



THE GOSPEL OF
JOHN

SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

PART 2
JOHN 10:1-21:25

John

John 10:1-21:25

Anchor Church | Spring 2019

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Introduction

We don't have to wonder why John wrote his gospel. He explicitly tells us, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-21). Jesus' identity is of utmost importance, for John's message, and the hope for humanity, stands on it.

As is true of anything we read, we must understand the author's assumptions about the world and the way it works. John's world is defined by the Old Testament Scriptures. These tell us the story of how a world that was created good was broken. They tell us why we long for justice and goodness while simultaneously putting our needs above the needs of others, contributing to the injustices we see all around us. They tell us of a good God who has provided all we need and of how we have doubted and rejected him. They tell us why death looms over all of us. But they also tell us of a promised hope for deliverance. This promise is progressively developed in the Old Testament through statements of God's intentions (like those found in Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 53, and Jeremiah 31:31-34) and through repeated symbols and patterns (like the temple, the feasts, the Davidic King, or the Exodus). This promised hope for deliverance centers on a coming Messiah (or Christ) who will rule forevermore with righteousness and justice. He will triumph over sin and death.

But the history of Israel gives little hope for a Messiah who can live up to the billing. The greatest heroes are broken just like us. It is very easy to read the Old Testament and come away feeling despair. What man could ever undo the tangled knot of sin in his own life, much less that of the world? This is why the identity of Jesus is so important.

John begins his gospel by stating, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). John is showing how Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin and death put forth in the Old Testament and experienced by us today. He is no ordinary man. He has eternally existed with God the Father. As John states, in the beginning Jesus was both with God, and he was God. This is mind-boggling to our finite minds, and yet as the gospel unfolds and helps us to understand the Old Testament promises, we see that it must be true (see, for example, John 3:1-15). Creation was made through him, and yet he humbles himself and takes on flesh to dwell among his people. He came to live the righteous life we couldn't, to die in our place for our sins, and to give us new life through belief in his name.

John shows us that God has revealed his glory to the world through his son Jesus. He is the fulfillment of God's promises, and God is saving a people for himself through his life, death, and resurrection.

Week 1

John 10:1-42 – The Good Shepherd

By Harvey Edwards IV

Introduction

Gerald Borchert, author of *The New American Commentary: John 1-11*, recounts two experiences that helped him understand the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. First, he witnessed a shepherd leading his sheep through the City of Jerusalem, singing to his sheep as they followed along despite the nearby traffic. The second was that of four Bedouin shepherds who had combined their flocks in a single sheepfold for the night. In the morning, each of the shepherds began to sing and call to their sheep. The sheep all separated, each moving towards the sound of his shepherd, knowing that he would lead them to sustenance.

When I read about this, I could not help but see the simple trust the sheep have developed in their shepherd. They know that each morning he provides for them, so when they hear his voice they follow him, trusting that he is good. In this passage, Jesus likens himself to a shepherd and us to sheep. The question we are presented with is this: Do I trust Jesus like the sheep trust their shepherd? Do I hear his voice and follow him, knowing he is the source of life?

Read John 10:1-42 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Jesus' teaching indicated that the good shepherd has rivals for the attention of the sheep. What might the thieves and robbers represent in this passage?
 2. What does it mean to hear the voice of the good shepherd, Jesus?
 3. What does it mean to follow him? What does it look like in everyday life? What does a life of following Jesus result in?
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Commentary

10:1-21 – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”* ⁶ *This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

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

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

This story comes on the tail of the healing of the blind man in chapter 9. The Jews bring the man before the Pharisees to give an account of his healing. When he will not back down from the idea that Jesus, the one who healed him, is from God, they cast him out. In response, Jesus reveals his identity to the healed man. That the healed man has been treated poorly by the Pharisees introduces Jesus' teaching on how differently robbers, hired hands, and good shepherds treat a flock of sheep.

In order to better understand this teaching, it is necessary to know something of the shepherding process at this time. A shepherd spent lots of time with his sheep. He would protect them and lead them to food and water. And as he led them, he would talk and sing to them and they would learn the sound of his voice. When they were in the countryside, there would often be low-walled corrals with a narrow opening in front that the shepherd or a watchman would often sleep across, forming a gate for the sheep. When shepherds came near a town, there were communal corrals. These would often have a professional gatekeeper. When a shepherd came, the gatekeeper would recognize him and he would be allowed into the corral to tend his sheep. When it was time to leave, the shepherd would begin to call his sheep. Those that belonged to the shepherd would know the voice of the one who consistently led them to food and water, and they would respond by following him. Those who did not belong to him would not know his voice and would not follow. They would remain in the corral.

Jesus begins by differentiating between a robber and the shepherd of the sheep. The thief enters by a way other than the door, but the shepherd is given access to the sheep by the gatekeeper. When the true shepherd calls out to his sheep, those who belong to him will follow him. When a stranger calls to them, they will flee from him. Jesus is making a statement about those who see the true identity of Jesus that the Jews do not understand—those who belong to him know him and will follow him.

In his grace, Jesus continues on. He is the good shepherd and the door to the sheep. All those who enter through him are saved and will find pasture. But there are those who seek to harm the sheep. Thieves come to steal, kill, and destroy. In stark contrast, Jesus comes to give abundant life to his sheep. He is the good shepherd who not only cares for his sheep when it is convenient for him, but lays down his life to care for his sheep. He is not like a hired hand who cares nothing for the sheep and leaves when difficulties and dangers arise. Instead, he loves his sheep and is willing to lay his life down for them. It is through his love that his sheep know him. Jesus knows his sheep and his sheep know him, just as Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows him.

In verses 1-5, Jesus calls out to the sheep in a sheepfold and those who are his respond to him. This would appear to be the Jews who believe. In verse 16, Jesus says that there are other sheep that are not of this fold, but that he is going to bring those as well and they will listen to his voice. In so doing, there will be one flock and one shepherd. This second group would be the Gentiles, completing the promise of Genesis 12. Jesus comes through Abraham (the father of the nation of Israel), but he brings the blessing to the nations. He has laid down his life for all, Jew and Gentile, that any who hear his voice might have life. This laying down of his life is done of his own free will. Jesus is God, the one with the authority to give his life and the one with the authority to take it back up again (something that clearly speaks of his divinity). He does so according to the will of the Father.

This claim of authority and oneness of purpose with the Father creates division among the Jews. Many aren't quite sure what to make of Jesus. Some claim that he is a demon while others see the power he has demonstrated by opening the blind man's eyes that could only come from

God. Jesus is speaking, but many do not recognize his voice. This begs us to ask ourselves the question, “Do I hear his voice? Do I follow the good shepherd? Do I belong to Jesus?”

10:22-42 – *At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.³⁰ I and the Father are one.”*

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

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

The Feast of Dedication celebrated the rejection of false rulers, particularly Antiochus IV who desecrated the temple, and the victory of Israel over the Syrians in 164 B.C. under Judas Maccabeus. At this time, the temple was reconsecrated. This overthrow of the Syrians stoked messianic expectations for Israel. With this in mind, the desire for Jesus to tell them plainly if he is the Christ, or Messiah, is understandable. They want to know if he is restoring Israel to prominence. Their thought is that this is going to come with an uprising against the Romans. To participate would risk their lives. But Jesus tells them he has already answered them with his words and with the works done in his Father’s name. If they had known him, they would have already heard his voice and followed him. If they had known him, they would know that they were already secure because the Father who has given those who belong to him to the Son.

This angers the Jews and they pick up stones to stone him. Jesus’ continued claims to be one with the Father force a decision upon people. You cannot be intellectually honest and be ambivalent to the claims of Jesus. Jesus asks for which one of the good works (that are obviously the works of the Father because of their power) are they going to stone him? They reply that it is not his works that have angered them, but his claim to be God. Jesus quotes from the Old Testament (which the Jews recognize as the word of God) from Psalm 82:6 where the word ‘god’ is legitimately used to refer to someone other than God. Jesus’ intent in verse 36 is not to diminish his identity as God the Son or the profound oneness between him and the Father, but rather to cause them to more carefully evaluate what the Old Testament says. Were they to correctly understand the Scriptures they would see that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The works done by Jesus demonstrate that the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father.

At this point, they seek to arrest him, but Jesus escapes. He returns to the place that John the Baptist was baptizing. There people recount the testimony of John, see that it is true, and believe in Jesus.

The Main Point

Jesus’ self-identification as the Good Shepherd expands his claim of unity with the Father and demonstrates the trust that exists in those who recognize that Jesus is the Christ. Do we know him? Do we trust the one who laid down his life for us?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 23

Psalm 82

Matthew 18:10-14

John 5

John 9

Week 2

John 11:1-57 – Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life

By Brandon Wingler

Introduction

One of my favorite movies is “Signs,” a thriller from 2002 about aliens invading the earth making crop circles in a family’s backyard and terrorizing them. Now you might be wondering, what in the world does a movie about aliens have to do with John 11? In the movie, a former priest, Graham Hess, loses his faith in God. His wife dies in a car wreck, leading him to wrestle with unbelief, doubt, and disappointment. During one intense scene, he has a conversation with his brother, Merrill, about faith. Graham says that there are two types of people in the world. Those in the first group believe that everything happens for a reason and that someone out there is watching over us and taking care of us. Those in the second group believe everything that happens is governed by random chance and coincidence. Graham’s continued wrestling with doubt and unbelief eventually leads to a desperate call out to God to save his son from a poisonous asthma attack. By the end of the movie, his faith in God is restored and strengthened.

Think about your own life. Have you ever felt disappointed in God or felt like he was not there? Have situations in your life, such as the death of a loved one, caused you to question God’s power and love in your life? Maybe these situations have even caused you to doubt God exists at all. In this chapter, John shows us the most incredible miracle and sign of Jesus’ ministry so far: Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, calling him out of the darkness of death and into the light of life. In this passage, Jesus tells us he is the resurrection and the life. He confronts doubt and conquers death. This last powerful sign before the crucifixion and resurrection is displayed, “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Read John 11:1-57 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Have you ever had a season of time in your life where God’s action in your life seemed distant or even nonexistent? How can we live in faith and trust during difficult seasons of life?
 2. How should the truth that Jesus is the resurrection and the life shape our lives here and now?
 3. How should we respond to the loss of a loved one in our life or a friend’s life?
 4. What does this passage say about the nature of faith and belief? How has your faith grown or changed over the past year?
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Commentary

11:1-6 – *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*

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

John begins this chapter by introducing us to Lazarus, a man who is ill, and his sisters, Mary and Martha. From the start, we know that Jesus loves this family and that Lazarus is deathly sick. But Jesus says, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (v.4). With a follow-up statement like that, it seems like everything will be fine. And it will be. But things will certainly seem to be a lot worse before we get to the end.

After Jesus’ statement, John reminds us again in verse 5 that Jesus loves Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. But immediately after this, the illustration we’re shown doesn’t seem anything like love as many of us picture it. The next verse says Jesus loved this family, so he did not rush to them and heal Lazarus. Jesus loves Lazarus, yet he is going to let him die. How can this be love? What John is about to show us is astounding.

As he is setting the scene, John is stressing three themes—death, love, and glory. Death swallows up Lazarus. Jesus loves this family. And Jesus, by letting Lazarus die, will somehow use the situation to bring glory to himself and to God. How will all of this connect together? Part of the answer has already been put on display. In chapter 9, while the disciples and other Jews were so caught up with whether the blind man’s sins or his parents’ sins caused his blindness, Jesus responds to their concerns, saying they have it all wrong: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (9:3). Suffering is not always a result of sin. Sometimes hard and painful things are allowed to happen to demonstrate greater things. This is exactly what will happen with Lazarus’ death and resurrection.

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

In chapter 10, we saw Jesus nearly get stoned by the Jews in Judea. Understandably, his disciples are concerned that Jesus wants to go back to Judea. When Jesus responds to their concerns, he questions them, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world” (v. 9). Jesus is reminding the disciples that he is “the light of the world” (John 8:12) and that they will not stumble if they will walk with him and look to him. Here Jesus also warns them that “If anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him” (v. 10). If we don’t walk with Jesus and set our eyes on him, we will surely stumble and wander in darkness. We should ask ourselves often, “Am I living in light of who Jesus says he is and who he calls me to be?”

