, if we are willing to do “God’s will,” we will hunger and thirst after righteousness, and will “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt 6:33). The “key to understanding” the wisdom of God lies within us – if we “humble ourselves before God and desire to know Him,” the Holy Spirit will “open” our hearts and minds to understand His Word (cf. Acts 16:14) – God’s Word is not cast before swine; it is only given to those whose hearts are sensitive to “believe it” (cf. Matt 7:6; 1 Cor 2:14; Is 55).

The Jewish leaders understood the enormity of Jesus’ claims & the foundational issues He raised: Jesus was claiming to be “God” – thus, their reaction is justified if Jesus’ claims are indeed false. Incredible as it may seem, many in Christendom today “deny Jesus’ claims to be God!” – Mormons and Liberal Denominations emphatically deny His claims. I find it very interesting that the Jewish leaders knew precisely what Jesus was claiming – obviously, we have a lot of tares mixed in among the wheat. Jesus went on to say, “If Moses gave you the Law, then why don’t you obey it? And why do you seek to seize Me?” The people responded, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?” Jesus said, “Moses gave you circumcision, and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man; how is it then that you are angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?” Jesus then proceeded to tell the people not only Who He was, but where He came from – many were now seeking to seize Him, but no man laid a hand on Him because “His hour” had not yet come – that was God’s doing. Furthermore, many people began “believing in Him,” saying, “When the Messiah comes, certainly He will not perform more signs than those this man has, will He?” Meanwhile, the religious leaders grew increasingly angry. Jesus therefore said, “For a little while longer I am with you, and then I will go to Him who sent Me.” At that time “you will seek Me, but you will not find Me; because where I am, you cannot come.” And the people wondered where He was going.

Now on the last day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out. “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink! He who believes in Me, from His innermost being shall flow rivers of living water!” (He was referring to the Spirit who had not yet been given). Here He was, fulfilling the role of God, who “will guide them and lead them besides springs of water” (Is 49:10). So God Himself is offering us life (cf. Is 55:1; Ps 63:1; 42:1-2); He who is called “the Spring of living water” (Jer 2:13; 17:13). When Jesus made His declaration, there rose a division among the people as to “Who” this could possibly be – though some wanted to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him. There was a very mixed response to Jesus, and their reactions reflected the variety of views within Judaism. When the chief priests & Pharisees began demanding He be arrested, the “Roman officers” answered their complaint with these words, “Never did a man speak the way this man speaks.” Then a fellow Pharisee named Nicodemus
spoke to His own religious leaders reminding them, “Our Law does not judge a man, unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” The chief priests and Pharisees obviously knew of Nicodemus’ point – because they didn’t dispute it – but their hearts were so filled with rage, they just ignored what Nicodemus said. Thus it became increasingly clear that they were bent on “killing” Jesus any way possible, regardless of what the law said.

This passage reveals that “Nicodemus” was still inclined toward Jesus in some measure, because He was willing to defend Him even in the face of severe opposition. This passage also reveals that the Pharisees were the ones at the heart of the opposition movement against Jesus. This discourse serves to illustrate just how determined and resolute the Pharisees were.

The Application – There are “two very significant statements” that Jesus made in this passage that beg our attention: 1) Jesus said, “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether or not it is of God.” The key point here is “being willing to do God’s will” – if you are truly “willing,” you will also “desire to do God’s will” – and that’s all God wants from us – a desire and a willingness to follow Him! Remember, “No man can serve two masters” (Matt 6:24). 2) Jesus said, “If a man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink; he who believes in Me, from His innermost being shall flow rivers of living water!” The key point here is “thirsting spiritually” – again, if we really “desire to have our spiritual thirst quenched,” God will give us His Spirit and satisfy our spiritual thirst forever! The ultimate question is this: “What is your supreme desire?” As a believer, search your heart until you’re able to be forthright and honest in your answer – and remember, your answer will determine your eternal destiny.

8:1-11 – The Adulterous Woman. Early the next morning Jesus came again into the Temple, and a great crowd gathered around Him and He began to teach them. And then the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman “caught in adultery,” and set her in their midst – and began questioning Jesus, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act – the Law of Moses commands us to stone such a woman; what do You say?” They were trying to trick Jesus into contradicting the Law of Moses; as such, they were testing Jesus that they might have “grounds for accusing Him. They reminded Jesus that Moses commanded that a person taken in the act of adultery should be “stoned to death.” For their own wicked purposes, the Pharisees hoped the Lord would disagree – they thought that justice and the Law of Moses demanded that she should be made an example. They had no real charge against the Lord and were trying to manufacture one. They knew if He let the woman go free, He would be opposing the Law of Moses and they would accuse Him of being “unjust.” If, on the on the other hand, He condemned the woman to death, then they might use this to show that He was an enemy of the Roman government. Jesus responded by stooping down, and with His finger wrote on the ground – when they persisted with their question, He stated that the penalty of the law should be carried out, but only by those who had committed no sin –

“Let he among you who has no sin, be the ‘first’ to throw a stone at her.” Thus the Lord upheld the Law of Moses; He did not say that the woman would be free from the penalty of the law. What Jesus did here was accuse every one of these men of having sinned themselves – those who wish to judge others should be pure themselves. This verse does not excuse sin; rather, it condemns those who are guilty even though they have never been caught. At this point Jesus stooped down again and wrote on the ground – and one by one all of her accusers departed. Obviously, those who accused the woman were convicted by their conscience, and left with nothing else to say. They were all guilty, from the oldest to the youngest. Jesus then stood up and said to the woman, “Is there no one to
condemn you?” And she said, “No one, Lord.” Jesus then said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” It should be noted Jesus neither condemned nor pardoned the woman, though He did issue a warning to her that she refrain from sinning. It is also interesting to note that the “man” in the adulterous affair was never apprehended – why? he was just as guilty as the woman was, yet he apparently was able to leave the scene without any legal conflagration. Legalists always seem to rigidly apply laws when it’s to their advantage, yet ignore them when it is not; hence, this was an indictment against their integrity.

The Application – What a powerful lesson in “forgiveness.” Even the most “spiritually proud” weren’t able to “condemn” this woman, though her guilt was never in question; even Jesus acknowledged that. This story “begs” us to ask what it was that Jesus “wrote on the ground” – the narrative suggests that it “took the wind out of their sails” – it left them speechless and guilty. Though these men really weren’t “men of faith,” they couldn’t deny their own sinfulness. How much more should “humble men of faith” refuse to condemn? Jesus responded, “Neither do I condemn you.” Can you imagine what the woman must have been thinking? Here she was undeniably guilty – yet Jesus refused to condemn her. What would it like to “not be condemned” in a situation like that? Can you hear Jesus saying those words to you? The Bible says, “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ!” Jesus doesn’t condemn us! So, why do we “condemn ourselves”? Why are we so “proud” so as not to be able to “forgive ourselves”? Why do we “insist” on holding ourselves to a “righteous standard” we are incapable of attaining? Does not Scripture say, “our righteousness is as filthy rags”? (Isaiah), and “in our flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18, 24). Once the “blood of Christ” is applied to our lives, we are forgiven of all past, present and future sins, no matter how many or how heinous they may be – that is the marvelous “grace of God” to each of us who has believed in Jesus. The final word to the adulterous woman was this, “Go and sin no more” – those were her marching orders. . . and they are ours as well. That is the “goal” that should drive us, and it can only be met when we are “mindful” of the grace and forgiveness of God that we have received in Christ. When you do sin. . . listen again to Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you. . . go and sin no more.” That, my friend, is “grace.” It’s hard to believe, but that’s what grace is – it never condemns and is always ready to forgive. Always. By the way . . .

Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace. . . and your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God’s grace.

8:12-30 – Jesus is the Light of the World. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Jesus here is attending the “Feast of Booths” in Jerusalem, and a lamp-lighting ceremony took place every evening at the feast – it was in that setting that Jesus declared He was “the light of the world.” The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 49 was to be a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6). The world lies in darkness and death because it has rebelled against God. Jesus here proclaims to be the divine presence that saves people from their bondage. The Pharisees challenged Jesus on a legal point – they reminded Him He was testifying concerning Himself; they couldn’t accept “His testimony of Himself,” because self-testimony is usually biased. Jesus said, “He who sent Me bears witness of Me” – “the problem is you don’t know Him” – and His witness is absolutely true because He is God. “If you knew Him, you would know Me; conversely, if you knew Me, you would know My Father” (8:19). It is important to note again here that it is the Holy Spirit who “opens the heart and mind” to know God – and this He does only to those who “humble themselves” before Him; God then extends
“grace” to them. The problem with the Pharisees was that “they claimed to see, when they really didn’t – they were not only blind, they were proud” (9:41). Jesus said, “I am going away, and you will seek Me, but you will not find Me” – “and if you do not believe in Me you will die in your sin;” and where I am going you cannot go . . . you are from below, and I am from above . . . you are of this world, I am not of this world.” Bewildered as to what Jesus was saying, they inquired of Him, “Who are You?” Jesus responded, “What have I been saying to you from the beginning? He who sent Me is “true” – when you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [God]. These things I speak as the Father taught Me; I always do what is pleasing to Him.” The Lord’s relationship with God the Father was very intimate. Each of these expressions was a claim to equality with God. As He spoke these things, many came to “believe in Him” (v. 30). The application to this section is given at the end of the next section.

8:31-59 – The Truth Shall Set you Free. Jesus said to those who believed, “If you abide in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Those who abide in God’s Word continue in the teachings of Christ, and do not turn aside from Him. True faith always has the quality of permanence. Those who truly know the Lord Jesus are delivered from sin, they walk in the light, and are led by the Holy Spirit of God. When we believe and place our trust in God’s Word, the Holy Spirit “sets us free” in our spirit, delivering us from enslavement to sin & darkness. The Pharisees took exception to Jesus implying that they were “slaves” – so Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin – but if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed. These Jews pretended to be very religious, so they responded saying, “Abraham is our Father.” Jesus in turn said, “If you are Abraham’s children, then do the deeds of Abraham – instead, you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God – this Abraham did not do. If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I proceeded forth from God – He is the One who sent Me.” Jesus then said, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.” If a man really loves God, he will hear and obey God’s words, because the Spirit of God opens the heart of His children to concur with His teaching (Jn 7:17; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor 2:14); God’s Spirit confirms in our hearts whether or not His Words are true – this point is critically important – it’s not as if we as human beings have to go and figure everything out for ourselves – God’s Spirit simply “turns the light on” in our minds and hearts – that’s God’s work!

The Jews showed by their rejection of the Jesus’ message that they did not really belong to God; thus they didn’t understand divine truth. Therefore Jesus said to them, “You are of your father, the Devil; as such, you want to do the desires of your father – he was a murderer from the beginning; he is the father of lies; there is no truth in him.” Satan is the personification of what is the exact opposite of Jesus – it is light vs. darkness. “Because I speak ‘truth’ to you, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?” The answer is simple – he who is “of God” hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them, is because you are not of God.” In their anger at Jesus’ words, the Jews picked up stones to throw at Him – the Jews understood exactly what Jesus meant when He said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” – He was claiming to be Jehovah Himself, and for them this was blasphemy. The truth is they were unwilling to accept the fact that the Messiah was standing in their midst – they would not have Him reign over them! When some Christians read this portion of Scripture, they somehow think if Jesus would have explained Himself better, these Jewish leaders would have understood and accepted Him – if you’re tempted to think that way, you need to understand the mind and heart of “darkness” – they are in total disagreement with the truth (light). . . and that’s by choice! Make no mistake about it – the Jewish leaders “loved darkness!” – contrary to their being “religious – and that’s the issue!!
The Application – The importance of “humility before the Lord,” is critically important for believers and non-believers alike – humility is the “ticket to grace” in God’s economy... all of us desperately need His grace in our lives. As His children, when we humble ourselves before God, the Holy Spirit gives us understanding and peace in the midst of the trials & storms. When we “abide in His Word” we are set free from the bondage of the flesh. As believers, God’s Word must have “primacy” in our lives – it has to be on the front burner of our lives – it can’t be a Sunday only kind of presence. If you are not hungering and thirsting after righteousness, you are not “abiding in His Word” as you need to be. Your highest ambition in life must be to cultivate an “intimate relationship” with Christ – this must be your all-consuming passion. Obeying and trusting God’s Word is “God’s will” for your life – when you exercise such faith, you will do what is pleasing in His sight, and He will “rewards you” accordingly (Heb 11:6), and give you the “peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Phil 4:7). When you question and doubt what God says, and you’re tempted to walk in ways that are contrary to His will, you need to “cry out” to Him as the psalmist did, and experience His presence, His peace, and His power (to do His will). As His children, we need to cultivate complete confidence in Christ – He is the “truth;” all He says is “true;” if we vacillate on that point – believing one minute and not believing the next – we forfeit the peaceful fruit of righteousness in our lives (Phil 1:6; 4:6-7; Heb 4:16; Jam 1:5-6).

9:1-41 – The Healing of the Blind Man. Jesus came upon a man who had been “blind from birth” – His disciples asked Him, “Who sinned that he should be born blind?” Jesus responded, “No one, it was that the works of God might be displayed in him.” It was commonly assumed in the ancient world that “sin” was the cause of problems and various maladies – the friends of Job believed this. Jesus responded by spitting on the ground and making clay of the spittle – He applied it to his eyes, and then told the blind man to “Go and wash in the pool of Siloam.” The man did as he was told, and he came back seeing. Those who knew him were startled; they could hardly believe that this was the same man who had sat and begged for so long – it should be this way also when a person is saved; our neighbors should be able to notice a difference in us. Some insisted it was the same man, and others were not so sure – thus the man responded, “I am the one,” and he explained what Jesus had done. Note the timing of this miracle – Jesus had just declared that He was “the light of the world” – the correlation between “light” and “being blind” (can’t see – living in darkness) is the main issue. Apparently in earnest enthusiasm over the miracle, some of the Jewish people brought the healed man to the Pharisees. It was on the “Sabbath” that Jesus healed the man, so the Pharisees concluded that “Jesus could not be from God, because He did not keep the Sabbath.” The dilemma before the Pharisees was trying to reconcile how a “sinful man” could perform such signs. They questioned the man who received sight about who he thought Jesus was – he concluded, “Jesus must be a prophet.” Apparently the Jews didn’t believe him, so they called his “parents” in and questioned them. They simply said, “He was born blind, but now he sees; if you want to know anything else, you will need to ask him” – they said this because they were afraid of the Jewish religious authorities, who had let it be known that anyone confessing that “Jesus is Messiah” would be expelled from the synagogue. The Jewish leaders had concluded that Jesus was a “sinner,” and asked the healed man to confirm such. The man responded, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know, but one thing I do know it this – I was blind, and now I see.” The religious leaders continued to question the man about Jesus because they really didn’t know who He was. Finally the man responded, “Well, that’s an amazing thing; you don’t know where He is from, yet He opened my eyes. . . since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing!” The healed man’s angered the religious leaders; as such they responded to him,
“Who do you think you are teaching us? You were born entirely in sin” – this was the same issue Jesus’ disciples entertained (Jn 9:2). It has been said, “When you have no case, abuse the plaintiff” – that’s exactly what happened here. The Pharisees had utterly failed to shake the testimony of this man, so they began to abuse him. In their exasperation, the Pharisees finally cast the man out. It is interesting to note, in this entire narrative the Pharisees never entered into the “excitement” the blind man must have experienced being that his sight was restored – instead, their entire focus was only upon “discrediting Jesus and the healing” because it occurred on the Sabbath.

When Jesus found the man He had healed, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man responded, “Who is He, Lord, that I might believe in Him.” Jesus said, “I am He.” And the man answered, “Lord, I believe.” And Jesus said to the man, “I came into this world that those who do not see may see; and that those who [say they] see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who heard what Jesus said, “Are you accusing us of being blind?” Jesus answered them succinctly, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say YOU SEE, your sin remains” (v. 41).

