Gospel of John

A Study Guide

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L1 - John - Introduction

The author: Although the gospel is written anonymously, there is sufficient internal and external evidence to be confident that he was the apostle John, who should also be accepted as the author of the letters of John and of Revelation. Particularly relevant is John 21:20-24, where the author identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (see also John 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2-3; 21:2,7-8). This disciple is in the “inner circle”, closely associated with Peter. John is the only one who fits this description.

The occasion: Most probably, the date was in the 90’s, John was writing from Ephesus, and the recipients likely included the nearby churches in Smyrna and/or Philadelphia. These churches faced persecution and conflict with the Jewish leaders of the synagogues (see Revelation 2:8-10; 3:7-10).

The primary audience was Jewish Christians, continuing in most of their Jewish traditions, and trying to maintain their ties to the Jewish community and to the synagogues. They rightly considered themselves as the true and faithful “remnant”, following the Messiah. But within the community and in the synagogues they were a minority. The synagogue elders and rabbis opposed them, and oftentimes expelled them from the synagogue.

In addition to the issues of being condemned and ostracized by the Jewish community and authorities, they faced the threat of political persecution from Rome. Claiming Jesus Christ as Lord, they refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord, or to perform rites of worship for Caesar. There had been a long-time agreement by which Rome exempted the Jews from any such religious practices that the Jews found offensive. Therefore, so long as the Jewish Christians were perceived as a Jewish sect, the Romans left them alone. This was in fact a practical reason for Jewish Christians to try to maintain membership in the synagogues. But the Jewish leaders saw the presence of Christians as a threat to their protected status. There was thus a political as well as religious aspect to the conflict between the church and the synagogue.

Genre and Style: The gospel of John is a “biography”, written in a manner consistent with Greek and Roman conventions of the time, but with considerable Palestinian Jewish influence, particularly from the Septuagint (LXX). In accordance with these traditions, it is a faithful and reliable rendering of the substance of historical events and teachings, but with creative flexibility and liberties to alter details and chronology, and to paraphrase discourses, in order to conform to a unified style and to more clearly convey the intended message. In addition to his own memories, John used inputs from established oral traditions, which he modified and arranged to fit into his own coherent style and structure.

John is often obscure and enigmatic, which accords with the “grand style” of rhetoric, considered appropriate for the mysterious and profound nature of his subject. His use of words and phrases with more than one possible meaning is often probably deliberate. Compared to the other three (Synoptic) gospels, John is more Jewish and Palestinian, he presents Jesus’ teachings mainly in private, extended discourses, rather than in public sermons and parables, and he provides more theological interpretation. F. F. Bruce has noted that the Synoptics present what Jesus did and said; John is more concerned with who Jesus was and what he meant.

Theme: Jesus was the perfect revelation of God the Father, and the only way to adequately come to and to know the Father. To receive Jesus as such, believing into Him, is therefore the sole means of gaining eternal life, the life that is only in the Son. So the main teaching points are to establish the identity of Jesus as this perfect revelation, and to lead people to a saving faith in Him (John 20:31). A secondary theme is the role of “witnesses” to Him: that such witnesses are necessary to lead us to the “Light”, but they are not in themselves the “Light” (John 1:7-8).

More particularly, John addresses the situation of the Jewish conflicts by building up their faith in Jesus as truly the Messiah, the eternal Word, the true fulfillment of Torah; and he presents Jesus’ life as an example of the same conflict and persecution that his audience was facing. A major theme of John is the opposition between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, whom he ironically designates as “the Jews”. In this gospel, Jesus taught that His future disciples would face the same kind of persecution from the “Jews” (John 9:20-23; 12:42-43; 15:18-21; 16:1-4). This was precisely the encouragement that they needed.

Outline:

1. Prologue [1:1-18]
2. Signs and Public Discourses [1:19 – 12:50]
	1. Witness in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee [1:19 – 6:71]
	2. Tabernacles and Hanukkah [7:1-10:42]
	3. Introducing the Passion [11:1 – 12:50]
3. Farewell Discourse [13:1 – 17:26]
4. Passion and Resurrection [18:1 – 20:31]
5. Epilogue [21:1-25]

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L2 - The Prologue – I -- John 1:1-5

John 1:1-3 -- “In the beginning was the Word…” This deliberately recalls the first words of Genesis: “In the beginning God…” The meaning of “beginning”, in both Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1, is the locale of the eternal source and foundation of all creation. It is the position from which God eternally is and from which He creates. John asserts here that the Word (*Logos*) also was “in the beginning”. By allusion to Genesis 1:1, Logos is associated with the creative word by which God spoke the creation into existence. *“God said, ‘Let there be light…’ and there was light”.* Thus in Genesis God’s spoken Word was the agent of creation.