After this, Jesus tells his disciples that Lazarus has “fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” (v. 11). John is giving us a double meaning here. In the Old Testament, when someone fell “asleep,” it was often a euphemism for death. But to be clear, “Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died” (v. 14). Interestingly, Jesus says he is happy that he wasn’t there to save Lazarus, so that the disciples would believe in him. This passage might be uncomfortable by this point for many readers. Jesus did not immediately go to Lazarus and now he is telling his disciples that he is glad he didn’t go and heal Lazarus immediately. All of this is at odds with what we normally think of when we think of love. But what Jesus shows us in the rest of this passage is remarkable.

Jesus says that he is glad he did not show up to heal Lazarus immediately, so that the disciples and others may believe in him. This statement alludes to John's purpose in writing this gospel and one of the central themes of this chapter—"so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Jesus allowed Lazarus to die so that, by raising him back to life, the glory of God would be on full display. He did this with specific, purposeful timing, and he did this so that they would believe in him. God works through suffering, pain, and evil to ultimately work for our good and to bring himself glory. He does this so that we may believe in him and come to have life in him, through Jesus. And that is love, even if we have a difficult time wrapping our minds around that truth.

11:17-44 – *Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.* ¹⁸ *Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,* ¹⁹ *and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.* ²⁰ *So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.* ²¹ *Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* ²² *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."* ²³ *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."* ²⁴ *Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."* ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,* ²⁶ *and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* ²⁷ *She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."*

²⁸ *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."* ²⁹ *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.* ³⁰ *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.* ³¹ *When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.* ³² *Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* ³³ *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* ³⁴ *And he said, "Where have you laid him?"* They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ *Jesus wept.* ³⁶ *So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"* ³⁷ *But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"*

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

When Jesus finally arrives near Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days. This is significant because there was a belief amongst some Jews that the soul hovered near the body for three days. But the three days have now passed, and by this time, any superstitious Jews amongst this crowd have lost all hope that Lazarus will live again. Death has won and it stings.

We might be led to think that this death is not all that bad, especially since Jesus is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. But this was real and it was painful. Lazarus died. His sisters watched him die. They buried him. They wondered where Jesus was and why he did not show up. This was real death and real loss. And Jesus really didn't show up to save Lazarus.

Jesus' decision to not show up leads to many questions and seemingly no answers. Martha and Mary both tell Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21, 32), and some of the Jews among them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37). These people are hurting and they're questioning Jesus' love for them. They're calling out to him, saying, "Jesus, if you had come sooner, my brother would not be dead! Where were you, Jesus? We needed you!" They are devastated, losing hope, and doubting Jesus' love for them. Are you in a similar situation right now?

When Jesus responds to Martha, he assures her, "Your brother will rise again" (v. 23). Upon hearing this, Martha's thoughts fast-forward to the end of time, when the redeemed will be resurrected. But Jesus is speaking beyond just the resurrection of believers at the end of time. Jesus' response powerfully captures what he wants Martha and all of us to know: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Martha's response seems sincere. "Yes, I believe in you Lord and I believe in who you say you are." But did she really? As we see in verse 39, Martha still has her doubts. To be clear, Martha's faith is real and she does believe Jesus is who he says he is. However, her faith, just like ours, is incomplete. She doesn't fully realize that Jesus, the same man who healed the blind man, has authority over death and can heal a dead man. Just like Martha, our faith will be stretched and filled, but through the doubt and the uncertainty, we should press into the eternal and everlasting hope that only Jesus can provide.

Mary runs to Jesus and, in her brokenness, falls to his feet and cries, wondering where he was and why he didn't save her brother. Jesus' reaction is one of strong emotion. Verse 38 says, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled." Why exactly was Jesus deeply moved and greatly troubled? Many commentators have arrived at different interpretations of this passage. Some have contested that Jesus is angry at death and the pain it causes. Others emphasize that Jesus was upset at the insufficient faith of Mary, Martha, and the rest of the Jews. And some commentators stress the humanity of Jesus in this passage as he displays emotions of intense sorrow and grief. I think it is possible that all of these factors are present to some degree. I think part of what John wants us to see in this passage is that Jesus is saddened and perhaps even upset that Mary, Martha, and the rest of the Jews do not yet grasp that he is the perfect, holy, all-powerful Son of God, capable of healing the blind, curing the sick, and even raising a dead man back to life. Jesus loves them and he wants them to experience life and fullness, which can only be experienced through faith in him.

Jesus responds once more to Martha's doubt when he tells her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (v. 40). And here we reach the climax of this story. Jesus is about to put on full display his power and authority over death and bring glory to himself and God, so that they might believe in him and experience life. Jesus calls out to Lazarus, "come out!" And when Jesus speaks, even death bows down and obeys. Remember that four days have passed. Many Jews believe that Lazarus' soul has departed from him for good. So when Jesus finally raises Lazarus from the dead, his miraculous work is magnified. Jesus commands that Lazarus also be loosed from the rags of death that had bound him. Jesus calls us out of the darkness of death to walk with him in the newness of life. And as we will see in chapter 20, Jesus will also be raised from death, proving completely and miraculously that death has no hold over him because he is the resurrection and the life.

In this incredible passage, John shows us that Jesus is king over death. He speaks life into our broken lives. He raises us from our state of spiritual death and he will one day raise us from a state of physical death. Lazarus' death and resurrection serves as a preview for our resurrection. And when the trumpet sounds, all who believe in him will be raised from death into life. As we wait on that glorious day, we cling to the hope that we find in Jesus Christ and we sing,

*"Death is swallowed up in victory."
"O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"
(1 Corinthians 15:54-55)*

11:45-57 – *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him,* ⁴⁶ *but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.* ⁴⁷ *So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs."* ⁴⁸ *If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."* ⁴⁹ *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all."* ⁵⁰ *Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."* ⁵¹ *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,* ⁵² *and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.* ⁵³ *So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.*

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

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

After such an incredible display of God’s glory, it is no surprise that many Jews believed in Jesus. This event will be the last straw for the Pharisees, though. They gather the council, which is the Sanhedrin, a type of Supreme Court for the Jewish people. The Pharisees are threatened by his power and they fear they will lose their power and status if they continue to let him go on performing miracles and gathering more followers. Even more so, if Jesus continues to gain more followers, the threat of a Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire could come to pass, leading to the destruction of Israel. That’s the argument the Pharisees and chief priests give to the Council.

The high priest that year, Caiaphas, offered his suggestion: Arrest Jesus, kill him, and sacrifice him in our place. We kill him and the Romans won’t kill us. For Caiaphas and the rest of the Council, the “ends justify the means.” They made plans to kill Jesus and gave orders that anyone with knowledge of Jesus’ whereabouts should let them know. So Jesus no longer traveled out in the open but remained with his disciples. As all of this is going on, Passover was right around the corner.

It is important to remember the symbolism of Passover. For the Jews, Passover included the sacrifice of a lamb in place for the nation and their deliverance from slavery and oppression in Egypt. This chapter finishes before the arrival of Jesus at Passover, suspending the story of John’s gospel with a feeling of tension and uncertainty. But as we look back on this story, we can know and behold that Jesus was and is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Believe in Jesus, walk in the light of his truth, be delivered from the slavery to and the oppression of sin and death, and enter into life with him.

The Main Point

Jesus does not just bring resurrection or bring life. He is the resurrection and the life. He is Lord over everything, including death. Those who believe in him will have eternal life. Will we believe in Jesus, even when all hope seems lost?

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Isaiah 25

Romans 5-6

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 John 1:1-2:6

Week 3

John 12:1-50 – A New Kind of King

By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

I love Tuscaloosa! I love my house where my family and I live. We have worked hard to make it our own place. New paint. New floor. New lights. New patio covering. Lots of new things. But all of the investments we have made in our house are not what makes this house our home. What makes our house our home are the conversations that are shared with family and friends over the meals my wife cooks. What makes our house our home are the hide-and-seek games we play with kids, the sliding across the wood floors in our sock feet, and the bedtime reading and prayers with our kids. The time, energy, and love invested within these four walls are what make a house a home.

In light of eternity and as one who follows Christ, this world is not my home. I know what you're probably thinking. "Aaron, that was a hard, left-hand turn! We were feeling all cozy and warm, with a tear in our eye, and then you jerk us back to reality. What gives?" Forgive me for putting you through that, but if we are not intentional in our daily lives we forget our purpose. We forget that we are not here to build beautiful homes and invest large amounts of money making sure that we are comfortable until we pass. We are here to declare the glory of God to a broken and hopeless world. Sure, we can have those things. However, how are we investing our relationships and our resources into his kingdom? "This world is not my home" is really easy to say. It's more difficult to live daily.

In John 12 we see how some of the authorities in Jerusalem believed in Jesus, but were not vocal about it because they desired the glory from man more than the glory that comes from God. They were so focused on the comforts this world could offer that they did not stop to realize that this world was not their home. How about us?

Read John 12:1-50 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. How do you typically share your faith with others?
2. What does it look like to live with eternity in mind? Specifics are preferred here.
3. What does it look like for us to live like this world is not our home?

Commentary

12:1-8 – *Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³ Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."*

This is a very interesting scene. The time of the event is six days before the Passover. This means that it is, more than likely, on a Saturday evening. According to Jewish tradition, each day started at sunset, or around 6:00 p.m. We can assume it is evening because Martha is up preparing a meal. She would not be doing this if it were still within the Sabbath hours. So it is possibly later on in the day on Saturday, the week before Jesus is going to be crucified. The scene is Jesus and his disciples, along with Martha, Mary, and the newly resurrected Lazarus all in the same house eating a meal and enjoying each other's company. Can you imagine the excitement, the joy, and maybe even a bit of anxious buzz going around? Just a few days prior (John 11), Lazarus was dead and lying in a tomb. Now, because of who Jesus is and what he does, Lazarus is alive and well. So much so, that Lazarus is eating a meal with the group. Do not miss this. A man brought from death to life is now eating a meal with the God-man that is also known as the Resurrection and the Life. How could they keep that quiet?

Then Mary proceeds to come in and anoint the feet of Jesus with a very expensive perfume and wipe his feet with her hair. Some commentators say that this could have been her dowry intended for marriage. This could have been something that had been passed down to her through her family, or maybe she had purchased it early in life and was saving it for a very special purpose. We aren't certain why she has the perfume, but we are certain what she does with it. She anoints the Savior's feet. In that day, touching someone's feet was reserved for slave work. The feet were seen as dirty, both literally and ceremonially. The disciples, not knowing what to say or do, sit and observe. No one except Jesus really understands what has just taken place. He understands that he is about to give his life as a ransom for many. Then someone does speak up. Judas Iscariot makes a comment about the cost of such an ointment and then chastises her for possibly wasting it on Jesus instead of giving the money to the poor. I love how John (the writer) follows Judas' comment. In verse 6, John points out to us that Judas was a thief and it was common knowledge at that time that he would help himself to the funds within the money bag.

When Judas makes his comment about selling the ointment and giving the proceeds to the poor, Jesus responds with what might be misunderstood as a negative statement toward the poor and needy. However, when taking into consideration all that Jesus taught, he is talking specifically about his death. He says that the poor will always be around, meaning that the disciples will always need to be working to care for those less fortunate. He is attempting to, once again, focus their gaze on what is about to take place. He will not be around much longer. What were they going to do when he returns to heaven to be with the Father? I love how Matthew and Mark end their accounts of this scene. Matthew 26:13 and Mark 14:9 say that wherever the gospel is preached, what Mary did will be told along with it. Here we are today, about 2000 years later, and we are still talking about this special event.