The Application – Jesus said, “This man was born blind in order that the works of God might be displayed in Him.” God does not allow anything to enter the lives of His children that is not able to glorify Him by drawing us into deeper intimacy with Him and revealing His glory. The way the Pharisees responded to the healed man indicates they had no idea who Jesus was – as they admitted – yet, they were certain He was a “sinner.” Obviously, they failed to clearly think thru their position. Like the ancient world, they believed “sin” was the cause of problems and physical maladies – being Pharisees, you would think their studies of the “life of Job,” would have led them beyond this ancient pagan belief. When the Pharisees asked Jesus if He thought they were “also blind”? Jesus said to them, “Since you say you see, your sin remains.” Jesus was accusing the religious leaders of being “spiritually blind;” a far worse condition than simply being “physically blind.” To proudly say “you know something that you really don’t know,” only serves to condemn you, since you are wrong. The only position they could have honestly held with “integrity,” was to have humbly admitted, “We don’t know.” That would have at least been the “honest position” (cf. 9:41). Here’s the logic: How can you say “you know something” when in fact you don’t? You can “surmise,” and admit such, but you cannot unequivocally hold to a position that is contrary to the facts – in doing so, you are condemning yourself. Obviously, the Pharisees felt a “consensus” among their peers constituted sufficient evidence to hold to an “unwavering position.” The Pharisees demonstrated they had “no poverty of spirit” (Matt 5:3); and that they had a “veil over their hearts” (2 Cor 3:15). Every human being without Christ is “blind spiritually” and in “need of enlightenment.” As such, they need to realize their desperate condition, their utter poverty and blindness, and their need of Jesus Christ.

10:1-21 – Parable of the Good Shepherd. In the Old Testament, the leaders of God’s people are called “shepherds” (cf. Ps 77:20; 78:70-72; Ezek 34:23) – God shepherds His people through designated leaders. He condemns the false shepherds (cf. Jer 23:1-2; Ezek 34:1-22), and appoints faithful shepherds to tend His flock (cf. Ezek 34:23-24). Clearly, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees here, who claimed to be rightful shepherds of the people of Israel. The solemn character of what Jesus has to say here is indicated by the expression, “Truly, truly” or “Most assuredly.” Thus Jesus said, “He who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep is a thief and a destroyer; He who enters by the door is a Shepherd of the sheep – the sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name; the sheep follow Him because they know His voice; a stranger they simply will not follow.” Notice the intimate relationship Jesus speaks of between Himself and His sheep – “I know My sheep, and am known by My own;” Jesus says the relationship He has with
the sheep is the same union and intimacy that exists between Him and His Father. “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the Door of the sheep – if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved. The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I came that you might have life, and might have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep; on the other hand, the hireling flees when a wolf comes” – the hireling serves for pay (self-interest), not because he genuinely cares for the sheep – he is more interested in his own welfare than in the good of the sheep. The Pharisees were hirelings; their ultimate concern was for themselves. Sadly, there are many hirelings in the church today – men and women who choose the ministry as a self-centered occupation, without true love for God’s sheep. The words of David are so appropriate here, “The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want” (cf. Psalm 23:1); He cares so much for us He gives His life for us.

Jesus goes on to say, “I have ‘other sheep’ who are not of this fold – Gentiles; they also hear My voice; I will bring them in and add them to this fold, and they shall be one flock.” This verse gives a little preview of the fact that in Christ, Jew and Gentile would be made one, and that the former distinctions between these peoples would disappear. When Jesus spoke these things, there arose a division among the Jews – some felt Jesus was demon possessed; others said a demon-possessed person would neither speak nor do the things Jesus had done. The Pharisees were the ones who were actually “scattering the sheep.” The entrance of Christ into the world, and into the hearts of people, produces a sword, rather than peace. Only when men receive Him as Lord and Savior do they know the peace of God. It is always amazing to see the “division” that is caused when light enters the darkness – the world “hates light” because it exposes the evil hearts of people (Jn 3:19); the first step in being saved is “acknowledging that you’re a sinner” – and this, most people refuse to do! You tell someone they’re evil – even a family member – most of them will hate you! That’s the human heart.

The Application – Jesus Christ is the “Door” through whom we must all go to enter the sheepfold; and He is the “Good Shepherd” whom we must follow. We enter the sheepfold by “faith,” and we listen and “follow” the Good Shepherd – He knows us and we know Him, and we hear His voice and follow Him. As God’s sheep we must “listen and agree with what He has to say to us” – when we do, we experience “life” in all its abundance. The question is, “Whose voice do we listen to?” The world? Natural reason? Our Friends? Or the voice of God? His Word? When we “humble” ourselves before the Lord, He will open our hearts and minds to receive His Word (cf. Acts 16:14); without humility of heart, God’s grace is withheld.

10:22–42 – Jesus Asserts His Deity. Jesus was at the “Feast of Dedication” in Jerusalem; it was also called the “Feast of Lights,” and is known today as “Hannakah.” This holiday commemorates the rededication of the Temple in 164 BC, after the Seleucid King “Antiochus Epiphanes” had forbidden the Jews to continue practicing their religion – in his attempt to destroy their religion, he desecrated their Temple by setting up an altar to Zeus in it. A priest by the name of “Judas Maccabeus” led a successful revolt against Antiochus, and defeated him. There was only a “one day supply of oil” available for the 8-Day Dedication – the lamp miraculously stayed lit for the entire eight days. The narrative of John 10 was Jesus’ last public teaching before His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. The people asked Jesus to tell them plainly if He was the “Christ.” Jesus said to them, “I told you, but you do not believe; the works I do bear witness of Me. You do not believe Me because you are not My sheep; My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand or My Father’s hand – I and the Father are ONE.” The Jews took up stones to stone Him, and Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”
The Jews responded, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy – because You make Yourself out to be God.” Jesus replied, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I am in the Father.” The problem wasn’t a lack of clarity by Jesus, but a lack of faith by His listeners. The main problem was that they were not expecting a Messiah who shared in God’s divinity. When Jesus finished responding to them, the Jews tried to seize Him, but He eluded their grasp, and escaped to the other side of the Jordan. Many more came to believe in Jesus.

The Application – Jesus establishes the fact that He and the Father are “one” – they are both God. Jesus manifested His Deity through the “works/signs” that He did; such works “authenticate” who He is, thus substantiating His message. As believers we see the “evidence” and our faith is enhanced, thus giving us all the more reason to follow and obey Him.

11:1–46 — The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus of Bethany became sick and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to let Jesus know – Jesus told His disciples “his sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of God.” When sickness enters our homes, we are not to conclude that God is displeased with us. Here sickness was directly linked with His love rather than His anger. In order to demonstrate His glory, Jesus waited a few days before going up to Bethany – He wanted His disciples to see what He would do so that “their faith would be greatly strengthened.” God’s delays are not God’s denials. If our prayers are not answered immediately, perhaps He is teaching us to wait, and if we wait patiently, we will find that He will answer our prayers in a much more marvelous way then we ever anticipated. Not even Jesus’ love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus could force Him to act ahead of the proper time. When they arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Martha said to Jesus that if He would have been there, “my brother would not have died.” Jesus told her, “Lazarus would rise again.” Martha knew her brother would rise again on resurrection day, but she had hoped Jesus would have kept him from dying now. Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.” After Jesus said this, Mary then came to Him weeping over her brother, and Jesus asked her where they had laid Lazarus’ body – Jesus was so deeply moved in his spirit that He “wept.” Jesus obviously had a special relationship with Lazarus and his sisters. The Jews who saw Him weep responded, “Behold how He loved him!” When they came to the tomb, Jesus told them to “remove the stone” – Martha reminded Him that He had been dead four days – plenty of time to start the decomposing process. After removing the stone, Jesus looked toward heaven saying, “Father, thank You for hearing Me – may those standing here believe that You sent Me.” He then cried out, “Lazarus, come forth” – He did, bound in burial wrappings. Jesus had Lazarus unbound, and those who beheld what He had done “believed in Him.”

The Application – The raising of Lazarus clearly points to the fact that Jesus is He who “gives life.” In all that Jesus does we see the glory of God (Jn 1:14), for we see God’s love and life-giving power. God is the one who brings “life” to the dead (cf. Eph 2:1-5), which is the heart of the Gospel. God sometimes “waits” to respond to those trials and difficulties in which we find ourselves, in order that we might clearly see the “His hand” at work on our behalf. His delay in the case with Lazarus led to a “greater blessing” – His waiting in our lives gives us time to importune His throne, bear our souls before Him, grow in faith, and come to fully depend upon Him as the sovereign Master of our lives. This narrative also teaches us that “our faith in God’s love,” even in the midst of adversity, is well grounded. Just as Jesus is the “resurrection and the life,” so also He brings life and resolve to our troubled lives. The fact that Jesus “wept” over His friend demonstrates how deeply “He enters into the pain and suffering of His children.” We are also reminded once again here, that regardless of
our circumstances, nothing is too difficult for God – “with God all things are possible” (Luke 18:27). Furthermore, all that God does and orchestrates in our lives is done with the expressed purpose of “increasing and building our faith” (cf. Jam 1:3-4; 1 Pet 1:7; Heb 12:2).

11:47-57 – Conspiracy to Kill Jesus. The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council together to discuss what they should do with Jesus – “He is performing so many miracles and we’re not doing anything to stop Him” – such an acknowledgement was to their own condemnation; they admitted that the Lord Jesus was performing many signs, so why then did they not believe on Him? The issue has been the same all along – “they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn 3:19); as such, their deeds simply didn’t reflect the things of God. When our focus is on “ourselves” and our interests, it’s not on God and His interests.

The Jewish leaders felt they could no longer remain inactive – if they did not intervene, masses would turn to Jesus. Furthermore, if the people acknowledged Jesus to be their “King,” it would mean trouble with Rome, because they would think that Jesus had come to overthrow their empire; as such, they would then move in and punish the Jews. Essentially, Rome would destroy the temple and scatter the Jewish people. These very things took place in A.D. 70 – not because the Jews accepted Jesus, but because they rejected Him. “Caiaphas,” the high priest told the council that “it is expedient that one should die for the people, rather than the entire nation perish.” Little did he know that he actually prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation (cf. Jn 11:51) – this prophetic utterance was given to Caiaphas because he was “high priest” that year. God spoke through Him because of the office he held and not because of his own personal righteousness, for he was a sinful man. From that day on they planned together to “kill Jesus.”

Realizing the mounting hostility of the Jews, the Lord Jesus went to the quiet city of “Ephraim” (the exact location of this city is not known by biblical scholars, other than it was by the wilderness). Now the “Passover of the Jews” was near – it was at this Passover that Jesus was to be crucified. The people were required to go up to Jerusalem before the Passover to “purify themselves.” This purifying was done through various types of washings and offerings. The sad thing is that the Jewish people were thus seeking to purify themselves, while at the same time planning the death of the Passover Lamb – this again reflects the “darkness of the human heart” – men love darkness rather than light! The talk at this Passover celebration was about this man “Jesus,” and whether or not He would appear at the feast. The chief priests and Pharisees gave the order to have Him “arrested” if He showed up.

The Application – As Passover week dawned, Caiaphas the high priest even made a prophetic utterance that Jesus (the Passover Lamb) should die for the people of Israel. The “timing” of God’s plan was critical to the exact day! God is never early... and He’s never late! Take it to the bank!

12:1-11 – Mary Anoints Jesus. Jesus went back to Bethany again where Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha lived. There was a party being held in His honor at another friend’s home – Lazarus was also an honored guest, and Martha helped with the serving as was her custom (v. 2). While at the party, Mary anointed Jesus feet with extremely expensive perfume, and wiped His feet with her hair (v. 3) – Mary’s devotion to Jesus caused her to take this pound of very costly oil of spikenard and anoint His feet with it. Essentially, she was saying, “there is nothing too valuable to give to Jesus.” Judas, the treasurer of the group, was shocked at the waste of such costly ointment (vv. 4-5). A number of Jesus’ other disciples felt the same way (Mt 26:8-9; Mk 14:4-5). Judas points out that it was worth a “year’s wages” – 300 denarii –
about $10,000 in today’s money. One denarius was a day’s pay for a day laborer. No wonder Jesus’ followers were dismayed and taken back by the gesture. Judas, however, used to pilfer the money box, so his motivation was far more selfish (v. 6). The Lord answered in effect, “Do not prevent her from doing this; she has kept this oil for the day of My burial – now she wants to lavish it upon Me in an act of affection and worship” (v. 7). Judas’ heart was fundamentally different from Mary’s heart. Furthermore, “there would never be a time when there would not be poor people on whom others might lavish their kindness; but you will not always have Me with you” (v.8). This should remind us that “spiritual opportunities” are passing – we should never delay doing what we can for Christ (“redeem the time”??).

**Why did Mary do this?** Most likely, it was sheer gratitude for what Jesus had done for her brother. It was an act of genuine humility for her to wash Jesus’ feet with her hair. The humility of her act prepares us for what happens in the next chapter (chp 13), when Jesus Himself washed His disciples feet. The word quickly spread that Jesus was near Jerusalem, and large number of Jews came to Bethany to see Him – others came to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. Incredibly, the chief priests plotted to even put Lazarus to death – because many of the Jews were believing in Jesus; that made Lazarus an enemy of the religious leaders. With such large numbers defecting to Jesus, the authorities were losing control over the people.

**The Application** – Jesus said, “In as much as you do it to one of the least of these, you do it to Me” (Mt 25:45). Are we sensitive to the “spiritual opportunities” in our lives to serve others? in love? Does gratitude fill our hearts and move us to love and bless others? In so doing we do it to Christ.

**12:12-19 – Jesus enters Jerusalem as King of Israel.** Given the tensions and expectations that have been growing (cf. 10:39-42; 11:46-47; 12:11), Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is very dramatic. Thus He takes the first step toward the final confrontation. Passover was one of the three great feasts in which Jews were supposed to attend in Jerusalem (the others were Pentecost and Tabernacles) – as such, the population swelled enormously at this time. When word spreads that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, a large crowd of pilgrims went out to meet Him. As Jesus approached the city, the people cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (v. 13). “Hosanna” is a Hebrew word that meant “Save!” or “Help!” The Palm Branches the people carried are symbolic of a victorious ruler. So the import of these two concepts is made even clearer as the crowds add, “Blessed is the King of Israel!” (v. 13). Clearly they see Jesus as the answer to their nationalistic, messianic hopes.

**Jesus responds by riding in on a “young donkey”** (v. 14; Zech 9:9) – as such, He undercuts their nationalism, and point in a different direction – He is indeed King, but not the sort of King they have in mind. Not even Jesus’ disciples grasped the meaning of what had taken place until after Jesus had been glorified. While the crowds build around Jesus, the religious leaders become more and more upset, and conclude, “Look at how the whole world has gone after Him!” (v. 19). Obviously, this was an exaggeration – but it reflected the level of frustration they were experiencing. So the Jewish leaders only hardened their position against Jesus.

**The Application** – Who is Jesus to you? Do you look upon Him as One who is to make your world what you would like it to be? Or is He the One who came to be your Lord and Master? to set up His kingdom in your heart? Are you focused on your “outside world,” or your “inner world” – your soul?

**12:20-26 – Greeks seek Jesus.** A number of pious Greeks (proselytes) came to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover Feast, and expressed a desire to Jesus’ disciples that they wanted to see Jesus. When His
disciples approached Jesus about the request, He responded to them with the following cryptic message “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (v. 23). In the following verse He reveals that it is time for His death to take place (v. 24). It may seem strange to refer to Jesus’ death as a “glorification,” but the “cross” is what reveals the heart of God most clearly. Selflessness and humble self-sacrifice are seen to be divine attributes.