Logos also encompasses Wisdom and Torah (the Law). Proverbs 8:22-31 presents Wisdom as the agent of creation:

*“The lord possessed me at the beginning of His way,*

*before His works of old.*

*From everlasting I was established,*

*from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.*

*When there were no depths I was brought forth….” --* Prov 8:22-24a

*“Then I was beside Him, as a master workman…” --* Prov 8:30a

And in Psalm 119, the Law is similarly extoled as the agent of creation, from the beginning:

*“Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.*

*Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations;*

*You established the earth, and it stands.*

*They stand this day according to Your ordinances,*

*For all things are Your servants.”* - Psalm 119:89-91

In later Rabbinic teachings, widely known and accepted at the time of Jesus and the early church, the Torah was personified, and regarded as the agent of creation, from the beginning.

So, John’s use of “*Logos*” should be understood as a term that encompasses God’s creative word, and it includes all the exalted claims made for both Wisdom and Torah.

There are also associations with the Greek understanding of *logos* as the principle of reason by which all things are rationally ordered, similar to modern ideas of the “laws of nature”. But for the primarily Jewish-Christian audience of John, and from the perspective of John’s own Palestinian-Jewish background, the most important associations are with the Jewish understanding of Wisdom and Torah. And in the wider context of John, and the cultural situation of the church relative to the synagogues, the role of Torah, and one’s faithfulness to Torah, are the most important issues. So, in this opening phrase, John is subsuming Torah under the category of “*Logos*”. *Logos* fulfills Torah, and faithfulness to the *Logos* is the highest form of faithfulness to Torah.

The next phrase, “and the Word was with God”, indicates a special relation to God. The word translated here as “with” is *pros*, which in most places has the meaning of “towards”. In this particular phrase, it indicates a dynamic and intimate interaction between the Word and God: a much closer and more significant relationship of communion than is denoted by “with”. It particularly indicates an activity of the Word towards God that goes beyond what was posited for either Wisdom or Torah.

John then says “the Word was God” (*theos hen ho logos*). This goes well beyond what the Jews would have said about either Wisdom or Torah. It identifies the Word as being fully God. The word order in the Greek, placing “God” (*theos*) at the beginning of the phrase, places special emphasis on God, as God; and grammatically, it is proper for it to not have the article when placed in this position (i.e. *ho theos*). This means that it is not just a weak claim of being “divine”, in the sense of having some divine qualities, as e.g. is claimed by Jehovah’s Witnesses. On the contrary, the proper interpretation is to take this according to the traditional translations: “the Word was God”. This verse then very elegantly and succinctly conveys the doctrine of the full deity of the Word, yet maintaining the distinctive identity of the Word in an interacting relationship with God.

The 2nd verse then repeats, for emphasis, that the Word was in the beginning, and “with” God. This framing structure draws attention to the central and most remarkable doctrine: the Word was God. This means that everything that can be known about God, all knowledge of God, is conveyed by knowing the Word. Beyond that, it means that all relationships and interactions between God and the creation are through and by the Word. Our only connection with God, and the only connection of all creation with God, is by the Word. This leads to the next assertion: “All things came into being through Him”. This again refers back to Genesis 1, wherein all the creative work of God is by His spoken Word. What scripture claims for Wisdom and Torah as the creative agent is here explained as the work of the Word.

John 1:4-5 -- Since the Word is the agent of all creation, it follows that He is also the source of all life: that “in Him was life”. This is an important theme throughout John (e.g. John 5:26; 6:35, 57; 11:25; 14:6). The Word has been and is the source of all life in the present creation, and He is the only source of life eternal in the new creation. The essence of “life” could be described as a creative and purposive reaching out to the future. It is characteristic of all living things to grow, to develop and to reproduce, to fulfill the Genesis mandate to be fruitful. This driving “life force” comes from the Word, who reveals and expresses God’s eternal purpose.

“And the life was the Light of men.” This is an unexpected logical relation: not that life depends upon enlightenment, but rather that enlightenment depends upon life. See also Psalm 36:9 for this connection between life and light. The priority is given to receiving life in the Word, which is prerequisite for becoming enlightened, the basis for knowing God. The only way to properly know or understand anything is by knowing God, and the only way to know God is to participate in and receive life from the Word. It is only when we walk with Him, sharing His purpose, that we come to know Him, and thereby to know the Father. And it is only then that we can understand and see the meaning of all that He has done and is doing throughout the creation. This is the Light of men (see also John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46).