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

Let's be honest here...How many of us, after hearing that a man had been in the grave four days, was raised from the dead, and was now at someone's house eating a meal, would not immediately head over to see this oddity? At the very least we would be checking Facebook for live videos or our Instagram feed. We are curious creatures. We long to be amazed and have a desire to know that there are some things in this world we cannot explain. Where do you think that desire came from? God. He created us for worship and relationship with him. It is no wonder that we often find ourselves studying both the vastness of the universe and the intricacies of things at a molecular level. We want to find out why we are here, and we want to find our purpose. When the people of that day hear that Lazarus is alive again, they do what we would do. They go to check it out for themselves.

Because of the interest of the people, the chief priests begin discussions on how they will not only put an end to Jesus, but also Lazarus. Why? Why are they not be happy for and excited about a man coming back to life and being restored to his family? It's written in plain text. They want to kill Lazarus because now that he is alive and well, even more people are beginning to follow Jesus. With Jesus attracting this much more attention, the chief priests are even further down the pecking order. They are not at all happy about this. Their first thought is to kill Jesus and anyone else that might detract from their following.

12:12-19 – ¹² *The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,*

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

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

This is one of those scenes that I would pick to visit if it were possible to time travel. Can you imagine the buzz that is going around? The same guy that brought a man back to life is now coming to your city! That's nuts. Not only that, but there are prophecies you've been told your entire life, that you've told your children, that are coming to fruition in this guy. Could this be the Messiah that would end the tyrannical reign of Rome? Maybe? Hopefully!

As it so often happens, the disciples do not understand what is taking place. They are caught up in the glitz and glam of the pomp and circumstance with Jesus entering the city. Finally, perhaps they are part of the "in crowd." John reminds us that the disciples are clueless to the significance of this event until Jesus is glorified. Only then does it all make sense. How often are we caught up in the moment and forget why we are there in the first place? Let us be mindful of our place and our purpose. We are in our place because of God's purpose in the world. Let us leverage every relationship and every resource for his cause to seek and save the lost.

John 12:20-26 – ²⁰ *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

If there is ever a time in John's gospel where Jesus is perfectly clear on his purpose, this is one of those times. Throughout John's gospel, Jesus has taught that his earthly life is going to be short-lived in the grand scheme. His purpose is to come to this world to fulfill the prophecies and the law, becoming the spotless sin sacrifice that God requires for the redemption of his people. In this momentary meeting with the Greeks, Jesus succinctly summarizes his earthly ministry in verse 24 and then he takes it a step further, applying that purpose to all who would believe. He does not just come in order to be a great teacher and give the world a moral standard to mimic. Jesus comes to die so that we might live. According to what Jesus says to his disciples in this moment, if they want to truly live, they must die as well—figuratively speaking of course. However, most would physically die in the midst of living their lives for Jesus. Jesus' words are still true for us today. If we say that we believe, then our lives should reflect our belief. We believe that we need food and water for life, so we eat and drink. We say that we need money to pay bills, so we work in order to earn our wages and pay our bills. We say that we believe that Jesus came and died so that we might truly live. How do our lives reflect that belief?

John 12:27-36a – ²⁷ *"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*

I do not think it ironic that John records the words of Jesus the way that he does. Look at verse 35 and 36. Does that sound familiar? Flip back to John 1:5. You see it? Jesus is the light of men. Jesus also tells his disciples that if they follow him, he will make them "fishers of men," (Matt. 4:19). Following Jesus means that his beliefs and actions become their beliefs and actions. His words become their words. Here we are 2000 years later, and the same is true for us today. If we follow Jesus, then we will become "[children] of light." He is saying that when he makes us to become the ones that he designed us to be, then his light within us (his Holy Spirit) will "bear much fruit" (12:24) in the way of bringing lost souls to himself.

This is also a perfect opportunity for us to see Jesus' humanity. Let us not forget that Jesus clothed himself in frail humanity not for his sake, but for ours. He does this so that in his humanity, he is able to relate to us and reconcile us to God. In Hebrews 4:15, we see that he is tempted like us in every way, yet he does not sin. We see here that he feels emotion as we feel. His soul is troubled because his earthly life is drawing to a close. He is about to be betrayed by a close friend, wrongfully accused, beaten and bloodied, and ultimately crucified for others. I cannot imagine the level of "troubled" he is referring to, but I can imagine it is something that I never want to experience. Thankfully, God does not want us to experience it. He places that burden on his son Jesus. I pray that we remind ourselves and each other each day that God has done this great thing for us so that we can be called children of the Most High God.

John 12:36b-50 – *When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

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

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

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

⁴¹ *Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. ⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. ⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the*

Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

Once again, John reminds his readers of the prophecies foretold of the one that would come in the name of the Lord. The Prophet Isaiah was given the task of preaching a message of redemption to a people that would not hear or see their need for forgiveness. Anyone want to volunteer for that job? Who would like to be given a task of telling the best message in the world to a people that could not care less? Think about the frustration that Isaiah must have felt. It’s the greatest message in the world, but in that day, for that period, no one seemed to care. Now that these prophecies are being fulfilled, we are told that many authorities are believing in Jesus. However, the sad part is that because that they are afraid of what others might say, they keep quiet about their belief.

In Matthew 13, we read a parable that Jesus teaches on the topic of the gospel message. He tells of a farmer who goes out to plant seeds. As he is scattering the seeds, some fall on fertile soil, some on rocky ground, some fell among thorns and weeds, and some on the walking path. In John 12:41-43, I believe that these authorities are like the seeds that fall among thorns. The gospel message takes root for a moment, but because “they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” they remain quiet. What a waste, right? How could they keep quiet about such a great message?! Here they are finding the true joy and hope that everyone searches for but few find—and they are silent. Sound familiar? Unfortunately, the statistics state that many in our churches today are similar to the authorities in Jesus’ day. We remain quiet. We love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. We may not say it that way, but we desire our comfort, our relationships with our peers more than we desire to carry out the mission of God. We must take seriously the call to make disciples. This begins with evangelism. We must share our faith. After all, for those of us that call ourselves Christians, someone shared their faith with us. Why would we not want to share that same faith with others?

The Main Point

There will be times in our lives when we are confronted with a decision to make. The choice will be whether or not we truly believe what we claim to believe. We must decide if we will follow the true king, or if we will love the glory that comes from man.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Zechariah 9:9

Isaiah 6; 44:18

Matthew 13

Matthew 26:6-13

Mark 14:3-9

Luke 7:36-50

John 11

Week 4

John 13:1-38 – A New Commandment of Love

By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

Maybe after I experienced my first heartbreak as a middle schooler or later on in life, my uncle told me, “Aaron, those that hurt us the most are the ones that are the closest to our hearts.” Man that stings, doesn’t it?! Think about it though. The last time you were truly hurt was more than likely by someone who is close to you. You have shared laughs and tears together. You have shared ups and downs. After all, that is what brought you together. Investing life in one another. Opening ourselves up to others can be a scary thing. I am not specifically talking about dating or married relationships. I am referring to relationships in general. We are not certain as to how that person will respond. Will they accept me for who I am or will they reject me?

In John 13:34, we see why we should pursue meaningful relationships with others. Our love for others, both in word and deed, shows the world that we live by a different code. We are called by a different name. We are to love one another because God first loved us and sent his son to us in order that we could have the opportunity to be redeemed. Jesus is about to finish his earthly ministry with the most selfless act of love anyone could ever perform. Jesus is about to lay down his life for the sins of the world. He is encouraging his disciples to continue this lifestyle of giving their lives away, both figuratively and, for most of them, literally. How will we respond to this challenge 2000 years later?

Read John 13:1-38 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Who do you find it most difficult to love? Is it typically someone with similar or differing interests to you?
 2. What does it mean “to put others’ needs above your own?” How can we do that daily? Specifics are preferred here.
 3. How is God working in your life, shaping your heart to love those that are difficult for you to love? How is he moving you toward them?
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Commentary

13:1-20 – *Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸ Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.” ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ ¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”*

Is there a more memorable moment from the life of Jesus than this scene? The Last Supper has been memorialized in our minds by the great artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci. You’ve probably seen it hundreds of times. Yet, much like the disciples, we have probably missed the point behind one of the greatest acts of service that any person has performed for another. During the meal, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Not only did God take on frail humanity, but even more, he took on the role of a servant and washed the nasty feet of those he came to save. How many of us today are volunteering for this job? Growing up in Walker County, Alabama, this was something we did every fifth Sunday night. In a small cinder block church, the members of Cedrum Grove Free Will Baptist would gather to take communion and wash one another’s feet. The men would be in one room and the women in another room. We would take turns washing one another’s feet. As a child, it was lost on me. Only when I became a teenager did I begin to think through the events of that night as Jesus was preparing to go to the cross. He knelt down to illustrate for them how far he was willing to go in order that they might be redeemed.

The response that comes from Peter might resonate with us at times. I would say that most of us are ready to serve those in need. Any time we hear that there is someone that is going without or is down on their luck, we step right in and give assistance. But when was the last time we let someone else step into our space and serve us? In this situation, Peter does not realize the magnitude of the act of service that Jesus performs for his disciples. Peter, much like us, only sees the act on the surface level. He attempts to keep Jesus from washing his feet, but to no avail. Jesus explains that the one who [has taken a bath] only needs to wash his feet because of the dirt from outside. Then he uses another term for wash, but it does not mean the same thing we think when we think of bathing. Jesus says that all of the disciples have been washed and are clean, except one - Judas. This means that because of their belief in Jesus, they have been cleansed by Jesus. We can assume that Jesus washes Judas’ feet along with the others, because he does not leave the room until Jesus tells him to do so. Can you imagine? Washing the feet of THE guy that is going to lead to your wrongful punishment and death? Once again, we see that Jesus, being God, keeps his Father’s purpose in the front of all things. He does not allow anyone to derail him from his mission.

This act of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples is not a prescriptive principle for us to emulate, but a descriptive principle for us to practice. We are to serve one another in all things. Paul says that we should look to one another as greater than ourselves (Phil 2:4). Jesus says that by acting this way, the world will know that we are his disciples (13:35). By putting others’ needs ahead of our own, we show the world that there is another and better way - the way of Jesus.

John 13:21-30 – *²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do*

quickly.”²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor.³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

John sets the scene for us with the disciples “reclining” at the table. This means that their heads are aimed toward the table and traditionally they would prop on their left arms, leaving their right arm free to eat and drink. Being a Passover meal, they are not seated at a table. If this were a normal, everyday meal they would be seated around a table. The low table would be U-shaped with the servants entering the open end to bring food and drink. The disciples would have been seated on the outside. This scene has always left me with an awkward, uncomfortable feeling. Think about it like this: you’ve been around the same guys for three years. You’ve eaten Passover meals together before. But this one is already a little different, because your Rabbi has just washed your feet and now is saying that one of the crew will betray him. Then you see Peter give John the head nod, and Jesus give some food to Judas. Afterward, Judas leaves quickly and Jesus seems to be bummed. What a weird night, huh?

Then John again uses the light and dark terminology to give us a clue as to the spiritual climate of the moment. “And it was night” lets us know that yes, it was more than likely night time, but more importantly sin was about to be dealt with through one selfless act of God. It would remain “night” until Jesus returns from the grave conquering sin and death.

One part of this scene that has always been difficult to understand is Judas’ actions and the devil’s role in it. Look at verses 26 and 27. Is Judas misguided? Is Judas already part of “the dark side?” We aren’t exactly sure. But what we are sure of is that his actions do not catch God by surprise. In fact, if we look at Jesus’ prayer in the garden, he actually points out that Judas is appointed to be THE guy to betray him, and refers to him as the “son of destruction” (John 17:12). Because God is sovereign, God either allows all things or orchestrates all things in order for his purposes to be achieved. At the same time, we are all responsible for our own actions. I do not think that any one of us are hanging by strings which are being controlled by the supernatural. We need to be mindful of this as we walk through life and respond to what is going on around us. With all that being said, we see here that there is obviously more at play than just Judas and his greed. We cannot always understand why things happen the way that they do, but we can always be sure that God is in control and he is seeking his ultimate glory and, in that, our ultimate good.