**Jesus goes on to say that the “mystery of life” coming through death.** He uses the image of a “seed” that must fall into the ground and die in order to produce “much fruit” (v. 24). Through Jesus’ death fruit will be produced in the lives of His followers (Jn 15:1-8). The next two verses (25-26) spell out this connection between fruit and discipleship. Jesus says, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (v. 25). Here is a call to radical discipleship. The “self” was not created to be an autonomous center of being, but rather to be in union with God and receive life from Him. The love of this “self” is at the heart of all sin. What is needed is a “detachment from this self” (i.e., “hate” in v. 25). What Jesus means here is this – devotion and obedience to Himself must be so thorough that nothing else is distracting (Mt 6:24; Lk 14:26; 16:13). So Jesus isn’t speaking of hatred of the “self” itself, but rather of a rejection of the “self’s claims to autonomy and control.”

**Such “denial of self” opens one to receive the divine life that never dies** (Jn 11:25-26), which comes through union with Christ by the Spirit. Jesus goes on to say, “Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be; and My Father will honor the one who serves Me” (v.26). He has been speaking of His death, and now says the servant must follow the Master. So we continue to hear the synoptic theme of “taking up one’s cross and following Jesus” (Mt 16:24). In a sense, these two verses contain the core description of discipleship. “Self must be displaced by another. . . and the endless, shameless focus on self must be displaced by focus on Jesus Christ.” The death to the “false self” is a form of suffering, and may even include physical suffering (cf. Jn 15:18-16:4). Jesus is under no delusion that “hating yourself” is easy, as we see in the next section (v. 27).

**The Application** – The mystery of life is discovered in “dying to ourselves” – if we live to ourselves we will never discover what true life really is. Devotion and obedience to Christ requires making “Him” our life – and rejecting autonomy and control. The love of “self” is at the heart of all sin – we need to be detached from the living for ourselves. As believers, we are no longer our own. . . we have been bought with a price, the blood of Jesus, and we now belong to Him. If that resonates negatively in your heart, study the cross and the grace of God extended to you. Jesus died to deliver us from the bondage of sin and the self-life, the end of which is death and destruction. Jesus came to give us life! If the “life of Christ” is the number one priority in your life, you will abandon the “self-life.”

**12:27-36 Jesus Fortells His Death.** Increasingly, Jesus’ thoughts were upon the events that lay immediately before Him – He was thinking of the cross. . . becoming the “sin bearer”. . . and enduring the wrath of God against our sins. Thus “His soul was troubled,” because this was the purpose of His coming into the world. So instead of praying that He might be saved from the cross, He prayed that His Father might be glorified – at this point God the Father spoke from Heaven, and many said it sounded like thunder. Jesus responded, “Judgment is coming upon this world, and the ruler of this world will be cast out” (v. 31). Satan was utterly defeated at the cross – sealing His doom – it is now just a matter of time before he will be cast into the lake of fire. Jesus said, “If I be lifted up, I will draw all kinds of men to Myself” (from
When the people asked Jesus who the “Son of Man” was, He spoke of Himself as the “light” of the world, and the fact that the light would only be with them for a short while. They should come to the light and walk in the light, otherwise “darkness” would overtake them. Spiritually speaking, the one who believes on the Lord Jesus is the one who walks in the light; the one who rejects Him walks in darkness – he lacks divine guidance, and stumbles through life. Again the Lord Jesus warned His listeners to believe on Him while they still had the opportunity – by doing so they would become “sons of light,” and be assured of direction through life and into eternity. After speaking these words, the Lord departed from the people and remained in obscurity for a while.

The Application – Again, the issues before us as “light” and “darkness” – either we choose to walk in the light, or walk in darkness. To walk in the light is to embrace Christ and His will for your life; to reject Christ and His will for your life is to walk in darkness, and live a life of autonomy and run your own life – in short, it is the “self-life,” and the end thereof is death and destruction.

12:37-50 – The Peril of Unbelief. John pauses to express his amazement that despite all of the “signs” Jesus had been performing, people were still not believing in Him. Their unbelief was not caused by a lack of evidence, because the Lord had given them plenty – “they simply didn’t want to believe.” They wanted a King to rule over them, but they didn’t want to repent – acknowledgment of sin and a contrite heart. Their unbelief fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah 53:1 – “Lord, who has believed our report?” Not very many. When the Lord Jesus presented Himself to the nation of Israel, they rejected Him. Over and over again, He came back to them with the offer of salvation, but they just kept saying “no” to Him. The more men reject the gospel, the harder it becomes for them to receive it. When men close their eyes to the Light, God makes it more difficult for them to see the Light – so God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, but only after they had closed their eyes and hardened their own hearts. As a result of Israel’s stubborn and willful rejection of the Messiah, they cut themselves off from sight, understanding, conversion and healing.

Many of the rulers of the Jews became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 42); however, they did not dare to share their conviction with the others lest they be excommunicated; it is difficult to know if they were genuine believers. Scripture tells us that “true faith” sooner or later will confess Christ regardless of the outcome. Jesus said, “It is impossible for one to believe in the Father, and not believe in Me – to believe in Christ is to believe in the Father” (v. 44). Jesus again refers to Himself as “light” – those who believe in Him do not walk in darkness. Apart from Christ men are in deepest darkness. The purpose of Christ’s First Coming was to “save” the world, not “judge” it. However, those who reject Christ’s words will one day stand before the judgment bar of God. --- We now come to a distinct break in the narrative. Up to this point the Lord has presented Himself to Israel, and all of the “seven signs” He performed were intended to prove that He is Messiah, the Son of God.

The Application – The signs and wonders and miracles Jesus performed all “authenticated” who He was – the Son of God / the Messiah – as such, they “substantiated His message.” Therefore, to reject Christ is to “deny the evidence of the truth” without any evidence to the contrary! People simply “choose not to believe,” not because of ignorance, but because their deeds/hearts are evil (cf. Jn 3:19).
13:1-3 – The Lord’s Supper. Chapters 13-17 are referred to as the “Upper Room Discourse” – the issues Jesus discusses here took place the night before Jesus went to the cross. This is the final time of fellowship Jesus would have with His disciples. It was the day before His crucifixion, and Jesus was well aware of the fact that His time had come to die on the cross, rise again, and return to heaven to be with His Father. He had loved His own to the end of His earthly ministry, and would continue to love them throughout eternity. On this night, Jesus celebrated the “Passover” with His disciples (Mk 14:12ff). The devil had already sowed the thought of “betrayal” in Judas’ heart – later that night he would carry out that betrayal; and Jesus knew that (13:21; cf. Ps 41:9); nevertheless, He still addressed him as “friend” (Mt 26:50). Jesus knew the Father’s work that had been committed to Him; He knew He had come from God and would be returning to God. Being conscious of His mission and destiny enabled Him to do that for which He came into the world – to reconcile sinners to Himself.

The Application – In the midst of the most trying time of Jesus’ life, He met with His disciples to affirm His love for them, and to share His heart with them. It’s so easy when we’re troubled to focus on “ourselves” – yet, here we see Jesus focusing on “others.” Jesus had fully understood & accepted “His mission in life” – to redeem sinful man – and He never wavered from that motivation, even though the agony of the cross was before Him. It is only when we really embrace “God’s mission” for our lives, that we are able to continue focusing on Christ and the needs of others.

13:4-20 – Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet. Rising from supper Jesus put a towel around Himself and began to wash the disciples’ feet – that this is the Son of God makes this act even more remarkable; God washing sinful men’s feet. Remember, Jesus came as a “servant” to you and me – “How can it be!?” How can Jesus serve hostile sinful man who are at enmity with Him? In the eastern lands the use of open sandals made it necessary to wash one’s feet frequently. It was “common courtesy” for a host to arrange to have a slave wash the feet of his guests. Here the divine Host became the slave and performed this lowly service. Imagine Jesus at the feet of the traitor! What an incredible picture! What a lesson for us! Peter was shocked to think of Jesus washing his feet, and expressed disapproval that One as great as He should condescend to one so unworthy as him. The sight of God in the role of a “servant” is disturbing.

Jesus taught Peter that there was a “spiritual meaning” to what He was doing – foot-washing was a picture of “spiritual cleansing.” Jesus told Peter, “If I do not wash your feet, you will have no fellowship with Me” (13:8; cf. 1 Jn 1:9). The meaning of foot-washing is this: As Christians walk through this world, they contract a certain amount of defilement, and need to be constantly cleansed. This cleansing takes place by the “water of the Word” – as we listen to the Word, we find that it cleanses us from the evil influences about us. Conversely, the more we neglect the Word, the more these wicked influences can remain in our minds and lives – fellowship with the Lord can be maintained only by the continual cleansing action of the Scriptures in our lives. So Peter then responds, “Wash me all over!” But that wasn’t necessary. On the way back from the public bath, a person’s feet would get dirty again. He didn’t need another bath, but he did need to have his feet washed. The “bath” refers to the complete cleansing received at salvation. . . whereas the “basin” speaks of the cleansing from pollution of sin that takes simply because we walk in this world. In this act of foot-washing, Jesus was also using a “practical action” to give an example of love to His disciples; as such, they are to show the same kind of love to fellow-believers.

Jesus teaches His disciples to follow His example (vv.12-20) – Since Jesus (Lord & Teacher) washed their feet, what excuse could they have for not washing one another’s feet? If pride or prevents us
from **stooping to serve our brethren**, we should remember that we are not greater than our Master. He **humbled Himself** to wash those who were completely unworthy, and He knew that one of them would betray Him (v. 18; cf. Ps 41:9) – in Psalm 41 the betrayer is described by the Lord as “my own familiar friend.” Would you minister in a lowly way to a person you knew was about to betray you? To know these truths concerning humility and unselfishness and service is one thing . . . but to do these things is quite another (cf. Jam 1:22). The Lord revealed His betrayal to the disciples in advance so that when it happened, they would know that Jesus was true deity – “**that you may know that I AM**” (19). The Jesus of the NT is the Jehovah of the Old – fulfilled prophecy is one of the great proofs of the deity of Christ. Jesus knew that His betrayal might cause the other disciples to stumble, so He added this word of encouragement – they should remember that they were being **“sent on a divine mission”**. They were to be so closely identified with Christ that to receive them was the same as receiving Him. Also, those who received Christ received God the Father. In spite of some of the ugly realities and experiences of life, we should be comforted by our close link with God the Son & God the Father.

**The Application** – The issue in this passage is that of **“being a servant”** to others – **“pride”** is the big roadblock to becoming an effective servant. When we are too much into our own agenda, and our own needs and selfish interests, we won’t notice the needs of others. Paul says, “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but look out for the interests of others” (Phil 2:4). This requires **“intentionality”** – if we’re not intentional in looking out for others, in most cases we won’t even notice if they are in need. Do we **“stoop”** to help the brethren? Are we **“humble ourselves”** enough to serve those who we may not have a good relationship with? Without embracing **“God’s mission”** for our lives, and the primacy of our **“relationship with Christ,”** our focus will be upon ourselves and our own selfish interests. Being a **“servant”** requires having right priorities in life by living JOYfully: Jesus, Others, You.

**13:21-30 – Jesus Predicts His Betrayal.** The knowledge that one of His disciples would betray Him caused the Lord to be “deeply troubled” – He acknowledged such to His disciples; yet even this revelation did not change the traitor’s mind. None of the disciples knew Judas was the one of whom Jesus spoke. According to Matthew 26 – **“each one of them was deeply grieved and wondered if they were the one?”** (Mt 26:21). John reports they were “at a loss to know of which one He was speaking” (v. 22). Judas may have been the “least suspected,” because he was the group’s treasurer (a position of high trust). To their credit, **the primary concern of each man was the possibility of his own culpability** – remember, Jesus had just rebuked them for their “self-serving egotism and fleshly ambition;” here they now showed signs of **genuine humility and self-distrust.**

The **apostle John** was **reclining at Jesus’ side** – he simply **identified himself as “one whom Jesus loved”** (v.23); obviously, John held a place of special affection in Jesus’ heart, so John enjoy a special closeness to Him. Peter gestured to him to find out of whom Jesus was speaking – so John asked Jesus who it was. Jesus didn’t directly identify the individual – He simply answered that His traitor was **“the one He would give a piece of bread to that was dipped in wine”** (v.26). Some scholars say that it was an Eastern custom for the host to give the bread to the **“honored guest”** at a meal. By making Judas the honored guest, the Lord may have been trying to **“win him to repentance with His love.”** If that is the case, this is tremendous demonstration of the extent of God’s love– even to the final hour! Satan had already put it into Judas’ heart to betray the Lord, and at this point **“Satan entered him”** and took control of him. Knowing His betrayer was now fully determined, the Lord told him to “do it
quickly.” Thus Judas left the upper room to carry out his betrayal. Some apparently thought He was simply going out to buy something for the feast (v. 29).

**The Application** – The response of each disciple to the Lord’s revelation that “one of them” would betray Him was profound. Each of them feared they might be the one – they had matured as men with regard to “knowing themselves,” and the possibility of their own culpability – “Lord, am I the one?” Paul’s words come to mind, “In my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18). An immature believer likes to think he’s a pretty solid character, but the more one grows in faith, the more one realizes how desperately evil is his flesh (cf. Jer 17:9). So here the disciples are demonstrating “genuine humility and self-distrust” – the heart of genuinely godly men. It is tremendously humbling to realize who terribly sinful the human heart is – God knows our frame and loves us still with an everlasting love. Again, I am reminded of the old hymn, “Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God wouldst die for me?” And then to consider Jesus’ affection at the last hour for Judas – here He was still extending love and grace to him, in hopes that He would genuinely repent. “Love so amazing demands my life, my all.”

**13:31-35 – Jesus Gives them a “New Commandment.”** As soon as Judas left, Jesus began to speak with the disciples more freely and intimately – “Now the Son of Man is glorified.” The Lord was anticipating the work of redemption which He was about to accomplish. Jesus told His disciples that “God Himself is glorified in the work of the Savior.” The message of the “cross” is this: God is a HOLY GOD who cannot pass over “sin,” and He is a LOVING GOD who does not desire the death of any “sinner” (cf. Ezek 18:23; 33:11; Mic 7:18; 2 Pet 3:9; Rom 2:4). God would see to it that appropriate honor is given to His beloved Son. God glorified His Son by “raising Him” from the dead and “seating Him” at His own right hand in heaven. God didn’t wait until His Kingdom was ushered in, He glorified His Son immediately.

For the first time the Lord Jesus addressed His disciples as “little children” – term of endearment. In the last few hours of His life on earth, Jesus sketched for them a picture of a future that they and we are to experience. The key to this experience is “relationship with each other” as members of a new community, and relationship with Jesus, the Enabler of the new community. Jesus explained the foundation of the new community: “A new command I give you: Love one another as I have loved you.” The OT spoke of “loving neighbors;” Jesus spoke of “loving one another.” In Christ we have become brothers and sisters, members of a single family (see Eph 2:19; 3:6). In Christ our relationship with each other is more intimate than any human relationship has ever been. Furthermore, there is a new standard for loving: The OT spoke of loving others “as you love yourself;” Jesus spoke of loving each other “as I have loved you” (13:34; 15:12-13,17). Obviously to love like that is impossible apart from the transforming power of the new covenant – the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul writes, “The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22), that believers can love as Jesus commanded. Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to, “Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you” (Eph 5:2). Finally, there is a new outcome – the Christlike love that permeates the new community of Christian brothers and sisters is a witness to the world that we are “followers of Christ” (v. 35). The badge of Christian discipleship is not a cross worn around the neck on a chain – the true mark of discipleship is “love for fellow Christians.” This requires divine power, and this power is only given to those indwelt by the Holy Spirit (as every genuine believer is). Jesus would only be with them “a short while longer” – during His absence, they were to be governed by the “commandment of love.” This context of a “loving community” is vital in all that Jesus goes on to explain in these next few chapters.
The Application – God neither passes over sin, nor does He delight in the death of the sinner (cf. Ezek 18:23; 33:11; Mic 7:18; 2 Pet 3:9; Rom 2:4). We need to continually remind ourselves of how loving and gracious God is – His love is far greater than His wrath! “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20). Satan wants us think of “God’s wrath;” he never wants us to think of “God’s love.” Our hearts should explode with rejoicing knowing that God loves us with an everlasting love – chesed love – that’s a love that knows no limits! There is nothing God wouldn’t do for us – even die on a cross! To minimize His love in anyway is to make God less than He really is. Our response should be one of praise and thanksgiving. And with the knowledge of that kind of love from God, we should in turn be “loving” to those around us (cf. 1 Jn 4:7-8, 11, 19-21). When believers fail to love others, they need to focus on their need of love (they’re sinful!), and God’s love for them (He forgives them!).