“The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”. This is usually translated “the darkness did not understand it”. But the Greek word for “understand” can also mean grasping hold of something in the sense of overcoming it. In this context, this is the more likely meaning. As used in John, “darkness” is not a personification that has the potential to “understand” truth, it is rather a force that opposes and seeks to overcome truth. What is asserted here is that the forces of darkness did not prevail. In opposition to all the powers of darkness and of Satan, the Light emerged victorious (John 16:33).

L3 - The Prologue – II -- John 1:6-18

John 1: 6-8 -- These verses introduce the role of John the Baptist. He was sent from God (a true prophet), but he was not the Light. He gave testimony to the Light, as a witness. Since a special point is made of this, it is likely that there was still some confusion in the Christian community as to the significance of John the Baptist. Several years earlier, the book of Acts indicates that Paul found some disciples in Ephesus who had not received the Holy Spirit:

*“And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ And they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”* -- Acts 19:3-5

It may be that there was a continuing tradition among Christians in the regions around Ephesus

that failed to make the full and proper distinction between the Baptist and the Christ. That could be the motivation for this discussion of the Baptist, here and in John 1:19-36; 3:25-30, as well as in the other three gospels.

This section also introduces the more general concept of “witnesses”, which is an important theme in this gospel. The other witnesses, in addition to the Baptist, include the voice from heaven (John 12:28-30), the works and signs of Jesus (John 2:11; 5:36; 10:25, 38), the scriptures (Old Testament) (John 5:39) and His eyewitness disciples (John 15:26-27; 21:24).

John 1: 9-14 -- In distinction from the witnesses, however, the true Light, by coming into the world, enlightens every man. This does not indicate that every man received the Light, but that the Light is intended to be available for and applicable to every tribe and nation, and that the only way that anyone can become enlightened is by this one true Light.

The following five verses then summarize the identity and the mission of this true Light. Below is a proposed translation, and structure, for verses 10 – 14:

*10 He was in the world,*

*and the world came into being through Him,*

*and the world did not know Him.*

***11 He came into His own things,***

***and His own people did not receive Him.***

***12 But as many as received Him***

***He gave the power to become children of God***

***(to those believing into the name of Him 13 Who was begotten not from bloods, nor from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of a husband, but from God.)***

*14 Indeed, the Word became flesh*

*and tabernacled in us,*

*and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

In the outer frame of this structure, verse 10a parallels verse 14a -- the first part (verse 10a) pertaining to those who did not receive Him, and the second part (verse 14a) pertaining to those who did receive Him. The correspondences are as follows:

*He was in the world < -------- > and tabernacled in us*

*the world came into being through Him < -------- > the Word became flesh*

*the world did not know Him < ---------> we beheld His glory, …*

The central section of the chiasm, verses 11 & 12a, should be regarded as the primary theme of the Gospel:

***His own people did not receive Him*** *< --------->* ***But as many as received Him,***

***He gave the power to become children of God***

It presents the contrast and conflict between those who received Him and those who did not, and the point that receiving Him is decisive for becoming a child of God (i.e. to attain eternal life).

The final phrase of verse 12 further describes those who receive Him as those “believing into His name”. As used in scripture, a person’s “name” stands for reputation and character. So “believing into His name” is placing our faith in Him, trusting Jesus to be genuinely the One whom He claimed to be. Other important places where John uses this expression are in John 3:18; 20:31; and 1 John 5:13.

There is a long-standing controversy regarding the proper translation of verse 13. All modern translations interpret the subject of this phrase to be plural, and thus referring to the believers. This is based on the text of 4th century Greek manuscripts, where the “who” is plural. The early church fathers, however, dating back to the 2nd century, quote this phrase with “who” as singular, meaning that it would be referring to Jesus. The interpretation presented here is that the subject “who” should in fact be singular. Although it is a minority position, it is a position that has considerable supporting evidence, and is held my many scholars.

If the pronoun in verse 13 were plural, then the meaning of verse 13 would simply be that it is by God’s will that we become His children. But if the pronoun is singular, it is a teaching of the virgin birth of Jesus, which is to say that the author and object of our faith was begotten solely from the will of God. This is then a statement of one of the key foundational themes of the Gospel: that everything Jesus did and everything He said was from the Father, according to the will of the Father (John 5:19-20,30; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10).