John 13:31-38 – ³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” ³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

I love John 13:34. It evokes a great deal of emotion and joy! All we have to do is love each other and people everywhere will know that we belong to Jesus! That’s easy, right? NOPE. Jesus is speaking to his disciples in a time before Facebook and Instagram. They live in a day when the only way someone hears news is by word of mouth. Today, if we want to get the word out, all we have to do is post something on social media and WHAMMY, it can be all over the world in a few minutes. Jesus emphasizes that the disciples must live differently. They are to be guided by a different set of motivations. They are no longer to be guided by their pride. They are to be guided by what they know to be true about God revealed through his son Jesus.

Today, the time isn’t much different regarding our motives. Living according to a higher standard will draw attention, but simply living a “good life” is not what Jesus is getting at here. We can live morally, be the talk of the town, and never speak of Jesus. Many good people will do some amazingly generous things in their lives. They will clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and provide for the less fortunate. However, this will not earn them salvation. Jesus says that the world will know that there is something different about his followers by the way that they love each other in their day-to-day lives. If we drill down to the core of the subject we will see that the motivation behind our love for others is different. Yet, if we are not visually different in our actions toward others, those who do not know Jesus may never be encouraged to ask us for the reason that we love the way that we do (John 13:35). We love because Jesus first loved us! In 1 John 4:19, we are told that it is only possible for us to love because God first loved us. When others begin to see WHY we love the way that we do, it will cause them to question our motives (1 Peter 3:15). When they do, this is a ready-made gospel appointment that God has orchestrated. This is what Jesus is getting at when he tells his disciples to love one another. Jesus models for his disciples, both verbally and nonverbally, selfless love. In like manner, we too are to both speak love and act lovingly toward others.

Here at the end of John 13, we see Peter doing what Peter does best—attempting to tell Jesus what’s up. Jesus is explaining to his disciples that his time has come, and he will not be with them much longer. Peter asks where Jesus is going. If we are honest, this is us. Peter has just spent three years going everywhere with Jesus. Now, Jesus is saying he cannot go with him. He speaks up as we probably would. “Hey man, where are you going? Wherever it is, I’m coming too!” Are we willing to follow Jesus anywhere? Are we willing to declare to others that we are going to follow him whatever the cost? What if it’s across the ocean—would you go? How about across the street? Jesus shares with Peter what is actually going to happen. Peter will deny Jesus not once or twice, but three times in the span of a few hours. WOW! I bet that is not what Peter was expecting to hear after declaring his undying allegiance to his leader. But that is the nature of our hearts. We are broken and sinful. We are in need of a new heart. Without God stepping in to redeem us and give us a new heart that loves him, we cannot live for him or please him. My prayer is that we will realize this need for him early on in our lives and live each day as though Jesus is physically with us today. My prayer is that we would live with eternity in mind and proclaim boldly the gospel of Jesus with grace and love for those that we meet.

The Main Point

Jesus models the selfless love that we are to put on display. This kind of love will mark us as his disciples.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Philippians 2:1-11

1 John 4

Week 5

John 14:1-31 – Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Harvey Edwards, III

Introduction

Recently we visited my daughter and her husband and their four children, ages 1-11 at their home in Bozeman, Montana. We drove a few hours from there down to Grand Teton National Park for a short visit. After a magnificent day of hiking on a picturesque lakeside trail, we returned to our rental cabin in the evening refreshed in spirit but tired in our limbs. After dinner, we decided it might feel good to soak our fatigued muscles in the outdoor hot tub just a short walk from the door of our cabin.

After enjoying a nice soak, we were about ready to head back to the cabin when of all things, a large cow MOOSE ambled right up to within 15 feet of the hot tub, glanced casually at us, and then began to eat the branches off a cluster of aspen trees growing right next to us! A couple of minutes later, she was joined by a young bull, who unnervingly began to aggressively rub the velvet off his new antlers, shaking the small aspens violently as he did so. The three younger children observed the fake calmness that the adults were straining to affect and remained quiet and calm themselves; but our 11-year-old granddaughter was old enough and had read enough to know that there is real danger in being that close to a moose, and she was literally quaking with fear. Thank goodness for her loving grandmother, Debbie, who held her, whispered constant reassurances in her ear, and finally prayed with her until the two moose eventually ambled quietly off.

Can you recall a time when you were in distress and received comfort from another; or, when you comforted someone else? What factors facilitated your giving or receiving comfort?

Read John 14:1-31 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Has your belief in God ever been challenged by hardship or sad events in your life? Or, have you witnessed that happening in another's life?
 2. What is your concept of the place being prepared for you by Jesus? Is it sufficiently encouraging?
 3. How do you understand the connection between love and obedience? Between the comfort of the Spirit and obedience?
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Commentary

These words of Jesus are part of his last communications with his disciples before the passion, delivered on the eve of the Passover celebration.

14:1-14 – *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Consider the setting when Jesus spoke these words. The disciples have left everything to follow Jesus, and have been his constant companions for the last three years. They have grown to love him, watched him perform miracles, and firmly believe him to be the long-awaited Messiah, come to restore Israel to her honored status as the favored nation of the Lord God. But as this special Passover celebration meal progresses, the mood set by Jesus seems something other than celebratory. Jesus keeps emphasizing in a confusing way how much he will have to suffer, and he seems to be in a somber mood. He has just identified Judas as a traitor and dismissed him from the room. He follows that up by informing Peter that before the night is over, Peter will deny three times even knowing him. No doubt these words of Jesus are troubling to the disciples, perhaps as they wonder who will be the next one that Jesus might single out as unfaithful or lacking in courage. Certainly Jesus would have been able to read in their faces uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion, and his heart would have been heavy knowing what these men he so loves will soon experience as their world crashes down in the hours to come.

And so, full of compassion, he begins to comfort them, using words that—while certainly specific to those men at that time—continue to comfort all persons ever since who read them and trust in their truth. First, he commends their belief in God and urges them to continue in it, no matter what lay ahead. Isn't it true that if there is no God, then there is no comfort, no meaning in life, and no reasonable expectation that all the brokenness and pain present in this world will ever be rectified? Believe in God! But more than that is necessary, because once one has become conscious of not just the brokenness of the world in general, but also of his own personal sinfulness, belief in a righteous and just God actually becomes uncomfortable, even terrifying. It is only through our belief in Christ as the Son of God, sent to save us, that belief in God becomes comfortable. Without Christ's mediation, we are hopeless, condemned, and lost. In Christ, we are welcomed into the presence of the Father as pure and beloved sons.

Next, he tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them. There are two important points to be made here: First, he must go. Without his going the way of the cross, there would be no place for them in the presence of the Father; and second, his purpose in going is that we should dwell in his Father's house with him eternally. This concept is not of an extravagant mansion, as the word “manse” was translated in the King James version, but rather calls to mind the living arrangement common to the time, with extended families dwelling together intimately in a multi-roomed complex, all under the common roof of the father, or patriarch. They will be there, at home, with Jesus, forever!

In confused honesty, Thomas boldly contradicts Jesus's assertion that they know the way to where he's going, saying that since they don't know where Jesus is going, they cannot possibly know the way. And Jesus answers in his typically cryptic, poetic, and most memorable manner, that he himself is “the way, and the truth, and the life.” Though no man can come to the Father but by his intercession, Jesus encourages them by telling them that by having known him, they now do know the Father. They will be able to commune with him, and that their understanding of the unity of the Father and Son will continue to grow. When Philip asks for a visible picture of the Father, something that all of us tend to think would confirm

our faith once and for all—Jesus declines, implying that he himself is the revelation of the Father most fit for mankind to regard and understand at that particular time in the Father’s plan. And surely that is enough, if Philip will only remember the authoritative words and miraculous works of Jesus.

No doubt, the disciples were incredulous to hear Jesus say that in the times to come, they would perform even greater works than his! All that would be necessary would be for them to pray “in my name,” meaning to pray in the wholly acceptable and unblemished name of Jesus (not in our own names!), according to the purpose of the Son, who dedicates his life to one cause, to bring glory and honor to the Father. By this promise of Jesus, such a prayer will certainly be granted!

14:15-31 – *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

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

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

In these verses, Jesus continues to comfort his beloved disciples. He assures them that he will not leave them as orphans, that he will most certainly return for them. And further, until he returns, he promises that to all who love and trust him, he will send a helper, the Spirit of truth, to dwell in them, to facilitate their communion with the Father and the Son, to teach them how to live in obedience, and to remind them of all the same things that Jesus taught them while he walked with them. Prophesied centuries earlier, but perhaps under-emphasized or poorly understood, the arrival of this indwelling Spirit would make all the difference in the lives of the disciples and the future success of their work. Surely it would have been reassuring to know that Christ would send the Spirit to be their Helper. But interwoven with these reassurances of the comfort the Spirit would bring, Jesus interposes repeated reminders of the Spirit’s necessary connection to obedience; for in the words of Matthew Henry, “We must not expect comfort but in the way of duty” and “Follow the conduct of the Spirit and you will have the comfort of the Spirit.” The way of the Spirit, the way to glorify the Son and thus the Father, is to obey the commandments found in the written word. This we are constantly and progressively enabled to do as we walk in the light of the Spirit; and as we continue, we are granted ever closer communion with both the Son and the Father, as well as the perfect peace sufficient to any trial the world might bring into our lives.

And as this passage concludes, we see Jesus do just what he asks of us. He rises to go willingly forth to perform the duty for which he was sent, knowing full well what it would cost, defeating evil and death once and for all, purchasing life for all who call upon his name, and in his obedience, bringing great glory to the Father he loves.

The Main Point

Jesus is the source of life. Those who know him are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life in light of the gospel.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 55:22—an assurance that would have been a comfort to Jesus

Ezekiel 36:22-27—the promise of the Spirit and a new heart of flesh

I Peter 5:7—Jesus still desires to bear our burdens and anxieties

Week 6

John 15:1-17 – The True Vine

Harvey Edwards, III

Introduction

A couple of years ago, Debbie received a small Peggy Martin climbing rose bush as a gift from my horticulturist sister, Jeanie. Jeanie had a beautiful one herself, gracefully framing her front door entrance, and we thought ours might look pretty arching over our front porch. I carefully dug a generous hole, planted it according to instructions, and we waited for it to impress. Alas, it never did. In fact, as tenderly as we nurtured it and tended to it, it hardly grew at all. After a couple of years, Jeanie and Debbie (who both love to personify plants) concluded that it “just wasn’t happy there”—probably not enough air circulation where we had planted it—and prescribed a transplant (their frequent solution). So I dutifully dug it up, moved it to a sunny and airy spot near our patio, and Debbie and I proceeded to construct a fairly complicated arbor upon which it could climb.

Whoosh! Did it ever take off! In a matter of a just a few months, it had grown up one side, across the entire top, and was extending down the other side, at least quintupling the growth it had accomplished in the previous two years. And the roses it produced at the time of its first bloom were absolutely beautiful! And then Jeanie visited again. She told me I needed to prune it. Huh? It’s doing great, all sorts of foliage, we worked hard to nurture it back to health—why would I want to risk harming it by cutting it? But Jeanie’s the expert, so I did—sort of. I timidly trimmed back a few small branches and let it go at that. The foliage remained glorious, continuing to reproduce itself at an impressive rate, but I noticed that at the next bloom, the rose flowers themselves were fewer, and the ones that appeared were largely obscured by all the leaves. So again, at the urging of Jeanie and Debbie, I pruned it somewhat more severely, with special attention to removing the branches that gave no promise of rose production. Sure enough, the next bloom was very much improved. And so it has gone, the more I prune, the more flowers we have. No longer a skeptic, I now boldly chop away at all those showy shoots with aggressive confidence, knowing that what I once feared would harm has proved only to help our bush do what it was created to do in the first place—produce hundreds of beautiful pink flowers. Come see it this spring!

Could this principle of pruning for health in plant life possibly have any application in the life of the Spirit? Read on to see what our Savior says.

Read John 15:1-17 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Abiding is not the most familiar word to us. What does it mean to you?
2. Are there any practical actions that help promote the practice of abiding in Christ?
3. In the chicken and the egg analogy, which of the two words “love” and “obey” is the chicken and which is the egg?