13:36-38 – Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial. With typical devotion and enthusiasm, Peter expressed he was “willing to die for the Lord.” He thought he could endure martyrdom by his own strength. Later he actually did die for the Lord, but it was because he had been given special strength and courage by God (Holy Spirit). Jesus checks his “zeal without knowledge” by telling Peter something he himself did not know – that before the night was ended, he would deny the Lord three times. Thus Peter was reminded of his weakness, cowardice, and inability to follow the Lord for even a few hours by his own power.

The Application – As human beings we’re inclined toward being “proud of self” – because of our sinful disposition we think we have more going for us than we really do. When our emotions surface, they cause us to overestimate our strength & abilities – “confidence in self” is our biggest weakness (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). We must be mindful of how weak and frail we are, how little faith we have, and how much we need to depend upon the Lord – “apart from Him we can do nothing” (John 15:5; Phil 3:3). God is predisposed to us when we are “humble” – but actually works against us when we are “proud” (Jam 4:6). Therefore, let us humbly acknowledge our need of grace and strength, fully aware that we are unable to stand in and of ourselves – because we’re not capable of doing right in our own strength (cf. Rom 7:18). Our flesh is not only incapable of doing that which is right, it is prone to doing that which is wrong. There are times when “God pulls back” and let’s us do things in our own strength, to show us how dependent we are of Him. There are other times when “God remains silent” in our lives, to show us how much we need Him. God knows we will “stumble,” nonetheless He let’s us do so to show us the weakness of the flesh, and our need for Him.

14:1-15 – Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. After Jesus announced Judas’ betrayal (13:21), His own imminent departure (13:33), and Peter’s denial (13:39), He told His disciples “not to be troubled, but to trust Him.” Jesus’ words can comfort us just like they did the remaining eleven disciples. Jesus was going to His Father’s house – heaven – where there are many dwelling places. He told His disciples He was going to “prepare a place for them,” but that He would “come back again” to take them to be with Him forever – that is the great hope we have as believers. Jesus’ aim here was to encourage them with this hope. When Thomas asked Him to clarify what He was saying about knowing the “way” to where He was going, Jesus told them He was “the way” – Jesus is salvation – no one comes to the Father except through Him. The way to the Father is not through the Ten Commandments, the Ordinances, the Golden Rule, or Church membership – it is through faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Jesus is “the truth” – He is not just a teacher of truth, He is the truth. And lastly, Jesus is “the life” – He is the source of life, both spiritual and eternal. Those who receive Him have eternal life.
Once more Jesus taught the “mysterious union” that exists between Him and the Father. If the disciples knew who Jesus really was, they would have known the Father also – because the Lord revealed the Father to men. From now on the disciples would understand that Jesus was God the Son. Then they would realize that to know Christ was to know the Father, and to see the Lord Jesus is to see God. Philip wanted Jesus to give them a special revelation of the Father, and that would suffice. He did not understand that everything the Lord was, and did, and said, was a revelation of the Father. Jesus patiently corrected him regarding Who He really was – Deity – and His unity with the Father. Jesus said, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me” – that describes the mysterious union that exists between Jesus and the Father. They are separate persons, yet they are One. We should not be discouraged that we do not fully understand the fullness of what is referred to by theologians as the “hypostatic union.” All Jesus did and said was in obedience to the Father. Jesus told His disciples that they should believe that “He was one with the Father” because of His own testimony; but if that was not enough for them, they should believe “because of the works He performed.”

The Lord predicted those who believed in Him would perform even “greater works” than He did. Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost brought more followers to Jesus than did Jesus’ entire early ministry – 3,000 people placed their faith in Christ that day! That meant the church grew by at least 300% in one day! “Saving souls” is a far greater work than “healing bodies!” What a comfort it must have been to the disciples to know that, even though the Lord was leaving them, they could pray to the Father in His Name and receive their requests (v. 13). The key to receiving what we ask for is to ask things in “Jesus Name” – it is to ask in accordance with the mind and will of Jesus Himself. It is to ask for things which will glorify God, bless mankind, and be for our own spiritual good. In order to ask (pray) in Christ’s Name, we must live in close relationship with Him – otherwise we wouldn’t be praying with the mind and attitude of Christ. The closer we are to Christ, the more our desires will be the same as His are (cf. Ps 37:4). The Father is glorified in the Son because the Son only desires those things that are pleasing to the Father. Therefore, live in the center of God will… walk in fellowship with Him… ask for anything that the Lord would desire, and your prayers will be answered (v. 14). Jesus then told them, “if they really loved Him, they would obey Him” (15). Notice the way in which we express our love to Christ – it’s not by tears (emotions), but by obedience. The commandments of the Lord are the instructions which He has given us in the Gospels and the rest of the NT.

The Application – As Christians we are “born again to a living hope” (cf. 1 Pet 1:3; 3:15) – the hope of spending eternity with Christ in heaven (cf. Tit 3:7), and this hope does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). This hope is not simply wishful thinking, it is the “certain reality” and “substance” of our faith (Heb 11:1). The believer’s hope stabilizes the soul like an anchor by linking it to God’s faithfulness and steadfastness (cf. Heb 3:6; 6:18-19). This “eternal hope” was Jesus’ answer for the “troubled heart” – therefore when we are troubled with the concerns of this life, we must intentionally focus on the “big picture” – we are going to spend “eternity in heaven with Jesus” – and that perspective will allay any fears we may have. Remember, “faith is the substance of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1) – if we lose sight of our eternal hope, we will become discouraged and disheartened by the circumstances of this life. Furthermore, we must focus our energies on developing an “intimate relationship with Christ,” so that our desires are conformed to His desires, that we might walk in the light and have “fellowship with Him and with one another” (cf. 1 Jn 1:3-7; Ps 37:4). When we live in the center of God’s will, we will obey Him and live with “confidence” that God not only understands everything we are going through, but will provide everything we need – this is the “confidence of things hoped for” (Heb 11:1); remember, we walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7), and faith always has a “future orientation.”
The Role of the Holy Spirit. The word “Helper” (Paraclete) literally refers to “one called alongside to help” – it is also translated “Advocate” (1 Jn 2:1). The Lord Jesus is our Advocate or Helper, and the Holy Spirit is “another Helper” of the same kind – not of a different kind (the Greek word he used would have been a different word). The Holy Spirit abides with believers forever. The Holy Spirit is also called the “Spirit of truth” because He teaches truth and He glorifies Christ who is the truth (15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn 4:6). Jesus told His disciples He would not leave them as orphans – rather, He would come to them in the person of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (v. 18). At the end of the age Jesus will also literally come again to take His children home to heaven. Though Jesus’ disciples would see Him prior to His ascending into heaven, they would not see Him again until He returns at the Second Coming. When the Holy Spirit came He would instruct believers in the truth of the marvelous union of life between Christ, the Father, and His saints (v. 20). Christ Himself actually indwells the believer through the Holy Spirit (cf. Col 1:27).

The disciples had expected the Messiah to come publicly and deliver Israel from the tyranny of Rome and the corrupt priesthood of the Temple. Judas (not Iscariot) questioned Jesus as to how He would reveal Himself to “His followers,” but the “world” would not see Him (v. 22). Judas did not understand that the Lord would manifest Himself to His own in a “spiritual manner.” Jesus explained that His manifestation to the disciples would be in response to their love and obedience – if they loved and obeyed the Lord, they would experience fellowship with God. As such, they would see Him by faith through the Word of God. Incidentally, by the Spirit of God, we can actually know Christ better today than the disciples knew Him when He was on earth. By faith we can enjoy the closest fellowship with Him. Jesus went on to say to His disciple, “If a person truly loves the Lord, he will obey Me; My Father will love him, and My Father and I will come to him and abide with him” (v. 23). On the other hand, the one who does not love Christ will not keep His commandments – where there is no love, there will be no inner response leading to obedience. When the Holy Spirit came and took up residence in their hearts, one of His functions was to “teach them all things” – via the apostles teaching and the written Word of God. The Lord Jesus seems to have presented in “germ form” all the teaching that is developed throughout the rest of the NT.

What Jesus was doing in this section, was to share “His last will and testament” with them; He was leaving His possessions to His loved ones. He bequeathed things that material possessions could not buy – “the peace of conscience” that arises from a sense of pardoned sin and reconciliation with God. The customary “good-bye” among the Jews was to say “Shalom” – meaning “Peace.” The Lord was about to depart, so He added to this farewell by saying “My Peace” – the word “My” is emphatic. This was no conventional wish. This was “God’s Peace” that Jesus was giving them. The peace that Christ gives banishes fear & dread from the heart, for Jesus is in control of all circumstances. As such, it is not given as the world gives – sparingly, selfishly, and for a short period of time – God’s gift of peace is forever. Therefore the Christian should not be troubled or fearful. Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that “He is going to the Father” – this should have elicited great joy within them, but they still did not fully understand who He was; thus their love was not as great as it should have been. While Jesus was on earth He was reviled, spat upon, and endured the hatred of men – for all for us – now that He was going to heaven to be with the Father, He would no longer suffer such indignities. Therefore the disciples should have “rejoiced” at His returning to the Father. When Jesus said His Father was “greater than Him,” this did not mean that Jesus was inferior in essence than the Father; it simply meant that He “differed in rank or position” from the Father – as the humble, submissive Son, Jesus submitted Himself to the authority of His Father (cf. 1 Cor 11:3; 15:28). Just as a “human
child” is not considered less human than his “earthly parent,” so Jesus is not inferior to His Father – the Father and the Son still are “equal in essence.”

The Application  – As believers we must live with confidence that the “Holy Spirit” has taken up residence in our lives – no matter how we “feel.” It is the reality of “God’s presence” in our lives that assures us and constrains us to be the people God wants us to be. It is through the Holy Spirit that we “experience fellowship” with God and “His peace.” Furthermore, we can depend upon Him to “instruct us” in the way we should go, knowing that His loving eye is upon us (Jn 14:26; Ps 32:8). We should also “rejoice” in the fact that the Lord Jesus is now in heaven at the Father’s right hand, and is ever making intercession for us. Think of all He did for us while He was here on earth, and then think “He is still consumed with us and our spiritual well-being.” “Amazing Love! How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me!” And He is still “loving us” with every fiber of His being. Affirm the wonderful truth of the gospel (repeat it to yourself) – every day! And always start with the fact you are so undeserving – never equivocate on the fact “you’re a sinner!” Salvation is all grace!

15:1-11 – Jesus is the “Vine”… we are the “Branches”… and God the Father is the “Vinedresser.”

The new community of Jesus asks us to adopt a lifestyle far beyond our capacity. Knowing this, Jesus then explained how a life of fruitfulness is possible for human beings. The fruit Jesus promised here is, of course, the fruit of the Spirit, who would soon take up residence in the disciples’ lives. The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control Paul lists in Galatians (5:22-23) are promised in these chapters of John. The Lord “takes away” every branch that does not bear fruit – this verb can also be translated “lifts up” (cf. Jn 8:59); if that be the case, then it would be the positive ministry of encouraging the fruitless branch by making it easier to bear fruit. When branches lay on the ground, it is difficult for them to bear fruit, so the Vinedresser “lifts them up” and prunes them so that they will bear fruit. The branch that “bears fruit” is the Christian who is growing more like the Lord Jesus. Even such vines, however, need to be “pruned and cleansed.” Just as a real vine must be cleaned from insects, mildew, and fungus, so a Christian must be cleansed from worldly things that cling to him. The cleansing agent is the “Word of God.” Just as the Savior had been talking to them, His Word had had a purifying effect upon their lives.

Jesus told His disciples to “Abide in Me” (v. 4). If we keep Jesus’ commandments, we will remain (or abide) in His love (cf. 15:10). As His Word shapes and conforms us to His image, we will live in the center of His love. Cultivating an “intimate relationship with Christ” is essential to abiding in Him. A branch abides in a vine by drawing all its life and nourishment from the vine. So we abide in Christ by spending time in prayer, reading and studying Scripture, obeying His Word, fellowshipping with His people, and being continually conscious of our union with Him. As we maintain constant contact with Him, we are conscious of His abiding presence and His supplying us with spiritual strength and resources. The branch can only bear fruit as it abides in the vine. The only way believers can bear the fruit of a Christ-like character is by living in touch with Christ moment by moment – it’s a moment by moment walk with Christ.

The Christian life is better described as “Christ living His life through us,” rather than “our living our lives for Him.” Jesus said, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” A branch has one great purpose and that is to “bear fruit.” But it cannot fulfill its purpose unless it remains in intimate connection with the vine. How “empty” the life of the Christian would be if he failed to remain in Jesus – as empty as that of a branch torn from the vine; it has no potential for fruit bearing. It’s only use would
be to serve as fuel for the fire (v. 6). The warning is clear – we cannot become what we are intended to be without having a close relationship with Christ, with our love for Him expressed in obedience to Him. How tragic for a Christian to not know the joy of fruit-bearing. “Abiding” is the secret of a successful prayer life. The closer we get to Christ the more we learn to think His thoughts after Him. So the more we get to know Him through His Word, the more we will understand His will, and the more “our will” agrees with His – and more we can be sure of having our prayers answered (v. 7). As the children of God exhibit the likeness of Christ to the world, “the Father is glorified.” We prove to be His disciples when we abide in Him.

The “love” which the Savior has for us is the same as the love the Father has for His Son. Jesus said, “Abide in My love” – this means we should continually remind ourselves of His love and enjoy it in our lives. We abide in God’s love by keeping His commandments. As says the hymn, “There is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust & obey.” The example we follow is that of the Lord Jesus: He kept His Father’s commandments. Everything He did was in obedience to the will of God. He lived in a state of constant enjoyment of the Father’s love – nothing ever marred His sweet loving fellowship. Jesus wanted His disciples to have that “joy that comes from dependence upon Him.” The Lord taught that the “fullness of joy” comes by taking God into one’s life as much as possible.

The Application – As believers, we must acknowledge our “total dependence” upon the Lord for godly living. God alone, through the person of the Holy Spirit, is responsible for “fruitful living.” It is simply not within us to live a holy life – that requires the person of the Holy Spirit. The picture we have here in John 15 is that of a “branch” and a “vine” – apart from the Vine, which is Christ, we as branches can produce absolutely nothing of any spiritual value. As believers, our attention must be upon “staying intimately attached” to the Vine – and this we do by abiding in Him, trusting Him, and obeying Him. The primary goal of the believer should be to “cultivate an intimate relationship” with Christ, not bearing fruit – bearing fruit is a by-product of intimacy; intimacy is not a by-product of bearing fruit. Don’t get the cart before the horse! We cultivate an intimate relationship with Christ by spending time in prayer, reading and studying Scripture, affirming the truths of Scripture, obeying His Word, fellowshipping with His people, and being continually conscious of our union with Him. From my experience, most fairly committed believers fail most in the area of “affirming truth” – that is, affirming the truths of Scripture. To affirm a truth is to verbalize it accurately, and then affirm the reality of it over and over again, until the reality of that truth brings peace to your heart. For example, many Christians often don’t “feel forgiven” even when they confess their sins – it is necessary to affirm the truth that God really does forgive us when we agree with Him about our sins – no matter how we feel. Satan will tempt us into thinking “we’re too sinful,” that forgiveness can’t be as easy as just confessing – that we need to suffer the consequences of our sin, before God will genuinely forgive us. An understanding of “love and grace” and the “sinfulness of our flesh,” will dispel this notion. Our problem is we end up believing what the Devil tells us rather than what Christ does regarding forgiveness. As such, we must commit ourselves to “growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ” – if we don’t know the truths of Scripture, we will stumble badly in our walk, and live a defeated life. This is an extremely common for believers. Is it easy to “abide in Christ”? No! Absolutely not! The fact is, this is the most difficult thing you will ever do, because it requires “the death of self” – saying “yes” to God & His will, and saying “no” to yourself & your will. This is the mother of all battles! Stop groaning about the fact that cultivating an intimate relationship with Christ is “too hard,” and commit yourself to growing in His grace and love. The wonderful truth of a life of holiness is this: when you truly abide in Christ, His peace and joy will completely transcend your circumstances –
no matter what they are or how painful they may be. Remember the secret of “affirming truth!”
Don’t focus on “fruit bearing” – that will only lead to performance-based living (legalism).

15:12-17 – The Command to “Love one another.” The Lord Jesus would soon leave His disciples, and they would be left to live in a hostile world. Furthermore, there would be the danger of disciples contending with one another. So Jesus left this standing order: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus said, “Greater love has not one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (13). The disciples of Christ are called to this type of devotion. We lay down our lives for each other by serving one another, by bearing one another’s burdens, by looking out after each other’s interests – rather than “self-centered” living, it’s to be “others-centered” living. The Lord is our example – He lived for “us,” not Himself. Paul himself said, “For me to live is Christ” (and others – cf. Phil 1:21).

We demonstrate that we are “friends of Christ” by doing what He says. Friends look out after each other’s interests – they don’t “use” their friends for selfish aims, friends enjoy being with each other and “serving” each other. Conversely, we are not simply “slaves” who are under obligation to do works of service, we are “friends” who enjoy a “loving relationship” with each other. Friends “share their hearts” each other – just as Jesus did with His disciples. Jesus shared all the Father had revealed to Him with His disciples – thus, they enjoyed a loving relationship of trust, not a relationship of suspicion and hidden agendas. Lest there be any tendency for them to become discouraged in a hostile world and give up, Jesus reminded them that He was the One who “chose them;” He had appointed the disciples to the work which lay before them – they were to “bear fruit” – “lasting fruit” (salvation of souls). The secret of effective service is “prayer” – the disciples were to go forth in their service with the guarantee that the Father would grant them whatever they asked in Christ’s name. Jesus returns to His theme again by commanding them to “Love one another.” The natural tendency of the flesh is to “live for oneself;” as such, we need to constantly remind ourselves of our calling in life – “living for others,” in particular, “our brothers and sisters in Christ.” When we genuinely love one another, we will be living life in such a way that our lives are “bearing fruit,” because the Holy Spirit will be living His life in and through us (cf. Gal 2:20).

The Application – It should be noted, we can’t love others if we don’t “love Christ.” Therefore the focus again needs to primarily be on “loving Christ” – then we will automatically “love others.” Once again it’s a matter of getting the cart before the horse if we primarily focus on “loving others.” Also, genuine friendship involves transparency and a loving relationship of trust – when we genuinely love others, we will care deeply about their needs and desires, and we will want God’s very best for their lives. Such love will produce “great fruit.” Again, focus first on “loving Christ.”

15:18-16:4 – The Disciple’s relation to the World. The disciples were not to be surprised or disheartened if the world “hates them” – because they do. The world hated Jesus & it will hate all who resemble Him. Men of the world love those who live as they do (v. 19); i.e., those who engage in profanity, fleshly lusts, and live for themselves. Christians condemn that kind of living with their holy lives (Jn 3:19-20), therefore the world hates them. People don’t like those who oppose them. Why would they? Jesus reminded His disciples: “a slave is not greater than his master – because the world hated Him, it’s going to hate you.” Why should a disciple of Jesus expect any better treatment from the world than He received? Their words will be refused just like Jesus’ were. He told them, “this hatred they will endure is for My Name’s sake.” It is because the believer is linked to Christ, because they bear His likeness. Some Christians naively think that unbelievers are good & nice – not sinful & corrupt; the reason is they are just
looking at their outward appearance. It is not until the unbeliever’s “behavior” is identified for what it is – sinful – that he becomes angry, vicious and hateful of those who judge them that way.

Remember, the world “found no fault” in Jesus, yet they rejected Him and killed Him! If Jesus wouldn’t have “called and ace an ace” – identified sin for what it is – they wouldn’t have hated Him. They were not only responsible for having heard the teaching of Jesus, they also bore witness to His miracles. This added to their condemnation. They saw works which no one else had ever seen! To reject Christ in the face of this evidence was inexcusable (v. 24). The Lord compared all their other sins to “this one sin,” and said that the former were as nothing when placed alongside the latter. Because they hated Jesus, they hated His Father – they are of the same essence – and this was their terrible condemnation. Jesus mentions the Scriptures predicted that Christ would be “hated without cause” (Ps 69:4). So the very Scriptures which these men prized had predicted their senseless hatred of Christ. When the Holy Spirit came, “He continued to testify to the truth of Christ.” This is His great mission. He doesn’t seek to occupy men with Himself, but rather directs their attention to the Lord of glory! The Spirit would testify directly through the disciples. As such, the world hated them also.

Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling.” At times the world’s antagonism has led to persecution, oppression, and death of those who follow Jesus. This would soon be the experience of the eleven. Jesus told His disciples these things so that they would not become disillusioned or shocked by the afflictions and persecution that lay before them in life.

Excommunication from the synagogues was considered by most Jews to be one of the worst things that could happen to a Jew. Yet this would happen to these men who were disciples of Jesus. The Christian faith would be so hated that those who sought to stamp it out thought they were pleasing God. This shows how a person may be very sincere, very zealous, yet very wrong. Failure to recognize the deity of Christ lay at the root of the matter; and the failure to receive Jesus meant they were also refusing to receive the Father. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that the path before them wasn’t an easy one; nonetheless, it was still a victorious one.

The Application – As believers, one of our primary obligations is to “proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ” to those in our area of influence. God has placed each of us in that “special place” that He uniquely designed for us to occupy. It is in that place, where we have some “kingdom responsibilities.” We are to be “beacons of light” in our little dark corner of the world. Yes, this will mean “upsetting people sometime,” because the message of the cross is offensive to them – it paints them in a bad light; it condemns them. By the way, there is a “fine line” between shoving the gospel down someone’s throat, and sharing it with them in a loving way – that is the tension for many believers. Generally, it is best to “befriend a person” before you share with them what you believe, and what the Bible teaches. Generally “friends” don’t respond in a highly hostile fashion – at least not in our culture; yet sometimes they do. In the New Testament culture of Israel, the Jewish population was strongly opposed to Christianity – they viewed it as a Jewish cult. As such, they frequently responded in a highly negative fashion if one of their fellow-countrymen embraced Jesus as Messiah. So persecution was very common throughout Judea. Jesus warns us of the fact that at various points in our testifying of Him, we are going to experience rejection and persecution. This isn’t abnormal. . . this is the norm. So don’t become alarmed and disillusioned when it happens. Again, by “loving Christ” first and foremost, the Holy Spirit will give you the grace to share the gospel in your sphere of influence, even in the midst of ridicule and persecution. Regardless, we must each intentionally take steps to share it, because it’s not going to happen automatically just because you’re a believer. So, prayerfully consider those in your sphere of influence that God would have you share with.
16:5-15 – The Coming of the Spirit of Truth. Jesus again tells His disciples that He is now returning to His Father; as such sorrow filled their hearts. Again, their perspective was “self-centered” – what would happen to them – at this point they weren’t thinking about what would happen to Jesus. Jesus then went on to tell them that it was “to their advantage that He leave them,” because He would send the Holy Spirit to be their “Helper.” The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to understand the ways and the truth of God, and He makes clear to us what Jesus said in His Word. Furthermore, He gives us the wisdom we need to apply that Word on a daily basis and to live in responsive obedience to Christ. Though Jesus is leaving this world, He is not being left without a witness to truth and life and grace. So when the Holy Spirit comes He will convict the world of the following three things (16:8-11) –

1. **The “sin of unbelief”** (v. 9) – The Holy Spirit creates an “inward awareness of the sin of failing to believe in Christ.” No one can convict but the Holy Spirit. Jesus is worthy of belief – there was nothing about Him that made it impossible for men to believe in Him – men simply refuse to do so. To reject Christ is to reject the testimony of the Holy Spirit in your heart. The basic sin of man is the sin which puts “self” at the center of things and consequently refuses to believe. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of its sin because they do not believe – their “stubborn unbelief” is that sin that dams people. Only the Spirit of God can convict the individual sinner’s conscience.

2. **The “righteousness of Christ”** (v. 10) – Conversely, the Holy Spirit creates an “inward awareness of Christ’s righteousness.” The Lord Jesus claimed to be righteous, but men said He had a demon. The Holy Spirit witnesses to the fact that Christ was right and the world was wrong. Every person becomes painfully aware of their own “lack of righteousness” and the “righteousness of Christ.” The Holy Spirit shows men that their righteousness before God depends not on their own efforts, but on Christ’s atoning work on the cross for them. Nothing but the Spirit of God can convict man’s heart of Christ’s righteousness. The Lord’s statement about “His going to the Father” provides the supreme evidence of His righteousness – His acceptance into the Father’s presence. The Father Himself testified to the righteousness of His Son (cf. Phil 2:9). Those who place their trust in Christ are clothed with His righteousness (cf. Phil 3:9; Rom 3:21-22; 2 Cor 5:21).

3. **The “judgment of Satan”** (v. 11) – The Holy Spirit creates an “inward awareness of coming judgment,” and “God’s judgment and defeat of Satan on the cross” (cf. Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). Though he has been defeated and judged, the final sentence against him will not be carried out until the end of the millennium (Rev 20:10). In the meantime he goes about as the “god of this age,” seeking to capture and devour souls (1 Pet 5:8). The defeat of Satan is a “judgment” – justice is done in the overthrow of the evil one. The Devil’s fate guarantees the judgment of every unrepentant sinner. Without the Holy Spirit men do not know the reality of Satan’s defeat at the cross.

**From the work of the Spirit in the world, Jesus now turns to “His work in believers”** (vv. 12-15). The Lord tell His disciples there are still a number of things He wanted to say to them, but at this point we’re able to bear them. This is an important principle of teaching – there must be a certain progress in learning before advanced truths can be received. The work which the Lord began was to be continued by the Spirit of truth – and the disciples, in turn, would put it in writing; today we have it in our NT. Today the Spirit “guides God’s people into all truth” through the Scriptures; be it spoken or written. The Spirit’s principle work is to “glorify Christ” – by this we can test all teaching and preaching. The Spirit gives understanding to those things that belong to Christ and the Father – the Spirit doesn’t go about teaching His own ideas.
The Application – As believers, we must consciously rely upon the Holy Spirit to teach us the truth. This isn’t something that we can garner on our own, apart from Him. We are “totally dependent” upon the Spirit of truth to apprehend truth, therefore we must “consciously” be mindful of His importance in ministering truth to our hearts. Remember, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in our hearts with the expressed purpose of guiding and instructing us – consciously affirm that fact. When you are reading & studying Scripture, carry on a “dialogue” with the Holy Spirit – seeking His understanding and will for your life. Never forget, “His work is to conform us to the image of Christ,” and He does that principally through the Scriptures (Jn 17:17; Rom 8:29; 15:16; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Th 5:23; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2).

16:16-22 – Jesus’ Death and Resurrection Foretold. Jesus was soon to leave the eleven disciples. The initial events of the Crucifixion would create despair, but in just three days the disciples would learn of His resurrection. Imagine the emotional roller-coaster they must have experienced – grief to inexplicable joy! Jesus told them He was leaving them. . . but after “a little while” He would see them again. The disciples were confused and perplexed by what Jesus was telling them. They couldn’t reconcile these two statements. “Truly, truly,” Jesus said to them, “You will weep and lament, and the world will rejoice. . . but your sorrow will be turned to joy!” Strangely enough, we have the same problem today – we do not know whether Jesus was referring to the “three days” He spent in the tomb, or the more than 1900 years prior to His Coming again. We must express ignorance as to the time indicated by the Lord’s words. Whatever the “time lapse,” the result is “incredible joy!” As believers we joyfully look for His return.

16:23-33 – Praying to the Father in “Jesus Name” – Up to this point, the disciples had come to the Lord with all their questions and requests. . . “in that day” (Pentecost) Jesus would no longer be with them bodily, so instead they would take their requests “to the Father,” and He would grant them for Jesus sake. Note that the requests are not granted for “our sake” – no, they are granted for “Jesus’ sake.” Remember, prior to this they had never prayed to God the Father in the Lord’s name. The meaning of much of the Lord’s teaching was not always apparent on the surface. He used parables and figurative language. Even in this chapter we cannot be absolutely certain as to the precise meaning. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the teaching becomes more plain – in Acts and the Epistles the truth is no longer revealed through parables but through direct statements.

“In that day,” we will simply take our petitions directly to the Father in “Jesus’ Name.” When we pray, we should “pray with confidence in God’s love for us” because we have placed our faith in His Son. Jesus once again told them He was leaving them to return to the Father (v. 28). At this point His disciples felt like Jesus was now speaking more clearly, and not using figures of speech (v.29); they felt like they were now able to understand Him for the first time. And they believed more fully in Him. Yet Jesus suggested that their belief was still imperfect (v. 31). In a short while, Jesus would be arrested, tried, and crucified. The disciples would all forsake Him and flee to their homes. But Jesus would not be deserted because the Father would be with Him. It was this union with God the Father that the disciples did not understand. According to verse 33, the purpose of this discourse with the disciples, was that they might have “peace.” When they would be hated, pursued, persecuted, falsely condemned, and even tortured, they could have “peace” in Him. Jesus overcame the world at the cross. In spite of their tribulations, they could rest assured that they were on the winning side. Also, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, they would have new powers of endurance and new courage to face the foe.
**The Application** – Praying in “Jesus’ Name” means praying according to God’s will, not our own. Perhaps the major battle for us as Christians is “dying to self” and our own interests. By the way, it is natural for the flesh to stubbornly embrace its own interests, and it will never surrender allegiance to itself – so the battle is a lifelong battle. None of us gets an exemption in this regard. The big thing for us as believers is “our commitment to the lordship of Christ” – is He indeed our “Master”? or is the “Old Me” still on the throne? The “Old Me” will wants the throne badly – make no mistake about it – but it can only take control when we relinquish in our hearts. So, the Christian “life” is primarily “cultivating a heart after God”— this requires stubborn tenacity and commitment in exercising the “spiritual disciplines” of the Christian life – prayer, scripture, meditation, worship, fellowship, and service. Without a commitment to these disciplines, we simply will not “grow” in our faith. When we confidently apprehend that “God truly loves us” – that must be affirmed DAILY – we will pursue Him above all else, and “His peace” will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 4:6-7).

**17:1-19 – Jesus Prays for “His Disciples.”** We now come to what is known as the “High-Priestly Prayer of the Lord Jesus.” In this prayer, “He made intercession for His own.” It is a picture of Jesus’ present ministry in heaven at the right hand of the Father making intercession for His people. You’ll notice Jesus doesn’t say one word against His people; there’s not a single reference to their failings/shortcomings. He speaks of them only as if they were living in accord with the Father’s purpose. All the Lord’s particular petitions for His people relate to “spiritual things” – all have reference to “heavenly blessings.” The Lord does not ask riches for them, or honors, or worldly influence, but He does most earnestly pray that they be “kept from evil… separated from the world… qualified for duty… and brought home safely to heaven.”