Commentary

Many commentators feel that this section of Jesus’s last teachings to his disciples might not be presented in exact chronological order by John, who was more interested in prioritizing themes and concepts than he was in laying down a precise timeline of Jesus’s last hours with his disciples. So, as Jesus seems to be leading the disciples out of the upper room towards Gethsemane at the conclusion of chapter 14, it doesn’t necessarily follow that these most profound and important teachings at the beginning of chapter 15 were necessarily delivered as the unwieldy group of twelve shuffled along the road to the garden.

15:1-8 – *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

Jesus was the consummate teacher, and had the keenest insight into what symbols he might employ to teach his students the lessons he wished to impart. We learned from the Old Testament account of Joshua, Caleb, and the other Israelites sent to spy out the land of Canaan that the Promised Land was famous for its ability to produce the most luscious grapes. At the time of Jesus, grapes were among the most important of agricultural products in the land. They were the source of wine, which was a Middle East symbol of joy and celebration. A vineyard once established tremendously enhanced the value of the land upon which it was planted. The work of tending the vineyard was visible to all, and all were familiar with the endless work of pruning and its necessity for keeping healthy plants capable of producing a fruitful harvest.

And so it’s no surprise that this is the familiar symbol Jesus chooses as he imparts these last lessons to the men he is training to carry on his work. He begins by identifying himself as the vine, his Father as the vinedresser, and believers as the branches. The disciples would have understood that the vine is deeply rooted, woody, and strong, and the branches are flimsy and vulnerable. They would have been gratified by the image of being held up by Jesus the strong vine. Nothing objectionable so far...

But grapevines are not grown for the sake of the branches. They have one purpose—to produce fruit. The fruit is the crop, not the branches. The fruit is what’s delicious. The fruit is the source of the beverage symbolizing life and joy and celebration. And fruit is what Jesus desires to issue forth from the lives of his disciples when he is gone. What makes this possible? The branches (we) must remain intimately connected to the vine (him). Nourishment and fruit production is possible only when the life-giving sap flows freely from the vine to the branches, and impossible—*impossible, not improbable*—when it doesn’t. That’s easy enough to understand when thinking about plants, but don’t we humans, seem to have difficulty believing it’s true of our spiritual lives? The caring parent conscientiously raising responsible children outside a nourishing relationship with Jesus—no fruit? The wealthy agnostic philanthropist donating millions to charity—no fruit? The philandering megachurch pastor powerfully preaching Christ and gaining members weekly—no fruit? According to Jesus, that’s exactly right—no fruit, “for apart from me, you can do nothing.”

So what is fruit? Souls won through our witness? Possibly, but God uses who he will, and aren’t we taught that it is the Spirit that draws people to Christ? Is it the fruit of the Spirit described by Paul—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? That seems likely. But what Jesus wants us to most focus on is the abiding, not crop production (or if you’re an Alabama football fanatic, perhaps the process, not the outcome). The Father recognizes the crop, the Father is the expert vinedresser, he knows fruit when he sees it. If the branches remain connected continuously to Jesus (“abiding” in him), fruit will result and the Father will value it. Our task is simple, and it’s not to try to figure out multiple ways to produce fruit; there is only one way, and that is to abide in Christ and obey him faithfully.

What is the role of the vinedresser, the Father? He tends the plant and improves its fruitfulness. If a branch produces absolutely no fruit, it is revealed to have no life-sustaining connection to the vine, and the Father gathers it with other fruitless branches into a pile for destruction. But if it does bear fruit, it is not pampered and indulged and made an object of admiration to be praised by others (as we might hope); rather, it is *cut*—not in a permanently injurious way, for the Father is the most skilled of all gardeners and makes no mistakes. He might cut away some luxuriant foliage, he might reduce a leafy branch to a skinny, bare-looking stick, and after his pruning a fruit-bearing branch might appear to have sustained irreparable injuries; but it will not be made fruitless, only ever more fruitful from the Father’s careful and deliberate attentions. Not exactly the happiest news for those of us branches who don’t happen to like being cut, but appreciated in maturity as we look back upon the fruit and joy that were the result of the Father’s skillful pruning and loving support through the healing of the wounds.

15:9-17 – *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

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

Consider the first sentence in this section: just as the Father perfectly loved Jesus, who was worthy, Jesus loved us, who are unworthy. In fact, he loved us so much *while we were his enemies* that he laid down his life for us, an act that when performed for *friends* is universally recognized as proof of the greatest love possible. He exhorts—no, commands—us to abide in that love and to love others with that same love. Only then will we be able to keep his commandments, for just as his love of the Father was the root of his obedience, love of Jesus must be the root of our obedience.

We are incredibly blessed to be in this most intimate relationship of love, but we can still mess it up. While love enables and promotes obedience, it does not force it. We can walk away from a loving relationship, leave it rather than abide in it, and often do, by disobeying the commands of the one who loves us. Men and women have been doing it ever since Adam and Eve. But how much more clearly we understand the depth of God’s love since Jesus came; how much more are we empowered to obey since Christ sent the Spirit to live in our hearts; how much less inclined to hide since we know our sins past and future have been paid for by the sufferings of our Savior! For these reasons and more, abiding and obeying should be our natural state, becoming ever more natural as the Father continually prunes that which needs to be cut away.

And then, their Master, the divine creator of the universe, soon to ascend to unspeakable glory, regards these rough and common men, these seemingly slow learners, these students whose dullness seems at times to exasperate him, and he raises them to a new and unthinkable status as he names them friends. Their time with him is complete. He has shared with them all that the Father has made known to him, preparing them to be knowledgeable and effective partners in his work. And he concludes with a few connected reminders that are as suitable for us as they are for them: I tell you this for your joy. Abide in my love, love one another, and in doing so, you will bear much fruit, for that is why you have been chosen.

The Main Point

Our connection to Jesus is the source of our life. If we are connected to him, there will be fruit in our lives.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Zephaniah 3:17—The prophecy of a ruler who will love and rejoice over his people

Galatians 5:22-23—The fruit of the Spirit

Romans 5:6-11—Christ died for us while we were sinners and enemies of God

Week 7

John 15:18-16:15 – The Work of the Holy Spirit

By Rand Nelson

Introduction

The first several years of elementary school were not easy for me. Regularly picked on by my classmates, I hated going to school and experienced difficulty knowing where I fit in. In contrast, at home I was one of nine children. My loving family environment provided me with personal security and gave me a voice. The people whose opinions mattered most had assured me of their love. I learned to manage among my peers at school because my family loved me, and they were with me. In this passage, Jesus informs the disciples that their allegiance to him will make them enemies with the world. He warns of shunning, persecution, and death as ways that the world's hostility will manifest itself to the disciples. But the good shepherd does not abandon his sheep; he promises to send the Holy Spirit to bolster God's truth in their hearts as he convicts the world of its errors. As the disciples had confidence then, Christians today can remain confident that the good shepherd still protects them, provides for them and cares for them.

Read John 15:18-16:15 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Supplemental Questions

1. In what ways do you think "the world" is opposed to the teachings and doctrines of Christianity?
 2. What are your experiences with persecution, if you have any? How do those compare to the persecution endured by Jesus, the early church, Christians throughout history?
 3. How do you understand the role played by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian? How do you experience the Spirit's presence currently?
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Commentary

15:18-25 – *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'"*

Having begun his farewell discourse speaking to the disciples about unity, friendship, and love for him and one another, Jesus now turns to the inevitable consequence of discipleship: the hatred of the world. Two kinds of people inhabit this world: those born into and continuing in rebellion of King Jesus' rule, and those who have surrendered in repentance and bow to him as Lord. The battle lines are drawn around loyalty to Jesus and God the Father. As deserters of the world's active rebellion, disciples of Christ can expect to encounter hostility and malice from their former faction. This hatred for the disciples is not personal as much as it is an indication of the rejection that unbelievers have for the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

By their human nature and by actions, all mankind is sinful (Romans 3:23). So, when Jesus says that "they would not be guilty of sin" (v. 22 & 24), it is best to understand him to be speaking of their specific sin of hatred and rejection of Jesus. Because the works Jesus performed are signs clearly manifesting his glory and declaring that he comes from the Father, the world is without excuse. The world's heart-level issue is not unbelief—stemming from ignorance, but rejection of the truth—stemming from a hatred of Jesus and a refusal to acknowledge him as Lord. "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). Believers can be comforted in knowing that hatred from the world is not just something revealed by God to be normative, but is also a burden shared by Jesus, who was himself hated. Furthermore, the hatred believers experience from the world is at its core a hatred of Jesus.

15:26-16:4a – *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

16 *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*

The role of the Holy Spirit, here referred to as the "Helper," is to testify to the truth of Jesus' identity, bolstering the faith of the disciples in times of persecution and equipping them to testify of Jesus to the world. No one knows better than Jesus the effect that persecution can have on the faith of Christians. Wanting to be liked and well thought of is a trap we all-too-easily fall into, and it would be easy for believers under persecution to abandon their faith that their pain and isolation would cease and their influence among their peers return. Intended to prepare them for the dark days ahead, the warning Jesus gives to his disciples in this moment does not sugarcoat the issue: they will be rejected from their people and even come to fear for their lives because of what they believe about Jesus. Even when this persecution comes at the hands of men who believe they are doing God's work—such as the Apostle Paul believed before he truly knew God—the disciples can remain confident in their testimony.

16:4b-11 – *"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*

Jesus' presence with his disciples has shielded them from much of the hostility of the world, but now that he is going to be with and remain with the Father, a shift in this dynamic will take place. Jesus speaks to their sadness, assuring them that it is to their advantage that he leaves them, because this must take place before he sends the Holy Spirit. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus will usher in a new era in history (which we read about in the Book of Acts), the age of the church. So, when Jesus is saying that he must go away before he can send the Helper, he's saying that these things must take place to trigger the next phase in the history of salvation. Jesus explains that this age will be marked by the presence of the Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The Spirit's conviction regarding sin is as we most simply understand conviction—

while the world walks in unbelief, he communicates their need of repentance and belief. Regarding righteousness, the Spirit continues the work of Jesus by exposing the “righteousness” of men to be what it is: vain attempts to make up for sin and satisfy a holy God. And regarding judgment, the Spirit testifies that the judgment of the world (under which Jesus was declared a criminal) is flawed and the ruler of this world is conquered by the finished work of Christ on the cross.

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

¹⁶ “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”

In these last few verses, Jesus speaks of things that the disciples cannot yet bear. Looking back, as twenty-first-century Christians have the luxury of doing, it is easy to understand some of the things Jesus taught the disciples that rather perplexed them in the moment. We have a far more complete knowledge of how things transpired from this point on. Yet, Jesus assures the disciples that their relationship with him will continue. The Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus by speaking the words of Jesus to them and declaring to them things that are to come. The message he will teach them is the united teaching of the Trinity. Christ does not abandon his disciples to fend for themselves. He continues to serve them and care for them through the person of the Spirit.

The Main Point

Despite the fact that Christians will be hated by the world and come under its persecution, they are continually shepherded by their Lord Jesus, and equipped to testify for him as he communicates sustaining truth to them through his Spirit.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

John 7:1-24

Acts 2

Romans 8

2 Timothy 3

Week 8

John 16:16-33 – Jesus Has Overcome the World

By Rand Nelson

Introduction

Despite what *People Magazine* would have you to believe from their made-up, celebrity mom photos in the hospital room post-delivery, nothing is really glamorous about birthing a baby. My wife and I went to bed the night of February 22, 2015 with the expectation that the movement in her eight-months-pregnant belly was indigestion, muscle spasms or something mild like that. Not expecting our son's arrival for at least another three weeks, I was somewhat annoyed that she requested I take her to the hospital a little after 2 a.m. Neither of us were ready for what would be the longest 23 hours and 46 minutes of our lives up to that point. She contracted and groaned in pain for hours and hours with little to no progression. Time continued to pass until finally it was time to begin pushing. After much blood, sweat, screaming, and tears, my wife finally wrapped her arms around our son and immediately her disposition changed. All the pain and suffering she endured as she took a day-long beating from her own body was, in a single moment, completely worthwhile. And it wouldn't be too much longer before she'd start asking about when we would try for another one. Some things are worth the anguish because a joy lies close by on the other side of the pain. At the end of this conversation with his disciples, Jesus reassures them of this truth.