Jesus, lifted His eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee” (v. 1). Though His enemies had repeatedly tried to “capture Jesus,” they were simply unable to do so “because His hour had not yet come.” Regardless of how badly man wants to control his world, “nothing ever happens outside the will of God.” He is on the throne. Period. End of discussion. But now the time had finally arrived for Christ to go to the cross – and in doing so the Father would be “glorifying His Son,” by raising Him from the dead, and crowning Him with glory and honor (Phil 2:9-11). Then, in turn, Jesus would “glorify the Father” by living a sinless life, humbling Himself to the point of death on a cross, and giving eternal life to those who believe on Him (v. 4). It brings great glory to God when ungodly men and women are converted and manifest the life of the Lord Jesus on this earth. As a result of the work of the cross, God has given His Son authority over all mankind – even the authority to give “eternal life” to those whom the Father had given Him. Here again we are reminded that before the foundation of the world, God had marked out certain ones as “belonging to Christ!” Think of it – God accepts “reprobate sinners” into the glory of heaven because of His Son! And we are able to enter into His presence because we have been made “perfectly holy!” That is incredibly glorious! How can it be!? The blood of Christ! There is no despicable sinner who cannot be saved by trusting in the Savior.

Next, Jesus prays to His Father, “Glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was” (v. 5). This clearly teaches the “pre-existence” of Christ. Jesus goes on to say that “He had manifested the Father’s Name to the disciples;” that is, He fully declared the Father’s true nature. And in spite of all their failures, Jesus says, “they have kept Your Word” – thus He credits them with having believed and obeyed His teaching. Isn’t it incredible that Jesus doesn’t utter the slightest allusion “against His people!” – as to what they had done or were about to do!
The Savior had perfectly represented His Father – He came to this world in complete obedience to His Father’s plan and will. He was the perfect Servant.

**Jesus then goes on to “Pray for His Disciples”** – He was representing “His own” before the throne of God. He had prayed for the “world” on the cross – “Father forgive them” – but not at this point. In these verses, Jesus declares to the Father regarding His poor feeble flock – “I am glorified in them” (v. 10). Jesus now prays as though He’s already returned to heaven – “Father, keep them in Thy Name, that they may be one” (v. 11). Here Jesus gives primacy to the “unity of Christian character” – as the Father and Son are One in moral likeness, so believers should be united in this respect; they need to reflect the character and likeness of Christ. While Jesus was with them, He kept them in the Father’s Name – “None of them is lost” (except the son of perdition – meaning Judas was consigned to eternal damnation; he chose to betray the Savior and in so doing the Scripture was fulfilled – Psalm 41:9).

**Jesus prayed aloud to the Father in the presence of His disciples**, that they might understand that He was there to promote their welfare, that they might be made in large measure partakers of His joy. The Lord gave them God’s Word, and they received it. As a result, the world turned on them and despised them because they had the characteristics of the Lord Jesus; they know longer fit in with the world’s ideals (v. 14). Jesus didn’t pray that the Father take them home to heaven immediately, but that He keep them from the evil one – He didn’t pray for our escape, but for our preservation. Christians are not of the world, just as Jesus was not of the world. We should remember this when we’re tempted to engage in some worldly behavior. Thus Jesus asked the Father to “sanctify us in the truth.” The idea behind this word is to “set us apart” – set apart from the world, unto God for a holy way of life. The “Word of God” has a sanctifying effect on believers – as we read and obey it, we are set apart as vessels suitable for the Master’s use. The Father sent the Lord Jesus into the world to reveal the character of God to men. Jesus realized His disciples would now need to carry on that witness, through the power of the Holy Spirit – that is the believer’s primary responsibility in this world: it is for this reason that Jesus “sent them into the world” (v. 18). The Lord “set Himself apart” for the work His Father sent Him to do, and consecrated Himself to aid our growth in godliness (v. 19).

**The Application** – The Lord’s “High-Priestly Prayer” should bring great assurance and comfort to the believer regarding his standing before the Lord. Furthermore, it is quite instructional as well. Jesus prayed not that we taken out of this world, but that we be “kept from evil / the evil one” (vv. 11-15), that God keep us separated from the world. The comfort here is twofold: First, we know that it is the “will of God” that evil not have dominion over us; and second, that God Himself is at work insuring that it doesn’t happen. If Jesus prayed that prayer for you and me, we can be confident that God is taking steps to keep us safe from evil! **God is at work in you** (cf. Rom 8:27-31; Phil 1:6; 2:13; Eph 1:5; 3:20; 1 Cor 15:10; Heb 13:21; Jude 1:24) – that truth needs to be affirmed over and over again throughout your entire life, because Satan will surely tempt you to believe He is not! Jesus didn’t go to the cross to only “partially do the work that is needed to make us pure and blameless before the Father” (cf. Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 1:6). This wonderful truth was articulated out loud before His disciples, that they might be assured in their hearts that the burden of being made “perfect in holiness,” ultimately, rested with God, not us. By the way Jesus is still making intercession for us at the right hand of the Father! (Rm 8:27,34; Heb 7:25). A part of the “sanctifying process” is the work of “Scripture” in our lives – God exhorts us to listen to, and read and study and meditate upon His Word, because that is the primary means through which the Holy Spirit transforms our lives (cf. 1 Pet 1:23; 2:2; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 2:12-13). As believers we’re
responsible to cooperate with the work of God in us by “believing and obeying;” but ultimately it is God Himself who “effectuates the growth” (1 Cor 3:6). Knowing this brings “fullness of joy!” (17:13).

17:20-26 – Jesus Prays for “All Believers.” Now the High Priest extends His prayer beyond the disciples by praying for generations of believers yet unborn. So, Jesus prayed for you and me over 1900 years ago! The prayer was for “unity among believers,” with the salvation of sinners in view. It was a unity based on common moral likeness. Jesus prayed that we might “be one” in exhibiting the character of God and Christ. This would cause the world to “see Christ in us,” just as the Father was seen in Christ (v. 21). Jesus then looks forward to the time when all saints will receive their “glorious bodies” – which is the glory of the resurrection. At that time, the world will realize the vital unity between the Father & the Son, and the Son and His people, and will believe (too late) that Jesus was indeed “the sent One” from God. The world will not only realize that Jesus was God the Son, but it will also know that believers were loved by God just as Christ was loved by God (v. 23).

The Son desires to have His people with Him in glory. To die is to go to be with Christ and to “behold the glory” He acquired as Savior and Redeemer (cf. Phil 2:9-11); this glory is a proof that God loved Christ before the foundation of the world. The world failed to see God revealed in Jesus; but a few disciples did, and they believed that God had sent Jesus. The Lord Jesus had revealed the Father to them – His words and works were the words and works of the Father. They saw in Christ a perfect expression of the Father (Heb 1:2-3; 2 Cor 4:4; Jn 1:14). Jesus has continued to declare the Father’s Name through the ministry of the Holy Spirit – especially through the Word of God. When men accept the testimony of Christ, they become special objects of the Father’s love. Since the Lord Jesus indwells all believers, the Father can look upon them and treat them as He does His only Son. The theologian, F. L. Godet, said: “What God desired in sending His Son here to this world was to form for Himself in the midst of humanity a family of children like Him.” It is because the Lord Jesus is in the believer that God the Father can love him as He loves His Son – such is God’s incredible love for us!

The Application – God desires that there be “unity among believers,” for the expressed purpose of being an effective witness to the world. Remember Jesus words in chp 13 – “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another” (v. 35). If we do not “love one another,” there will be “no unity” within our ranks, and our testimony will contradict our claim. Let’s remind ourselves of what love looks like – it is patient, kind, not jealous, not arrogant, doesn’t act unbecoming, doesn’t seek its own will, is not provoked; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (cf. 1 Cor 13:4-7). Imagine what a kind, accepting, supportive, encouraging, never condemning, patient, unselfish, others-oriented lifestyle might look like – who wouldn’t want to be a part of that kind of a “loving community”? If you were an unbeliever and you observed the warmth of a genuine “loving community” atmosphere – what would your response be? Who wouldn’t want to be a part of an “inclusive community”? Since we all want to be a part of a supportive, accepting, loving community, wouldn’t that make our testimony all the more effective? Is your life a contributor to such an ideal, or a detractor? What intentional ways do you contribute to making a loving community? What steps might you take to help build such community? (Study Eph 4:1-3; 4:11-16; Col 3:14; Jn 17:23).

18:1-11 – Judas Betrays Jesus. The words of Chp 13-17 took place in the “Upper Room” in Jerusalem. After this discourse with His disciples, Jesus and the eleven exited the city gates and walked eastward down into the Garden of Gethsemane, which was located in the Kidron valley between the city and the Mount of Olives. Judas knew that Jesus often prayed in the garden, so that is the location to which he led
the temple guards (v. 3). The Lord immediately addressed the soldiers as they came into the garden saying, “Whom do you seek?” When they said, “Jesus the Nazarene,” Jesus responded, “I am” – for whatever reason that revelation was so overpowering that the temple guards “drew back and fell to the ground.” When they arose, they repeated their question. . . again Jesus responded, “I told you that I am – therefore since you seek Me, let these [disciples] go their way” (v. 8). Jesus asked that they be excluded that the words He spoke might be fulfilled – “Of those whom Thou hast given Me I lost not one” (cf. Jn 17:12).

Simon Peter thought the time had come to use “violence” in an effort to save his Master from the crowd, so he drew his sword and struck the high priest’s servant – undoubtedly he intended to kill him, but an “Unseen Hand” caused only his right ear to be cut off. Jesus rebuked Peter and said, “Shall I not drink the cup [of suffering] the Father has given Me to drink?” The Gospel of Luke tells us that the Lord touched and healed Malchus’ ear at that point (Lk 22:51).

The Application – Admittedly, Peter’s act of resistance was a rash yet brave act – what else could we have expected from him? Hadn’t he promised to follow Jesus even to the death? (cf. Jn 13:37). Peter, like many of us, was an emotional man who often acted on impulse. How he “felt” seemed to steer his ship. Those of us who more strongly identify with Peter, often “act without thinking” – we mean well, but we over-estimate our abilities. We would like to think we’re better than we are; perhaps by boldly stepping out in some way, we think that will make a person of stronger faith. . . but we quickly learn, we still have a long way to go in our spiritual development – we want to be “powerhouses for God,” but we don’t have the capacity within us to be what we desire (cf. Mt 26:41; Rom 7:18). Peter actually failed twice in the garden – first, he fell asleep when he was supposed to be praying (cf. Mt 26:36-45); and then he thought he could overcome the opposition with the sword (Jn 18:10). A third failure was just around the corner; that very night he would deny he even knew Jesus three times! (Jn 18:17, 25-27).

Why did Peter overestimate himself? Why do we? Why do we become overconfident in our abilities? Are we actually so foolish as to think we’re actually spiritually superior to others? Is spiritual pride our problem? Why are we so slow to learn? Why do we think we’re better than we are? Why are we prone to think too highly of ourselves? These are just a few questions we might reflect upon to help shed some light on our true level of spirituality (Study Jer 10:23; Jer 17:9; Mt 7:1-5; Mt 23:11; Rom 12:3).

18:12-24 – Jesus before the Priests. Jesus was bound and taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was the “high priest” that year. So Jesus was first put on trial before the Jews in an attempt to prove Him guilty of blasphemy and heresy – hence, this was the religious trial. After this initial trial, Jesus was then taken before the Roman authorities where they would attempt to prove that Jesus was an enemy of Caesar – this was the civil trial. Since the Jews were under Roman rule, they had to work through the Roman courts. For instance, they could not carry out the death penalty – this had to be done by Pilate. Incidentally, Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people (Jn 11:50). The “High Priest” was the accredited guardian of the nation’s soul – he had been set apart to be the supreme interpreter and representative of the Most High. To him was committed the glorious privilege of entering once every year into the holy of holies. Yet this was the man who condemned the Son of God to death. How dark is the soul of man? Except God open a man’s eyes to see, he will not see, regardless of his position or intelligence.

Most Bible scholars believe the “other disciple” mentioned in verse 15 was the “apostle John;” humility prevented him from mentioning his own name, especially in view of Peter’s shameful failure. He wasn’t about to upstage his friend Peter in any way. John was obviously known by the high priest, and that gained him admittance into the courtyard (v. 15). Peter was not able to get in until John went
out and spoke to the woman who was the doorkeeper (v. 16). By the way, it seems significant that

**Peter’s first denial was not before a powerful, terrifying soldier** – this individual was but a simple

servant girl who kept the door. Peter now mingled with the enemies of his Lord and tried to conceal

his identify, even warming himself at their fire (v. 18).

The high priest [most likely Annas] then asked Jesus about His disciples & His teachings. Jesus

responded that His ministry had been carried on openly, and that He had nothing to hide. He had regu-

larly taught in the presence of the Jews, both in synagogues and in the Temple. There was no secrecy.

So Jesus responded, **“Why do you question Me?”** (v. 21). Jesus’ challenge obviously irritated the Jews,

who really didn’t have a case against Him, so they resorted to **physical abuse** – one of the officers

slapped Jesus for questioning the high priest like that. With perfect poise and unanswerable logic,

the Savior showed the unfairness of their position. They could not accuse Him of speaking evil, yet

they struck Him for telling the truth. John’s gospel describes the questioning before Annas – the trial

before Caiaphas is not described by him; it fits in between verses 24-28. The application for this

section is included in the following section.

18:25-27 – Peter’s Second and Third Denials. In the cold of the early morning hours, Peter warmed

himself by the fire. Undoubtedly his clothing and accent indicated that he was a “Galilean fisherman.”

One standing with him asked if he was a disciple of Jesus – he denied it. Peter followed the crowd . . .

in the darkness and among Jesus’ enemies, his courage faded. Peter had the courage for an impulsive act,

but as the darkness deepened and pressed in around him, that courage drained away. Soon after, a relative

of Malchus spoke to Peter – he had seen Peter cut off his relative’s ear: “Didn’t I see you in the garden

with Jesus?” For the third time Peter denied the Lord. . . this time he cursed angrily in denying Christ (cf.

Mt 26:74). . . and **immediately a cock crowed**. We learn in the other gospels that Peter at that point went

out and wept bitterly. I find it significant that John didn’t expand upon his friend’s denial and pain. John

must have hurt too deeply for him.

**The Application** – When we find ourselves on the **“enemy’s turf,”** that’s when we discover how

much spiritual depth we really have. As Peter demonstrated, when darkness deepens and presses us on

all sides, our courage often fades away. However, when we’re on our **“own turf,”** we seem to be fine–

but is that really the case? For example, when we’re not being tempted, and life is going well, we

might be prone to think that everything’s fine – no problems – we might even be pleased with our-

selves. But when temptation comes, however, we may suddenly feel like we’re a spiritual wreck.

Why is that? Because we’re really not as **“mature”** as we would like to think we are – good times are

deceiving, and bad times are revealing. Many of us are in the **“early stages”** of spiritual growth –

we’re not as advanced as we’d like to think we are – the fact is there’s a lot of treacherous territory

ahead of us that we’re still going to need to traverse, and **“humility” & “trust”** are the two necessary

requisites for successful advancement (cf. Jam 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5-10; Phil 2:5-8). Don’t let **“failure”** discourage

you. . . it happens to all of us. God uses it to humble us that He might give us the **“grace”** we need

to grow. Spirituality is **“all”** about grace – it’s not a self-help program. Study grace – it will greatly

encourage you in your walk.