Read John 16:16-33 together

Weekly Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Have you ever had moments of sorrow in your life that were alleviated by the sudden presence of joy? Explain what that was like.
 2. Jesus promises the disciples that the Father will give them whatever they ask for in his name. What do you think this means? How do you think that this extends to us today?
 3. What does Jesus want his disciples to find their ultimate hope in? How does that affect the way that we live our lives today?
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Commentary

16:16-19 – *“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”* ¹⁷ So some of his disciples said to one another, *“What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’”* ¹⁸ So they were saying, *“What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.”* ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, *“Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’?”*

Jesus has been talking with the disciples about his departure to go and be with the Father and the subsequent persecution that they will experience while living in a world that is not their home. He now transitions into more of an explanation of the confidence they can have in their ultimate hope. When Jesus tells the disciples that in a little while they will see him no longer, and again a little while and they will see him, he is referring to his death, resurrection, and the period of time in between. This is another instance where what is said by Jesus is seen much clearer on this side of the events he is discussing, as is evidenced by the disciples' apparent confusion. Because Jesus sees that they do not understand, he seeks to clarify the message for them.

16:20-24 – *Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.* ²¹ *When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.* ²² *So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.* ²³ *In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.* ²⁴ *Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

The death of their teacher, companion, and friend will bring great sorrow to the disciples. As the disciples mourn their loss, the world—already characterized as hating Jesus and rejecting his testimony (John 15:18-25)—will celebrate having decisively finished him off. But as the news reaches the disciples on resurrection day, their sorrow will turn to joy in light of a risen savior. Jesus compares the sorrow they will experience to the sorrow of a pregnant woman who realizes that the time to give birth is upon her. The idea here is not that the suffering and anguish they feel watching their closest friend be brutally and unjustifiably executed is akin to giving birth, but that the immediate relief they know upon seeing Christ risen is akin to the relief a woman experiences as she holds her newborn baby. Labor and delivery is unlike anything else in all the world in that there immediately comes an experiential, familial, and hormonal rush—a satisfaction that somehow, even after going through all this pain, it is worth it. The joy that Jesus promises for the disciples is an ultimate and abiding joy founded in a resurrected and glorified Christ; therefore, it is unable to be taken from them by the day-to-day sorrows they experience, even at the actions of a hateful world.

As Jesus has explained in this expanded passage (John 15-16), after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples will speak to the Father through the Spirit in the name of Jesus. This is an elevation of the relationship, ushering in a new era for the disciples, as well as for believers today. Through the reconciliation made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the intimacy of our union with the Father increases. We now enjoy direct access to the Father where we once did not. The Father's generosity is made plain by Jesus' directive to the disciples: *“Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.”* We are encouraged by Jesus to come to the Father with our needs, our burdens and our confession of sin that we may find a deep and abiding joy in his eagerness to provide.

16:25-27 – *“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father.”* ²⁶ *In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf;* ²⁷ *for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”*

Right now, Jesus is still speaking somewhat enigmatically about the approaching hour. This is compounded by the disciples' inability to understand because the events have not yet occurred. However, there is soon coming a promised time when Jesus will speak clearly enough for the disciples to understand exactly what he's saying, and after he goes to be with the Father, the Holy Spirit will continue to grant them further understanding. After Jesus accomplishes his mission of reconciliation, the disciples will have access to the Father directly through Jesus. As with all Christians, their relationship with the Godhead is because of the work of Christ. Their relationship with the Godhead is proven by their love for and belief in Jesus, which they have because the Father first loved them (John 3:16).

16:28-33 – *“I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”*

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus tells the disciples that he is returning to be with the Father, and they mistakenly understand this to be the hour in which he will speak plainly to them. The disciples are confused and try to mask it by proving that they understand who Jesus is and how the Godhead works at a deeper level. D. A. Carson might have put it best when he comments on this verse, “No misunderstanding is more pathetic than that which thinks it no longer exists.” Jesus’ response is somewhere between irony and sarcasm, pointing out that there is coming an hour when their mettle will be tested and found to be wanting. Jesus speaks of their abandoning him at the moment of his arrest, and of the comfort he will receive from his Father’s presence. The entirety of this discourse is to provide the disciples (and all of us, as well) with peace that comes from an assured victory. As spiritual battles continue to wage personally, locally and globally, and as many temporary defeats are suffered, there is an abiding hope that the war is won already. Christ’s victory over death and all the armies of hell is comprehensive and eternal. The tribulation and conflict now facing believers is but a hollow echo of the pain already endured and dealt with by our savior. In this, we have unshakeable confidence.

The Main Point

Witnessing the death of Jesus will bring the disciples much pain and sorrow, but it will be nothing compared to the joy they experience and the lasting hope they attain by the victory that is the resurrection.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 30

Romans 8

1 Corinthians 15

1 John 2

Week 9

John 17: 1-26 – The High Priestly Prayer

By Anthony Winfrey

Introduction

In this passage, we see the character and compassion of Christ demonstrated in his prayer. Even though Christ knows he is about to face ridicule, torture, and ultimately death, His last hours are focused on those whom he loved. Just as Christ's actions demonstrate his true character, people we encounter today demonstrate theirs by the actions they take. When I was growing up, my dad demonstrated his character through his hard work and determination to provide for his family. Even though he only finished the eighth grade in school, he determined to be better than what he was. His father died when he was only two years old. He was a part of a large family that never had the advantage of having a father figure. Alcoholism held most of the men of his family in its grasp. As a teenager, he determined that he wanted something different. Learning a trade as a mechanic would enable him to provide well for his family in the future. As a child I saw the love that my father had for us. I don't ever remember worrying about not having anything that I needed or wanted. Although it would be many years before he would come to know the Lord as his personal savior, I never doubted my dad's love for me. What would others around you have to say about your true character?

Read John 17:1-26 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who he is, and what he does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?

4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Jesus prayed for unity of the believers. Can that be accomplished today? If so, how?
 2. Knowing that Jesus prayed for future believers, how should that impact your life today?
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Commentary

17:1-5 – *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

In the end of chapter 16, Jesus was talking with his disciples and encouraging them because he knew he was about to leave them. Chapter 17 begins with his prayer to his father. This prayer is unique to others that we have seen in the Scriptures (Matthew 6:5-15) because it is not a prayer that shows us how to pray, but it is one that shows us an intimate look into how Christ cares for his people. In the beginning of the prayer we see that Jesus is praying for himself. Knowing that it is time for him to accomplish the plan that God had set before him, he asks his father to glorify him so that all glory might be turned back to God and that he might accomplish his will. “The sacrificial death of Christ was the means whereby God and humans were reconciled and therefore the father was glorified” (*The Gospel of John* by Elmer Towns). Jesus defines eternal life that the people may know God through him. This is the purpose of Jesus coming to Earth to die for us. Once that work is finished, he asks that his father receive him back to the glory he had before.

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

In this portion of the prayer, Jesus begins to pray for his current followers. He begins by solidifying that God's very nature is represented by Jesus' teachings. He has a responsibility to teach the truth that his father has given to him and they have believed. These current disciples are about to experience life without their teacher. Jesus asks his father to watch over them after his work on earth is complete. Jesus knows they will face opposition to their faith and will need God to protect them.

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

Jesus prays for those who would be believers in the future. The word of truth that the disciples receive will be spread to others and many will believe. Teaching what Jesus has revealed is the main responsibility for those who believe. Jesus knows that is important for them first to be knit together in the unity of the gospel before the world can receive it. He also expresses his desire for the oneness of the believers to be like his relationship with God his Father. He continues to pray that they stay true to his teachings so that the world may believe. Jesus' last request for believers is that God would allow him to be united with them. God's love allows us to have an opportunity to come to him through Jesus. Jesus ends this prayer by proclaiming he will continue to make his Father's name known and expressing his desire for God's love to rule in every believer.

The Main Point

Through Jesus, we are joined to the Father and receive eternal life.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Matthew 6:5-15

John 14:6

Luke 11:1

Luke 9:28

Week 10

John 18:1-19:16 – The King of the Jews

By Anthony Winfrey

Introduction

When I was a kid, I wanted to be an astronaut. I was intrigued with space, stars, and galaxies. One of the greatest presents my parents gave me was a telescope. I now could see something that was far away a little bit closer. I wasn't always looking at the stars with my telescope. I would look at animals, see what my neighbors were doing, and aggravate my siblings with it.

What if your life was being examined closely like a telescope allows us to examine the stars? I recently read an article about a popular Christian artist whose beliefs were put in the spotlight. She was asked if homosexuality is a sin. Seems like an easy answer. It is grouped with a multitude of sins throughout the Bible. She replied, "I can't honestly answer that, I have too many people that I love, and they are homosexuals." She failed to take an opportunity to speak the truth found in the Word of God and in doing so actually withheld love. As Christians, we will often be put in situations like this, and we always need to be ready to answer with the truth.

Read John 18:1-19:16 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. We are quick to condemn Peter for denying Christ. In what ways do we deny Jesus every day?
2. Jesus was put on trial for his faith. How will we react when we are put on trial today?
3. Jesus willingly suffered and gave his life for his friends. In what ways can we follow his example?

Commentary

18:1-14 – *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Jesus and his disciples retire to a garden that is common to them. Judas, who is betraying Jesus, knows where they are. He leads a band of soldiers and officers of the chief priests to arrest Jesus. Jesus confronts them as they arrive and asks them who they are seeking. They state they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus acknowledges who he is. He does not resist; this is the plan. He does ask that they let the disciples go. But Peter has a different idea. He takes his sword and cuts off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Jesus rebukes Peter for resisting and reminds him that this is God's plan. Jesus then puts Malchus' ear back on. Jesus is then arrested and taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who is the high priest that year. Annas himself has served as the high priest previously and has great influence in the Jewish community. This is the first of three Jewish trials that Jesus endures.

18:15-27 – *Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.*

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." ²² When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" ²⁴ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

After the arrest in the garden, the disciples disperse, but Peter and an unnamed disciple follow Jesus. Because the unnamed disciple is known to the high priest he can enter with Jesus and bring Peter into the courtyard. At that time, Peter is asked a poignant question about his relationship with Jesus. The servant girl who opens the door to the courtyard has a responsibility to know who is entering, but Peter feels it accusatory. Peter denies that he is a disciple of Jesus and begins warming himself by the fire. During Peter's denial in the outer court, the first Jewish trial of Jesus is being conducted. Annas begins to question Jesus about his teachings. Jesus reminds him that all his teachings are done publicly in the temple and synagogues of the Jews. He has done nothing in secret and many witnesses could be called. One of the officers hits Jesus with his hand to reprimand him for his response. He is accusing Jesus of being disrespectful. After that Jesus is sent bound to Caiaphas. During Jesus' second trial with Caiaphas, Peter is continually warming himself by the fire and he is approached again about his relationship with Christ. When he is asked again about being seen in the garden, he completely denies for a third time that he is Jesus' disciple. Then the rooster crows.

18:28-40 – *Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰ They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." ³¹ Pilate said*

to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”³² This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”³⁸ Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.”³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”⁴⁰ They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

After the trial with Caiaphas, Jesus is led to the headquarters of Pilate, who is the Roman governor. It was common for Pilate to ask, “What is the accusation against this man?” When Pilate discovers that Jesus has violated some Jewish law, he advises the Sanhedrin to try him under the Jewish law. The religious leaders explain that they do not want to judge him according to the Jewish law because they want him dead. Pilate begins to question Jesus, first asking him “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus responds by asking him if he is speaking for himself or others. Pilate continues to ask what he has done. Jesus begins to explain that his kingdom is not of this world. Jesus does not deny that he is a king and even that he was born a king. But he is to be a different kind of king, a king of truth and not of this world. Even though Pilate does not understand what truth is, he finds no guilt in Jesus. He gives the decision back to the Jewish people that he should release one man at the Passover. They choose Barabbas who is a robber.

19:1-6 – Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.³ They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands.⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.”⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!”⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?”¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”¹⁵ They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

Once the Jewish people decide to release Barabbas, Jesus is taken and beaten. The soldiers begin to mock him by creating a crown of thorns and place a purple robe on him while they continue to strike him. Once again Pilate, proclaims Jesus’ innocence and brings him before the Jews to proclaim that. When Jesus is brought out with the crown of thorns and purple robe the chief priests and officers begin to demand his death by crucifixion. Once again Pilate wants him to rid himself of this and asks them to take him and complete the task themselves.

The Main Point

Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. He comes to serve by giving his life as a ransom for many.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 40:6-8

Isaiah 53

Matthew 26:34

Luke 22:51

Luke 23

Week 11

John 19:17-42 – They Will Look on Him Whom They Have Pierced

By Harvey Edwards IV

Introduction

If you are like me, it is hard to overlook someone's mistake when that mistake costs you something. When someone acts with intent to harm, we want revenge. This is a common human experience. That is why so many of our stories revolve around vengeance. Think of classic books like *The Count of Monte Cristo*, or movies like *The Godfather*. Our hearts long to see someone receive the justice we feel they are owed, and many of our favorite stories wrestle with the feelings and implications of revenge.

Jesus has every right to exact vengeance. He is the rightful king and we are his wayward, rebellious subjects. But he does something unexpected. He allows himself to be subjected to humiliation and death by our hands to save us. He bears our sin so that we might be forgiven. Jesus will bring judgment, but only on those who refuse his offer of grace.

Read John 19:17-42 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Why does John make so many references to Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus' death?
2. What do you make of inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," on the cross of Jesus? What do you make of a king dying for his people?
3. What does Jesus' sacrifice mean to you?

Commentary

19:17-22 – *So they took Jesus,¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*

The sovereignty of God is on full display in Pilate's inscription on Jesus' cross. The Jewish leaders manipulate Pilate into sacrificing a man he believes to be innocent (John 18:38, 19:12). His refusal to change the inscription is a final jab at the Jewish leaders, but is used by God as a declaration of Jesus' exaltation as king. This is reminiscent of Caiaphas's declaration that it would be better for Jesus to die for the people than that the whole nation should die (John 11:48-53). Caiaphas declares the plan of God even as he is unwittingly at work to oppose what God is doing.

Though Jesus is innocent, he is sentenced to death. But it is important to remember that the reason Jesus came was to die. In John 9:17-18, we read, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." It is Jesus' intent to lay his life down. He does so to accomplish the will of the Father, to rescue a people for himself. And in the wonderful economy of God, we see that through his death, Jesus is exalted (Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus uses his authority to serve. He comes to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45). He is a king unlike any other. Thus, when Pilate writes, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" on the cross, an instrument of torture, he unwittingly helps us to understand the true heart of our king. Though he is greatest, he serves the least, even at great cost to himself. How can we doubt his heart? How can we not see his grace and goodness?

19:23-27 – *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,*

*"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."*

So the soldiers did these things,²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Again, John shows us how Jesus' death is all according to the Scriptures. Our God is sovereignly working out his purposes in Jesus' crucifixion. This Scripture is a quotation of Psalm 22:18, and it might at first seem like John is perusing Scripture to find any clause that might somehow fit the moment. However, this is not the case. It was well established that there was an expected messiah, and that this messiah would be a king like David. David was a type of Christ (messiah, anointed one). This means he was a living picture given to help people recognize the Christ when he comes. Often, his life helps us to recognize what will be true of the Christ, Jesus. In Psalm 22, David, God's anointed king, is afflicted by those he rightly rules. John's point is that the people's rejection of their rightful king, the true Christ, is no surprise. People have always rejected the rule of God's anointed, but God has the authority to raise up his king. His purposes will not be thwarted. This is true, even when things look the bleakest, even when the Christ is hanging on the cross.

The soldiers callously divide Jesus' clothes in front of his mother. Their squabbling for gain at another's loss is a strong contrast to the love of Jesus. Even as he gives up his life as a sacrifice for many, he takes care to make sure the needs of his mother will be met. Jesus cares for us in deeply personal ways. Though he is at work delivering God's people on a grand scale, he demonstrates time and again that his love is intensely personal.

19:28-37 – *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him.³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

Here again we have a fulfillment of Scripture. In order for Scripture to be fulfilled, Jesus declares that he is thirsty. John wants us to know that Jesus, as the Son of God, is fully aware of what he is doing in giving his life. He is intentionally fulfilling the role of the suffering servant, the one who bears the iniquity of us all. This is again building on the expectations of a coming king like David. In Psalm 69, David is being rejected because he has aligned himself with God. In Psalm 69:21, he says he is given sour wine to drink, just one of the pictures he uses to communicate that the people are rejecting their king. But their rejection will prove to be their undoing and his exaltation, for the Lord will raise up his king. This is what David believes the Lord will do in Psalm 69. When Jesus declares his thirst, he too is given sour wine to drink. Jesus' intent, recorded by John, is to say that just as David was rejected, God's true Christ has been rejected. But God will raise up his king and all of creation will praise him. Jesus is declaring that this is coming to pass in him.

After this, Jesus declares, "It is finished" and gives up his spirit. The Greek verb tense Jesus uses is important here because it means that Jesus has finished what he came to do, but that what he has finished has ongoing implications. In laying down his sinless life, he has paid the debt of sin one time, once and for all. Hebrews 10 discusses the implications of Jesus' perfect death. Verse 14 states, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." Jesus' death has accomplished what all other sacrifices were unable to do: cover our sin.

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. He has borne the sins of the world so that all who believe in him might receive forgiveness and life. Jesus has dealt with our sin and made a way for us to be restored to relationship with the Father. This is what the sacrificial system prepared us for, the recognition of our need for forgiveness, but our inability to accomplish it with the blood of animals. John wants us to see that the soldiers did not break the bones of Jesus because it reminds us that Jesus is the perfect sacrificial lamb. He says that the unblemished sacrificial lamb required in the Scriptures (Exodus 12:46) finds its ultimate fulfillment in the unblemished Christ. Jesus is revealed as the one John the Baptist proclaimed him to be, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

John declares that Jesus' death is the fulfillment of Scripture's promise of salvation. John quotes Zechariah 12:10, which in its full records God saying, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn." The people have pierced their Lord, and there is rightfully mourning. But out of mourning, God brings grace and mercy. Zechariah 13:1 states, "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." What was meant for evil has been turned for good. Jesus has borne our sin, even the sin of putting him to death, so that we might be forgiven. Mourning is appropriate, but it will not last forever, for Jesus has the authority not only to give his life, but to take it back up again. And he gives life to all who turn to him.

19:38-42 – *After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.*

Following Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for Jesus' body. Usually, someone crucified for sedition would at best receive burial in a common grave. Though Joseph acts secretly and with fear, John seems to commend him for his actions. He risks the ire of the Jews and procures the body of Jesus so that he could be properly buried. Nicodemus then brings a kingly gift of seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. With the actions of these two, Jesus receives the burial of a king. That Nicodemus appears here in this way should be a great encouragement to us. Although he did not understand the identity of Jesus in John 3, he now courageously declares him king through this extravagant burial.

Although many of us are familiar with the story of the crucifixion, we must not allow ourselves to become calloused to it. John takes great care to show us that Jesus' death is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. It was always God's plan to redeem a people for himself. Jesus, the Christ, the rightful king, came to die for the sins of the world, to be pierced by the ones he came to save. The king has come to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many, to bestow forgiveness on a people who do not deserve it. Let us look on the one whom we have pierced and mourn our sin. But then let us rejoice, for he has borne our sin to free us, to claim us as his own. Let us gratefully give our lives to the rightful king of creation.

The Main Point

Jesus' death fulfills the scriptures and pays the penalty for our sins once and for all.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 22

Zechariah 12

John 11:48-53

Philippians 2:5-11

Hebrews 10

Week 12

John 20:1-31 – The Resurrection

By Michael Green

Introduction

“Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”

Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy, 1789.

There are only two certainties in life, right? Death and taxes. I would argue the first one is even biblical. After all, there’s Hebrews 9:27, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” Thus far in history the death rate is holding pretty strong, virtually 100%. Everyone that lives dies. In the words of Jim Morrison, “No one here gets out alive.” Woody Allen has made his peace with it though: “I am not afraid of death, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

While death may be a certainty, it is not the end. Two thousand years ago on a Sunday in Israel, the finality of death died. Jesus of Nazareth passed through death and came out the other side, *alive*, paving the way for the truth that immediately follows the promise of death in Hebrews 9:27, “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Those that believe in Christ have the promise of life after death. Jesus secured it for them.

Read John 20:1-31 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:14, “And if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” What is the significance of the fact that Christ rose from the dead?
2. What is the importance of Jesus being *bodily* resurrected?
3. What was the impact of these events on the disciples?
4. In light of Jesus’ statement in verse 29 and given the fact that we live in a world where “seeing is believing,” how would you explain your faith to someone that has the same mindset of Thomas?

Commentary

20:1-10 – *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.*

In John’s account of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus’ followers that he had delivered from seven demons (cf. Luke 8:2) and a witness to his crucifixion, is the first to arrive at the empty tomb Sunday morning, before daybreak. In this chapter of the Gospel of John, it will become clear that Mary isn’t yet connecting the dots between this event and Jesus’ pre-crucifixion predictions of his subsequent resurrection (cf. John 2:18-22). In fact, Mary is distraught, inferring that someone has stolen Jesus’ body (v. 13). Upset, she runs to Peter and John, the author of the Gospel of John. John outruns Peter, peering in to see the burial cloths but remaining outside of the tomb. When Peter arrives, he enters into the tomb and sees the linen cloths as well. The disciples now see that Jesus’ body is in fact missing, but as is the case with Mary Magdalene, they aren’t yet connecting the fact that the body is missing with Jesus’ own predictions of his bodily resurrection.

D.A. Carson’s commentary on the Gospel of John is very helpful regarding the implications of the remaining burial cloths. He points out that it would have been very unlikely for someone to remove the burial cloths prior to moving Jesus’ body. What reason would they have had in doing so? Of what benefit would it have been to unwrap the body prior to transporting it? Furthermore, both the linen cloths and the burial spices would have been expensive, making it very unlikely that any kind of thief would have been the culprit, preferring to take the body while leaving behind the pricey plunder.

20:11-18 – *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.*

We next see Mary weeping outside of Jesus’ tomb. Two angels appear and begin to inquire as to what is wrong with her. She makes it clear that she is upset because she doesn’t know what has become of Jesus’ body. Mary then turns around and sees Jesus standing there but doesn’t immediately realize that it is him. She assumes he is the gardener and still doesn’t recognize him when he asks her why she is weeping and inquires as to whom she is seeking. She implores him to tell her what he has done with the body if he is the perpetrator. He responds with one word: “Mary.” And, the voice that calms the storm and settles the sea in Matthew 8:23-27 quiets the tumultuous waters in Mary’s heart and mind. Her perception of the situation turned as quickly as the disciples’ boat was stilled. For the first time in the conversation, her eyes are opened to the fact that this gardener is, in fact, the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth, whom she loves! I find it impossible to read this account without being reminded about the fact that Jesus’ sheep know his voice (cf. John 10:27-30). He calls them by name and they follow him! And, when Mary hears her Savior utter her name, she recognizes the voice of the one that delivered her from demons. The one she followed during his life. The one whose life, in her mind, was

prematurely and violently snuffed out, the harshest of deaths for the one that brought her life. But, now the one she saw brutally murdered is standing face to face with her again, *alive*. His one-word address is met with her own: “Rabboni!” Mary’s teacher is alive, after death!