18:28-40 – Jesus before Pilate. Once the religious trial ended, Jesus was taken to the **Practorium,** the

palace of Roman Governor, Pilate. The Jewish leaders didn’t enter the palace because they would have

been defiled, and thus prevented from eating the Passover. The irony of it all, if one can call it that, is that

they were **fearful of being defiled** by a Gentile palace, but they weren’t fearful of being defiled by the
blood of an innocent brother – apparently, “social infection” was feared more than “murdering someone.” It has been well stated: “Nothing is more common that for persons overzealous about rituals to be remiss about morals.” Pilate went out to where the Jewish leadership congregated, and inquired as to the nature of the accusation they were bringing against Jesus. They responded that Jesus was simply an “evildoer.” Pilate tried to evade responsibility and throw everything back on the Jews saying, “You go ahead and judge Him yourselves according to your law.” The Jews then said that they didn’t have the authority under Roman civil law to “put Jesus to death,” which was their desire (v. 31). Incidentally, this was all a fulfillment of prophecy – Jesus had predicted that He would be delivered up to the Gentiles to be killed (Mt 20:19); furthermore, in a number of other places He said He would be “lifted up,” which referred to death by crucifixion (Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32,34; see also Ps 22:16). The Jews used stoning in cases of capital punishment; whereas the Romans used crucifixion.

Pilate then took Jesus into the Praetorium for a private interview and asked Him point blank, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus, in effect, said, “Has it ever been reported to you that I proclaimed Myself a King who would undermine Caesar’s empire?” Furthermore, “Is this a charge have personal knowledge of, or is this something you have heard these Jews saying?” (v. 34). Pilate wasn’t a Jew. All he knew was that the “local Jews” had issues with this Man who stood before him. Jesus went ahead and confessed that “He was a King,” but not the kind of king the Jews accused Him of being; if He were, “His servants would be fighting against His being held captive by the Jews” – so Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. . . for this I was born. . . to bear witness to the truth” (v. 36). Everyone who loves the truth hears His voice, and that is how His kingdom grows. Pilate responded, “What is truth?” It is difficult to know if he was he puzzled, sarcastic, or genuinely interested. Without further comment, Pilate goes out to the Jews and says, “I find no guilt in Him” (v. 38). Nevertheless, Pilate did the “expedient thing” and chose to compromise his conscience – since it was the custom among the Jews at the Passover to request the release of some Jewish prisoner from the Romans, Pilate seized upon this custom in an effort to please the Jews and at the same time save Jesus. The scheme failed – the Jews didn’t want Jesus, they wanted to release a thief named Barabbas; thus revealing the darkness of their hearts – they preferred a bandit to a Man of absolute purity.

The Application – Isn’t it amazing how our peers opinions impact us – oftentimes it causes many to capitulate and compromise. As men & women of the gospel, we need to men and women of integrity, not compromise. The pressure will be there to cave-in, but we must stand firm and fight the good fight.

19:1-16 – Pilate’s Verdict: Innocent but Condemned. Obviously, it was unjust for Pilate to scourge an innocent Person. Scourging was a Roman form of punishment, where the individual was beaten with a whip that had pieces of metal or bone in it, and these cut deep gashes in the flesh. Perhaps Pilate scourged Jesus in hopes that this punishment would satisfy the Jews and that they would not demand His death. The soldiers also mocked Jesus and put a “crown of thorns” on His head – this would have caused extreme pain as it was pressed onto His brow. Incidentally, thorns are a symbol of the curse which sin brought upon mankind. So here we have a picture of the Lord Jesus bearing the curse of our sins, so that we might wear a crown of glory. The “purple robe” was also used in mockery – purple was the color of royalty. Again it reminds us of how our sins were placed on Jesus in order that we might be clothed with the robe of His righteousness. How incredible it is to think of the eternal Son of God being slapped by the hands of His creatures! Pilate then went out again to the crowd and announced that he was bringing Jesus out to them, but he wanted to know that “he found no guilt in Him” – yet he would not let Him go – thus Pilate
condemned himself by his own words. He had confessed with his own lips that Jesus had done no wrong, yet he did not have the moral courage to let Him go because he feared the Jews.

As Jesus came out with the crown of thorns and purple robe, Pilate announced Him as “the Man” (v. 5). The chief priests noticed that Pilate was wavering, so they cried out fiercely, “Crucify Him!” So it was clearly the religious leaders who were insisting upon the death of the Savior. Pilate seemed to be disgusted with them and their unreasonable hatred of Jesus, so he said to them, “If that is the way you feel, why don’t you take Him and crucify Him? As far as I am concerned, He is innocent!” Because they had failed to prove that Jesus was a threat to Caesar’s government, they brought forth their religious charge against Him – Jesus had claimed equality with God by saying that He was the Son of God – this was “blasphemy” and should be punished by death (v. 7). When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more troubled – so he took Jesus into the Praetorium or judgment hall and asked Him, “Where do You come from?” At this point, Jesus simply remained silent. Pilate tried to force Jesus to answer by reminding Him that he had the power to release or crucify Him (v. 10). Jesus responded quietly that whatever power Pilate possessed had been given to him by God – all governments are ordained by God, and all authority, whether civil or spiritual, is from God. Jesus then said, “The one who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin” (v. 11) – the thought is that the Jews should have known better; they had the Scriptures which predicted the coming of the Messiah; they should have recognized Him when He came. This verse teaches us that there are degrees of guilt – Pilate was guilty, but Caiaphas, and Judas, and all the wicked Jews were more guilty.

Just as Pilate became determined to “release Jesus,” the Jews used their last and most telling argument – “If you let this Man go, you are no friend of Caesar” (v. 12). “Caesar” was the official title of the Roman Emperor. The irony in this argument was that the Jews “hated Caesar!” Ultimately, they reaped the punishment of this terrible hypocrisy when the Romans marched into Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and utterly destroyed the city and slaughtered its inhabitants. Since Pilate could not afford to have the Jews accuse him of disloyalty to Caesar, he weakly submitted to the cries of the mob. Therefore at sunrise the next morning (6 am), the day following the Preparation Day of the Passover, Pilate presented Jesus to the Jewish mob saying, “Behold your King!” (v.14). Almost certainly, Pilate said this to annoy & provoke the Jews. He doubtless blamed them for trapping him into condemning Jesus. So Pilate taunted them with the question, “You mean you want to crucify your own King?” The Jews then stooped even lower saying, “We have no king but Caesar!” Here they were – refusing the God of all creation for a wicked, heathen monarch! Pilate was willing to please the Jews, so he turned Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified. He loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

The Application – Pilate confessed with his own lips that Jesus had done no wrong, yet he did not have the “moral courage” to let Him go because he feared the Jews. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where fear strongly tempts us to cave in morally – perhaps there’s an area in your life where your “moral courage” is being severely tested. By dwelling on the “waves of circumstances” we increase the likelihood of caving in morally – our “focus” is the key – we must intentionally focus on Christ the moment temptation raises its head, or we’ll cave in to it (cf. Gen 3:6). Pilate didn’t have the Spirit of Christ within Him to encourage a realignment of his thoughts; therefore he caved in to the pressure. Most people are aware of what is “morally right and wrong” – without the presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life, however, the likelihood of doing the “expedient thing” is greatly increased. The big questions are these: Do we desire the praise of men more than the praise of God? Do we value the approval of others more than the approval of God? Do the ramifications of obedience cost
us too much, therefore we cave in to the pressure? God is looking for men and women who will
“stand in the gap” for Him and do His bidding (cf. Is 6:8; Ezek 22:30) – by the way, it will cost you (cf. Lk 14:28).

19:17-30 – The Crucifixion. The Roman cross was of such a size a man could normally carry it, though it wouldn’t be easy. Jesus carried His cross for some distance, then it was given to a man named Simon of Cyrene to carry (Mt 27:32). Apparently Jesus struggled trying to carry it, because He had already been severely beaten. The procession went to the outskirts of town to a place called the “Place of the Skull” (Golgotha in Hebrew) where criminals were executed. The Lord Jesus was then nailed to a cross, hands and feet. Then the cross was lifted up and dropped into a hole in the ground. Two thieves were crucified with Him – one of either side; thus the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Is 53:12). It was the custom of Rome to put a “title” above the head of the crucified, and to indicate the crime. Pilate ordered that the title “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” be placed above Him (v. 19). Obviously, the chief priests didn’t like the wording – they wanted it to read as a “claim” made by Jesus, not as a “fact” (which it was) – Pilate became impatient with the Jews and refused to change it. He should have shown that kind of determination earlier. At such executions, the soldier were allowed to share the personal effects of those who died – there was a “fifth article” that couldn’t be divided up, so they “cast lots for the tunic” – little did they know they were fulfilling a remarkable prophecy written a thousand years earlier (cf. Ps 22:18). Such fulfilled prophecies remind us afresh that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and that Jesus Christ is indeed the promised Messiah.

There were three or four women standing by the cross, including “Jesus’ mother” (v. 25). Seeing His mother and John (the disciple whom Jesus loved) standing with her, Jesus introduced “John” to her as the one who would hereafter take the place of son to her – Jesus here instructed John to care for Mary as if she were his own mother. John obeyed and took Mary to his own household. Between verses 27 and 28, we probably have the “three hours of darkness” that took place from noon to 3 pm (Mt 27:45). It was during this time that Jesus was forsaken by God as He suffered the penalty of our sins. His cry, “I thirst!” indicated real, physical thirst, which was intensified by Crucifixion – this phrase should also remind us of His spiritual thirst for the salvation of the souls of men. The soldiers probably dipped a sponge in sour wine and affixed it to a branch of hyssop, and pressed it up to His mouth for Him to drink. Jesus then uttered the words “It is finished!” The work His Father had given Him to do was now complete… the pouring out of His soul as an offering for sin was done… the work of redemption and atonement was finished – His death, burial and resurrection were as certain as if they had already been accomplished. That Jesus gave up His spirit emphasizes the fact that His death was voluntary – He dismissed His own spirit (v. 30).

The Application – The work of the cross “finished the work of salvation.” There is no additional work that must be done whereby we are saved. All our sins are forgiven – past, present, and future. We must simply “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31). That’s why salvation is by “grace.” There is “nothing we can do” to add to the work that Christ did on the cross – nothing! Just believe!

19:31-37 – Piercing of the Savior’s Side. Look how scrupulous these religious Jews were concerning the details of Jesus’ murder. They thought it would be improper to allow the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath (Saturday), so they requested Pilate to have the legs of the three broken to hasten death. Death by crucifixion was a painful process of raising oneself up to breathe, and then having to let oneself down so as not to feel so much pain – ultimately, they would “break the legs” of those being crucified, so that they could not raise themselves up to breathe; as such, they would suffocate and die more quickly.
When they came to break Jesus’ legs, they discovered that He was already dead (v. 33); but in order to be sure He was dead they “pierced his side” – since blood and water came forth, they knew that Jesus was already dead, because only blood would have flowed from a living body (no water). Some take it that Jesus died of a ruptured heart. Now these things happened that Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not a bone of Him shall be broken” (cf. Ex 12:46) – that verse refers to the “Passover Lamb” – God’s decree was that the bones were to be maintained unbroken. Christ was the true Passover Lamb, fulfilling the type with great exactness. Although the soldier did not realize it, his action was another wonderful fulfillment of Scripture – “They shall look on Him whom they pierced” (Jn 19:37; Zech 12:10). Zechariah’s prophecy refers to a future day when believing Jews will see the Lord coming back to earth, and “they will look on Him whom they pierced.” They will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son.

The Application – In every case of crucifixion where bodies have been unearthed, archaeologists discovered that the legs of these individuals had been broken – yet that was not the case with Jesus. Incredibly enough, it was prophesied that Jesus that “not a bone of Him shall be broken!” Isn’t it amazing how God superintended these events in such a way that not a bone of His was broken? The entire process of redemption was carried out exactly according to God’s predetermined plan. God oversaw every detail of the sacrifice of His Son, so much so that the “Lamb of God” would be a “perfect sacrifice” in accord with Scripture (cf. Jn 1:29). Should we be surprised that our God does everything perfectly? No! Because He is absolutely Sovereign! (Cf. 1 Tim 6:15). Such is our God – perfect in every way! And then to think that “He loves us!” Again, we’re reminded of the hymn, “Amazing love! How can it be that Thou My God shouldst die for me?” Amen?

19:38-42 – The Burial in Joseph’s Tomb. Until now, Joseph of Arimathea had been a secret believer. Fear of the Jews had kept him from confession Christ openly. Now he boldly stepped forward to claim the body of Jesus for burial. In doing this, he exposed himself to excommunication, persecution, and violence. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews (cf. Jn 3:1), joins Joseph in claiming the body of Jesus – he brought with him a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes. As was Jewish custom, these spices were spread on the body before it was bound with strips of linen. Almost every detail in this passage was a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah had predicted that men would plan to bury the Messiah with the wicked, but that He would be with the rich in His death (cf. Is 53:9). A new tomb in a garden would obviously belong to a rich man – Matthews gospel tells us that it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Mt 27:57-61). It was all a part of God’s plan that the body of Jesus should be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (cf. Mt 12:40). In that connection, it should be noted that in Jewish reckoning, any part of a day was counted as a day. Therefore if Jesus was in the tomb for a part of three days, that was still a fulfillment of His prediction.

The Application – Joseph and Nicodemus finally made their faith “public,” by coming forth to claim and bury the body of Jesus. They had grown in their faith to the point where nothing would now stop them from identifying with the Savior – not excommunication or persecution. That’s the work of God in transforming the heart of His children. Perhaps you have been a “secret Christian,” and the Lord is now calling you at this moment to step forward and publicly identify with Him. Don’t let the fear of this world hold you back – by faith move forward on your spiritual journey.

20:1-10 – The Empty Tomb. On the first day of the week (Sunday), Mary Magdalene went to the tomb before dawn. When she got there she found the stone that sealed the tomb had already been removed. Obviously this took place after Christ’s resurrection (cf. Matt 28). Mary immediately ran to Peter and John
and announced that someone had removed the Lord’s body out of the tomb. It is difficult to imagine what went on in Peter’s and John’s minds at that point, but they immediately ran to the tomb – John arrived first and when he looked into the tomb “he saw the linen cloths lying there” (v. 5). Peter arrived just moments later and actually went into the tomb without hesitating (John had simply looked into it) – there is something about Peter’s impulsive manner that makes us feel a kinship to him. The orderly and unhurried manner in which the burial cloths were arranged suggested that the body had not been stolen – too much care had been exercised. John then entered the tomb as well, and when he also took note of the orderly arrangement, “he believed” – before Him were the evidences of Christ’s resurrection (v. 8). Up until this point the disciples did not understand that the Messiah must rise again from the dead – though the Lord told them repeatedly, they simply did not take it in. John was the first to understand. Following this incident, Peter and John returned to their homes.

The Application – Committed believers often “confer with one another” when confronted with issues they don’t fully understand. Such was the case with Mary and Peter and John. There are no lone rangers in the Christian community. Confide in others who are spiritually mature.

20:11-18 – The Appearance of Mary Magdalene. Mary had also returned to the tomb site to keep a lonely vigil outside the tomb; she was weeping because she thought the body had been stolen, probably by the Lord’s enemies. Mary, “who love much because she had been forgiven much” (cf. Lk 7:47), looked inside the tomb and saw two angels there – and they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” Mary responded, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (v. 13). At this point she looked back and saw someone else standing there – it was Jesus Himself but she did not recognize Him – and He likewise said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are your seeking?” She thought He was the gardener, and asked Him where He had laid Jesus’ body. At this point Jesus said to her, “Mary!” – and immediately she responded, “Rabboni!” (Teacher / v. 16). She did not realize that Jesus was more than her Teacher – He was her Lord and Savior. So the Lord prepared to explain to her the newer and fuller way in which she would hereafter know Him. Mary had known Jesus personally as a Man – she had seen Him perform miracles in his fleshly body. At the point the Lord sought to correct her thinking, “Do not cling to Me simply as a Man in the flesh – I have not yet ascended to My Father.” In effect Jesus was saying, “When I do return to heaven, the Holy Spirit will be sent down to the earth – when He comes, He will reveal Me to your heart in a way you have never known Me. I will be nearer and dearer to you than was possible during My physical presence here on earth.” Then He told Mary to go to “My brethren” and tell them of the new order that has been ushered in – they were to know that His Father was also “their Father,” and His God was “their God” (v. 17). Notice He didn’t say “our Father” – the Son’s relationship with His Father is different than ours – Jesus is equal with the Father; we are “sons of God” by adoption. Our relationship begins when we are eternally saved at conversion. Mary obeyed her commission – in all likelihood, this great privilege was given to her as a reward for her devotion?