Verse 17 seems to be the subject of debate among commentators, and Carson again does a very nice job outlining the differing viewpoints on its interpretation. Carson seems to settle on the viewpoint that Jesus’ instruction for Mary not to cling to him is not necessarily due to physiological considerations, referencing Jesus’ post-resurrection invitation for Thomas to touch his scars in this same chapter (v. 27). He sees it more as a reassurance to Mary that is directly tied to the next statement regarding the fact that Jesus will be ascending back to the Father, but not immediately. I highly recommend exploring all of the viewpoints outlined in Carson’s commentary if you desire to do so.

Mary then leaves as a herald of news that is a 180^o transformation from the fearful message she couriered in verse 2. She has seen the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth face to face!!! The one she followed, the one they crucified, is *alive* after being dead.

20:19-23 – *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”* ²⁰ *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”* ²² *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”*

That same evening the disciples were gathered together, huddled in fear. The doors being locked is a good hint as to their collective psyche, but John leaves his readers no doubt, clearly stating that they were locked “for fear of the Jews.” In the minds of the Jews, the rebellious movement led by Jesus of Nazareth had just been successfully truncated. But, if crucifixion was the fate of the leader, what is to come of the followers? They certainly aren’t out of the woods yet, and it is obvious that the Jewish leaders mean business, going to great lengths to murder Jesus. As a portion of the disciples hides in fear, the resurrected Savior miraculously comes and stands among them saying, “Peace be with you,” a common greeting given in the most uncommon of situations. Jesus then shows them “his hands and his side.” Thus, while the resurrected Jesus isn’t limited by time and space in the way that we are as demonstrated by his immediate appearance in their midst despite the doors being locked and other post-resurrection events, he does retain his physicality in some sense. Jesus is bodily resurrected. His body is no longer in the tomb and he retains his scars, offering them as proof that he is in fact the Jesus of Nazareth that was crucified. His temple has been destroyed, but he has raised it up just as he said he would (cf. John 2:19). He is the first fruits of resurrection. And, now due to his perfect life, obedient death, and victorious resurrection, the redeemed look forward to the day when they too will be bodily resurrected to eternal life (cf. John 6:39, 40, 44, 54 and 2 Corinthians 4:14).

Jesus then commissions the disciples, telling them that he is sending them out just as he was sent out by the Father. Giving the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 after Jesus’ ascension, what exactly transpires in verses 22-23 is the subject of much debate among commentators. Thus, I will bring in the heavy machinery. After summarizing the main schools of thought on the matter in his commentary on the Gospel of John, Carson offers the following helpful viewpoint:

The Christian witnesses proclaim and declare, and, empowered by the Spirit, live by the message of their own proclamation; it is God who *effectively* forgives or retains the sin. Thus Christian ministry is a continuation of Jesus’ ministry: through the gift of the Spirit the authority that Jesus exercises in, say, John 9, is repeated in their lives. Jesus there gave both sight and faith to the one who knew he was blind; to those who claimed to see, he declared, ‘Your guilt remains’ (9:41). Thus the retention of their sin was both description and condemnation. And the Paraclete [“Advocate” or “Helper”] who is given as a gift to Jesus’ followers (v. 22) continues the same two-edged work through them.

20:24-29 – *Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵ *So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”* *But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”*

²⁶ *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”* ²⁷ *Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”* ²⁸ *Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

I identify a lot with Thomas. Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus suddenly appeared in their presence. So, when the disciples tell him, “We have seen the Lord,” he wants to see the evidence. From his response, it is clear that he understands exactly what they are communicating. He hears what they are saying, but he needs concrete confirmation, tactile substantiation. Thomas tells the disciples that it will literally take him feeling the wounds of the resurrected Jesus in order for him to actually believe what they are telling him. It’s interesting to note here that Thomas was present when Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead (cf. John 11:16). Thomas, unlike most humans that have ever walked this planet, has actually already seen Jesus demonstrate his power over death in the bodily resurrection of Lazarus. Thomas literally saw Jesus bring a person back to life, and still can’t come to bring himself to believe the eye witness testimony of his friends. For some reason, that is comforting to me.

But, as comforted as I am in Thomas’ helplessness in his disbelief, I am more comforted by Jesus’ response. As Jesus had done with his followers prior to his death, he lovingly nurtures Thomas into belief—belief that Jesus is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. Miraculously, with the doors locked again, Jesus physically appears in his resurrected body in the midst of the disciples. But this time, Thomas is present too. And, despite all of the teaching that Jesus had done with Thomas throughout his time on earth and notwithstanding all of the miracles that Thomas had no doubt seen him perform in person, Jesus lovingly, graciously invites him to touch his wounds—to see his hands and touch his side. Housed in the Son of God’s inexhaustible kindness, Thomas’ doubtful stoicism turns to mush in an instant. His heart melts at the realization that the one whom his soul loves, the one whom they brutally crucified, now stands *alive* directly in front of him. And, out of the overflow of heart, the mouth speaks, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus wraps up the encounter with a blessing—a blessing on all of those to come after Thomas that won’t see Jesus’ wounds, that won’t touch his side, yet will put their faith in them.

20:30-31 – *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Chapter 20 concludes with John explicitly stating his purpose in writing the Gospel of John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” At the beginning of the Gospel of John, John tells us that life is found in Christ, and that life is the light of men (1:4). Jesus’ resurrection is proof that the darkness has not overcome that light. Life is found in Christ and Christ alone. Only those that believe in him experience that life now and have that life within them as a foretaste of eternal life. Jesus has given those that receive him the “right to become children of God.” And his resurrection guarantees those children that one day they will be like him, that he is the firstborn among many siblings that will be raised from the dead to spend all eternity in the presence of God.

The Main Point

Jesus rose from the dead, as the firstborn of all that receive life by believing in his name.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 22
Isaiah 53
1 Corinthians 15
John 2:13-22

Week 13

John 21:1-25 – Follow Me

By Michael Green

Introduction

Sometimes, when we are lucky, the math faculty at Shelton State gets treated to breakfast at our departmental meetings. Ordinarily, this takes on the form of chicken biscuits from Hardee's or some hot cakes from McDonald's. But, one morning ordinary was not on the menu. Unbeknownst to me, our departmental secretary had offered to make breakfast for the meeting set to take place the next morning. When I heard that, I got excited. She talked about making a nice breakfast with all of the fixin's: pancakes, sausage, eggs, juice. The whole nine yards. I naturally assumed that she would be transporting it to Shelton the next morning like all of the other times we had eaten breakfast together. But, to my surprise, I was asked to help her get stuff out of her car the next morning, and the stuff wasn't breakfast. It was the components necessary to make breakfast. As I filled up the cart to take everything upstairs, I saw a griddle, syrups, big bowls of batter, and cartons of eggs. I was asked to drop the cart off right in the carpeted lobby outside the math department's offices where we typically met together. Then, she proceeded to set up her griddle and all of the components necessary for a makeshift kitchen right there in the middle of the carpeted lobby area in the middle of Shelton State. I am pretty sure at one point, she was cooking pancakes barefoot. I can still remember discussing mathematical concepts to the sounds of bacon popping and pancakes flipping. I just remember thinking how out of place it was. It was just something extraordinary in the midst of the everyday ordinary. And despite the curious nature of the situation, as soon as I ate I sure did feel like I was transported back into momma's kitchen. In John 21, Peter and some of the disciples go out to do what they normally do. They go out to fish. But, then, extraordinary intersects the ordinary, complete with a full breakfast at the office.

Read John 21:1-25 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to the beach scene? What do you make of the post-resurrection Jesus grilling fish over charcoal on the shoreline?
 2. What do you think is the purpose of Jesus' conversation with Peter after breakfast? Why do you think he asked him virtually the same question three times?
 3. How would you feel if Jesus responded to you the way he did when Peter asked him about John? How do you process things when you feel like you are getting a "You're on a need to know basis and you don't need to know" response from the Lord?
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Commentary

21:1-14 – *After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No."⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

I love the mundaneness of this scene. Peter, and some of the other disciples, were fishermen by trade. Fishing is what they know. They are going out to do what they know how to do. They are going out to catch fish. And after a night of it, they have nothing to show for it. Then, as the sun rises a man calls out from the shoreline with a question, followed by some instructions. He asks the disciples if they had caught anything, and they communicate that they had not. The man on the shoreline responds with a curious suggestion. He tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. Now, I am not a skilled first-century fisherman by any means, but I can't really imagine that this comes across as a ground-breaking, insightful new fishing technique. After all, how wide is a modest first-century fishing boat, anyway? I am pretty sure that the trained professionals could have come up with this idea all by themselves. The difference here is that the one calling to them from the shore is the one that thought of fish. He designed them. He created them. And, he is sovereign over them. Thus, when the fishermen follow his advice, extraordinary intersects ordinary and, miraculously, they catch so many fish that they can't physically haul in the net. Evidently, it is clear that the power of the advice has more to do with the giver of the advice than the advice itself, leading John to exclaim to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

In quintessential Peter style, reminiscent of the time he walked on water toward Jesus or when he cut that guy's ear off in defense of his Lord, he can't wait for the boat to pull in to shore. He leaps overboard, splashing into the sea and swimming the length of a football field in order to get to Jesus as fast as he can! The others follow him in the boat, dragging the fish into shore only to run into another curious situation: the resurrected Christ cooking up some breakfast, grilling some fish on a charcoal fire accompanied by some bread. Jesus calls out to them asking them to bring him some of the fish that they caught and inviting them to come and have breakfast with him. From how the account reads, it seems that the disciples are struck by the oddity of the situation as well, given the fact that "they all knew who he was" but "no one dared ask him, 'Who are you?'" They are eating breakfast with Jesus, whom they had just seen crucified, making this the third time that they see Jesus *alive* after he was dead.

21:15-19 – *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."*

The last time Peter was around a charcoal fire in the Gospel of John, he was denying his savior (cf. John 18:15-27). This took place right after the ear-cutting-off incident. Shortly before that, at the Last Supper, Peter had proclaimed his devotion to the Lord stating to Jesus, “I will lay down my life for you” (cf. John 13:37). Jesus responded by predicting Peter’s subsequent denial, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.” Now, after a nice breakfast cooked on a charcoal fire, the resurrected Christ engages with Peter directly, inquiring as to Peter’s love for him three times. The weight of the questions seems to press in on Peter’s heart with each new time it’s posed. Each time, Peter affirms his love for Jesus and Jesus issues slight variations on a basic command: care for his sheep. Reading between the lines it seems like the repetition and nature of Jesus’ questions combine to really unsettle Peter’s soul, causing him in the last exchange to confess, “Lord you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus replies, “Feed my sheep.”

After that, Jesus proceeds to predict Peter’s death. Extra-biblical sources point to the fact that Peter is eventually crucified for his faith, and church tradition holds that he chooses to be crucified upside down, not considering himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. After foretelling of Peter’s future glorification of the Lord through martyrdom, Jesus tells Peter, “Follow me.”

21:20-25 – *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”*²¹ *When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?”*²² *Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”*²³ *So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”*

²⁴ *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

²⁵ *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

Remember here that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is referring to John, the author of this gospel as is made clear in verse 24. After Jesus tells Peter facts about how he will glorify God in his death, Peter looks over at John and inquires as to what the future holds for John. My take away from the conversation is that Jesus basically tells him, “You do you.” I am reminded of when Paul, addressing a judgmental attitude in his letter to the Romans, says, “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4). While I don’t think that Peter is exhibiting a judgmental attitude in any way here, I do think that the same sentiment is present in Jesus’ response: you and John are both servants of the master and the specific path laid out for the servant is the concern of the master, not the fellow servants. John tells us that this caused some to say that John would not die, but he definitively states that Jesus was not communicating that.

The Gospel of John concludes with a beautiful thought. The things written in this gospel were written with a very specific purpose, that those reading it would find life in Christ through believing in him. Thus, John concludes by letting the readers know that Jesus did many things that are not included in this book. And he supposes that if they were all written down, the world itself wouldn’t be able to contain all of the volumes.

The Main Point

Jesus is sovereign over all creation, from the fish in the sea to the lives of men. After rising from the dead, he demonstrates this in dramatic fashion, cooks a breakfast for some of his disciples, and tasks Peter with caring for his sheep.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 24

John 13:31-38

John 18:1-27

Colossians 1:15-20

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