The Application – The Savior of the world is always very near to us, yet we often don’t recognize Him. He usually comes in lowly guise, not as some high exalted One. When we find ourselves in a wilderness of confusion, we need to “affirm God’s presence” with us (cf. Mt 28:20; Heb 13:5; Phil 4:11). The wonderful truth is we are never alone – God is always present. Our problem is just like Mary’s, we like tangible evidence of God’s presence; but God dwells within us through the Holy Spirit – as believers we must grow in our understanding and confidence of His presence in our lives (cf. Jn 14:16-27; 16:7, 13). We will do that when our “concern for Jesus” becomes like Mary’s. Follow the admonition of Peter, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).
20:19-29 – Jesus among His Disciples. It was now Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together, perhaps in the Upper Room where they had met three nights ago. The doors were locked for fear of the Jews, and suddenly Jesus stood in their midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Obviously, they had just witnessed another miracle – though His resurrection body was a real body of flesh and bones, it didn’t have the physical limitations ours do – it could act independently of natural laws. Jesus’ words to them now took on new meaning, because Christ made peace possible by the blood of the cross. Those who are justified by faith have “peace with God” – we are no longer are we estranged from Him (Rom 5:1); we are no longer at war or at enmity with Him (Rom 8:7); we are now “forever one with Him” (cf. Jn 17:22; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28). The cross absolves us of all guilt; as such, the Holy Spirit makes us a “brand new creature in Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

After announcing peace to them, He showed them “the marks of His passion,” by which peace had been obtained. They beheld the nail prints in His hands, and the wound in His side caused by the spear. It’s difficult to imagine the thoughts that raced through their minds – it was almost impossible for them to take it all in. “Joy filled their hearts to realize it was truly the Lord Jesus.” He had done as He said He would – He had risen from the dead – as such, He is the Christian’s source of joy! (v. 20). Jesus then said to them, “Peace be with you; as the Father as sent Me, I also send you” (v. 21). Jesus was sending His disciples “into the world,” just like He had been sent into the world – that’s the arena in which we are called to serve. Jesus then breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (22). This statement has puzzled theologians, because the Holy Spirit wasn’t given to them until the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-4). Since the Holy Spirit could not come in His fullness until Jesus was glorified and back in heaven (cf. Jn 7:39), this reception of the Holy Spirit somehow differed from the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. The “context” of this reception immediately follows their “commissioning” to “go into the world and make disciples of all nations” (cf. Mt 28:19-20). Since one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to open the hearts of people to understand and receive the gospel (cf. Acts 16:14; Lk 24:45; Jn 16:8-13; 1 Thess 1:5), it would be necessary to have the power of the Holy Spirit upon them as they proclaimed the gospel to the world (cf. Acts 1:8). Though this happened at Pentecost, some sort of “prelude” to that event occurred here in John 20.

Another difficult verse follows which says, “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven; and if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained” (v. 23). Since “only God” can forgive sins (cf. Lk 5:21), the most common way to interpret this verse seems unacceptable. Therefore, either the disciples were given the capacity to “announce the terms” upon which one’s sins might be forgiven – or the disciples were given the right to “declare sins forgiven;” i.e., when someone would believe in the gospel, they could tell those individuals that their sins indeed had been forgiven; and those who refuse to repent and believe are told that they are still in their sins. It should be noted that the disciples were given special authority by the Lord in dealing with certain sins (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 5:3-5, 12-13; 2 Cor 2:4-8).

For some reason, Thomas was not present at this gathering when Jesus suddenly appeared; since no reason is given, we shouldn’t jump to conclusions (24). When the other disciples reported to Thomas what had happened, he said he needed to see Jesus with his own eyes; otherwise he would not believe. It was simply too great a concept for him to believe, simply based on someone else’s word. He would need to examine Jesus’ hands and side to be absolutely sure. Eight days later the disciples were gathered together again, and this time Thomas was with them – and Jesus again suddenly appeared before them and said, “Peace be with you.” Isn’t it amazing how much Jesus wanted His disciples to
be completely at peace?  He didn’t want them to be anxious and worried (cf. Phil 4:6-7). He wanted them to truly have His joy in them (cf. Jn 15:11; 17:13; 1 Jn 1:4). The Lord then dealt gently and patiently with Thomas – He invited him to prove the reality of His resurrection by putting his hand into the spear wound in His side. Thomas was fully convinced that Jesus was risen, and that He was both “Lord” and “God” – as one put it, “He acknowledged the divinity he did not see by the wounds he did see.” Though Thomas’ faith was not the kind that was the most pleasing to the Lord, because it was based on sight – Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (v. 29). God calls us to believe the “evidence of Scripture” (God’s Word) – the Holy Spirit conveys its truths to our hearts, and we honor God by believing it – affirming the truths of Scripture is critical for growing spiritually. When we demand additional evidence, we actually dishonor Him. By the way, it is important to notice that Jesus accepted worship as God (v. 28).

The Application – As believers, we are justified by faith have “peace with God” – therefore we are no longer estranged from Him (Rom 5:1); we are no longer His enemies or at war with Him (Rom 8:7). The word peace means “joining together that which has been separated.” We are now “united to Christ” – He is not against us, He is for us (cf. Rom 8:31). Sometimes we may “feel” like God has abandoned them when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances; but that is not the case – the trials of life are agency through which we are built up in our faith (cf. Rom 5:3-5; Jam 1:2-4). Twice in this passage, Jesus says, “Peace be with you” – He wants us to continually know His peace and joy. It’s when we take our eyes off of Him, that we lose our peace and joy – therefore, our greatest ongoing battle is to “keep our eyes on Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith” (cf. Heb 12:2). The temptation will be there to continually “take our eyes off of Him!” This must be resisted! We must be intentional with our thinking! You can’t just let your thoughts wander! (cf. 2 Cor 10:5).

More Application – Notice how the Lord dealt with “doubting Thomas” – He gently and patiently restored Thomas’ faith. That’s the same way He deals with us (cf. Mt 11:28-30). It’s Satan who beats us up. Do you see Jesus as a hard Taskmaster or a loving Savior? If you somehow “feel” as though the “Lord really doesn’t ove you,” you will live a terribly frustrated life. The most important truth you must affirm is the fact that “God really loves you” – no other single fact is more important that this!! “Amazing Love! How can it be that Thou My God shouldst die for me?”

More Application – Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (v. 29). Scripture tells us in this life, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). That means we must be men and women of Scripture – not merely hearers of it, but doers (cf. Jam 1:22). It is through Scripture that our faith grows (cf. Rom 10:17), and that we grow spiritually (cf. 1 Pet 2:2). It is “natural” to respond as Thomas did – demanding to see before he would believe – but God now indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit, for the expressed purpose of leading us into the truth (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:2;6; 16:13; 17:17). Give primacy to the Word of God in all of life – read it, study it, meditate on it, practice it, obey it, love it! If you think “mere mental ascent to the truth” is all that is needed, you’re in for some very dark seasons of life, where you’ll “feel like you’re completely alone!” Draw near to God! (cf. Jam 4:8).

20:30-31 – The Purpose of John’s Gospel. It is important to note that not all the miracles performed by Jesus are recorded in John’s Gospel. The Holy Spirit led John to select those signs which would best serve His purpose. Here in the last two verses of chapter 20 we have John’s object in writing the book – it was written that his readers “may believe that Jesus is the true Messiah and the Son of God.” So John’s gospel was written to convince his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah who fulfilled God’s
promises to Israel. Jesus is the Son of God, God in the flesh. By believing these things we have eternal life in His Name (cf. Jn 1:12).

**The Application** – The question is this, “Do you believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ?” That Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, and that by grace He shed His blood for your sins? If so, the power that raised Christ from the dead, that same resurrection power dwells within you to give you everlasting life.

21:1-14 – Jesus Appears to His Disciples in Galilee. The scene now changes to the “Sea of Tiberias” (Galilee). The disciples had journeyed north to their homes in Galilee. The Lord Jesus met them there. John goes on to describe how Jesus revealed Himself to them. Seven of the disciples were together at the time – Peter, Thomas, Nathanel, James and John, and two others whose names are not mentioned. Simon Peter decided to go fishing on the lake – the others agreed to go with him. That night they caught nothing. As they rowed toward shore early that morning, Jesus was waiting for them (but they didn’t recognize Him for some reason). Jesus said to them, “Young men, have you anything to eat?” Disappointedly they answered, “No.” As far as they knew, He was just a stranger walking along the shore. Then Jesus told them to “Cast the net on the other side of the boat, and you will find a catch” (v. 7). They did, and lo and behold, they caught a great load of fish – so many that they could not pull in the net! At that point John recognized that it was “Jesus!” and promptly told Peter. This story illustrates the uselessness of human efforts apart from divine help, especially in the matter of fishing for souls. It also teaches us that when the Lord directs our service, there are no more empty nets. He knows where there are souls ready to be saved, and He is willing to direct us to them, if we will let Him.

**Peter immediately jumped into the sea and swam ashore.** The other disciples came in a small row boat to assist in bring the large catch of fish to shore – they all worked at dragging the net full of fish some 300 feet to land. When they arrived on shore, the Savior already had breakfast ready – broiled fish & bread. He then instructed them to pull in the net with the fish – the catch totaled 153 large fish. The meaning behind the “number of fish” – perhaps it represented the number of languages, races, and tribes in the world at that time, toward which the gospel net would be spread out. The fishermen knew that it was remarkable that the net had not broken (v. 11). Apparently the disciples felt a strange sense of awe and solemnity in the presence of the Lord as they ate – there were many questions they would like to have asked Him, but they did not dare. They knew it was the Lord, even though they felt a certain sense of mystery about His person. Jesus then served breakfast to His disciples. This was the “third appearance” of Jesus to His disciples mentioned by John in his gospel (v. 14).

**The Application** – Jesus calls us to be “fishers of men” – the primary work to which Jesus calls us is a spiritual one, not a physical one (cf. Mt 4:19; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 5:18, 20). As stated in the commentary above, this story illustrates the “uselessness of human efforts” apart from divine help, especially in the matter of fishing for souls – though we are not passive in winning souls, God is the One who actually does the work of salvation in the heart of the individual. Our responsibility as Christians to simply to “obey” – “we plant and water [as God directs], but God gives the increase” (cf. 1 Cor 3:6). This passage also teaches us that when the Lord directs our service, God fills the nets according to His sovereign will. He knows where and when harvesting needs to be done, and He will direct us, if we are willing to let Him do so.

21:15-17 – The Restoration & Commissioning of Peter. The Lord Jesus now turned to Peter, specifically, not only to confirm his restoration, but to “commission him” for the future. Peter had publicly denied
the Lord three times – since then, he had repented and had been restored to fellowship with the Lord. In these verses, Peter’s restoration is publicly acknowledged by the Lord. Three times the Lord questions him before his friends – First He says, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” You may recall Peter’s words, “Even though others may fall away because of You, I will never fall away” (Mt 26:33). Peter responded to Jesus, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love You” – Peter would no longer boast that he would never forsake the Lord, even if all the other disciples did (cf. Rom 7:18); He had learned his lesson. Jesus then told Peter to “Tend my lambs” – a very practical way of demonstrating love for Christ is by feeding the young ones in His flock. It is interesting to note that the conversation had changed from fishing to shepherding – from evangelism to teaching and pastoral care.

**A second time Jesus asks Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”** (v. 16). Peter replied the second time, “You know that I love You.” This time Jesus said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” The sheep of Christ’s flock need the loving care of one who loves the Shepherd – we cannot effectively care for the sheep if we do not really love Christ. Just as Peter had denied the Lord three times, so he was given three opportunities to confess Him. This time Peter appealed to the fact that Jesus was God and therefore knew all things – “You know that I know that I love You” (v. 17). For the last time, Jesus told him that he could demonstrate this by “Tending My sheep.” In this passage, the underlying lesson is that “love for Christ is only acceptable motive for serving Him.”

**The Application** – Just as Peter would no longer boast that he would never forsake the Lord, even so you and I must refrain from uttering such declarations – it is not within us to “do as we please” (cf. Rom 7:18); the heart of man is deceitful above all things (cf. Jer 17:9). We don’t stand in our own strength; it is only by the “grace of God” that stand. Our focus must never be upon “us” – it must always be upon “Christ” (cf. Heb 12:2). We simply don’t have it within us be the kind of people we want to be! Simply look to Christ and obey Him – and when you stumble (and you will), look to Him again and confess your sins, get up again and move on (obey Him). As long as you “look at you/yourself,” you will envision yourself on a “performance track” – your “behavior” will become your focus – when that happens you will not only fail, “you will fail miserably and feel miserable” (and rightly so). The Christian life is not a matter of feeling good about you! It’s about feeling good about Jesus! Hence, only when you focus on Christ and loving Christ, will you be an effective, fruitful servant of Christ!

**21:18-23 – Our Times are in His Hand.** When Peter was younger, he had great freedom of movement. He went where he wished. The Lord here told him that at the end of his life, he would be arrested, bound, and carried off to execution – *Peter would glorify God by dying as a martyr* (v. 19). He who had denied the Lord would be given courage to lay down his life for Him. This verse reminds us that we can glorify God in death as well as in life. Then Jesus exclaimed to him, “Follow Me!” Apparently, they were walking when Jesus said this, and at that point Peter turned around and saw John following them – John here only identifies himself as “the disciples whom Jesus loved.” As Peter saw his friend John, the thought crossed his mind, “What about John?” Is he going to die as a martyr too? Or will he still be alive when the Lord comes back again? He asked the Lord concerning John’s future. **The Lord’s answer was that Peter should not be concerned about John’s latter days.** Even if he were to survive until the Second Coming of Christ, this should not make any difference to Peter. Many failures in Christian service/ministry arise from disciples’ being more occupied with one another than with the Lord Himself. It is interesting to note that Jesus’ words were “quickly misunderstood” by the Christian community in that day. It is also interesting to note that John was given the privilege to write the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” – the end times.
The Application – It is important to note that “our times” as well are in God’s hands. As the psalmist said, “In Thy book were written all the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (cf. Ps 139:16). Our commission – like Peter’s & John’s and everyone else’s – is that we simply “Follow Christ!” No two of us is given identically the same commission – to focus on the commission that others have is simply a waste of time and energy, and doesn’t serve any worthwhile good. Even worse, it can cause us to become envious of others. The “comparison game” is a dangerous game! Don’t play it! You and I don’t have the kind of wisdom needed to draw right conclusions. Let God be God – you simply obey Him. Rejoice in God’s call upon your life, and the privilege He has given you to serve Him in whatever capacity that may be. If that is not your focus, eventually, you will become very discouraged. Here’s a summation of this message – Joyfully follow God’s plan for your life!

21:24-25 – John’s Closing Witness to Jesus. In closing his witness, John added a word of personal testimony to the accuracy of the things which he had written. Jesus is God and is therefore infinite. As such, there is no limit to the meaning of His words or to the number of His works. While He was here on earth, He was still the Sustainer of all things! (cf. Col 1:15-17). Who could ever describe all that is involved in keeping the universe in motion? Even in His miracles on earth, we have only the barest description. In a simple act of healing, think of the nerves, muscles, blood corpuscles, and other things that He controlled. Think of His direction of germs, fishes, animal life. Think of His guidance in the affairs of men. Think of His control over the atomic structure of every bit of matter in the universe. Could the world possibly contain the books to describe such infinite details? The answer is an unequivocal “NO!”

The Application – Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift – the Lord Jesus Christ! (2 Cor 9:15). For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things – to Him be the glory forever! (Rom 11:36).