An interesting point about verse 13 is that it is a likely allusion to Wisdom of Solomon 7:1-2

*“in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh, within the period of ten months, compacted with blood, from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.”*

This is referring to literal physical conception, even more evident when “*andros*” in verse 13 is properly translated as “husband”. The context in Wisdom of Solomon is the mortal frailty and limitations of a man, and the consequent need to call out for help, to receive the spirit of Wisdom. In contrast to this, John 1:13 emphatically denies that Jesus suffers these same limitations. His whole life, including His conception, was by and from God, not man. Being born of a woman, He shared the physical frailties of humanity; but since He was not conceived by the seed or the will of a man (husband), He did not share our moral and spiritual frailties. He was fully “in the world”, but not “of the world”.

“And the Word became flesh.” These may very well be the most dramatic and shocking words every spoken or written, and the most difficult to comprehend. God – not just any god, but the true God of Israel, the God Who is Spirit – became flesh. We know, e.g. by the prayers of Jesus, that there was a definite distinction between the Father and the Son. But yet, the Son, the Word, who became flesh, was God. All that had been said about the eternal Word, as the revelation and the agent of God relative to creation, is to be said about the man Jesus, in the flesh. From the perspective of human-kind, relating to God, it means that the supreme and fullest possible knowledge of God is obtained by knowing the man Jesus as a person; and the only possible way to develop a relationship with God is by developing a relationship with Jesus. From the perspective of God the Father, the only means of revealing Himself to us, and reconciling us to Him, is through the man Jesus, the Son of Man. This is the practical significance of saying that the Word became flesh, a significance clearly and consistently taught throughout the New Testament.

Those like John, who were eyewitnesses, who came to know and to accept Jesus, saw the glory of the Father. They saw the wonderful and awesome revelation of God, a fullness of revelation that no one had ever seen before. It was a revelation of grace (unmerited favor and love) and truth (an uncovering of the meaning and the reality behind all that is).

John 1: 15-18 -- These final verses of the prologue summarize and re-emphasize the distinctiveness and superiority of Jesus relative to the Baptist (the greatest of prophets) or to Moses (the law-giver). Those who receive Jesus, receive the fullness of grace and truth. This is in stark contrast to the much more limited and partial revelation in the Law of Moses. No one, not even Moses, had ever really seen God. But Jesus was perfectly united with God the Father, He was in the bosom of the Father, and He was thus the perfect revelation of the Father. We thus return to the opening statement of this prologue: “the Word was God”.

L4 – Calling His Disciples -- John 1:19-51

John 1: 19-23 -- This section gives John the Baptist’s answers to those asking about who he was, and what was his mission. An official delegation from the Jewish leadership (the “Jews”) was sent to investigate, since the Baptist was acquiring a large following, and the “Jews” needed to know how to respond. He denied that he was either the Messiah, or Elijah (see Malachi 4:5-6) or the “Prophet” (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Instead, he claimed a more humble role: as “a voice crying in the wilderness…” (Isaiah 40:3-5), preparing the way.

John 1:24-28 -- They then asked him why he was baptizing, if he was not claiming the authority of either the Messiah, or Elijah or the Prophet. Up to that time, baptism was practiced only as a means of converting Gentiles into Jews -- “proselyte” baptism. It was offensive to the Jews to say that they should have any need to be baptized, and they wondered what authority the Baptist had for such a radical practice. This issue of authority was later raised in Matthew 21:23-27, where it is seen that the “Jews” did not accept the authority of John to baptize, but that “the people” did.

Here, in John 1:26-27, John the Baptist qualifies his baptism as being only “in water”, and points out that it is the One who will come later that is much greater, who will have all the authority that they are asking for. To untie the thong of a sandal was one of the lowliest of tasks, not to be performed by a disciple, but only by a slave. Yet the Baptist was not even worthy to perform this most humble form of slave-service to the One who was to come. It was to that One that he sought to direct their attention.

John 1:29-34 -- On the next day, John the Baptist personally identifies Jesus as this One whom he had been speaking of. He describes Him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. The most likely meaning of this phrase would be the fulfillment of the Passover lamb. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb delivered the Israelites from the judgment upon Egypt, and was the means of delivering them from Egypt to the promised land. Similarly, under the new covenant, a sacrifice for sin is required to deliver us from the reign of sin so we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This “Lamb of God” is probably also a reference to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who is like a sacrificial lamb (see Isaiah 53:7).

John the Baptist recognized that Jesus was this One, by the sign of the Holy Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove. There is little known background for the symbolism of a dove. It may be intended that we consider the dove that Noah released, which returned with an olive leaf, indicating that the flood waters were abating. This dove was thus a messenger of good news: of hope and peace. Regardless of prior symbolism, this was designated as the sign by which he knew that the Spirit rested upon Jesus, and remained with Him. The Baptist therefore knew that Jesus was the One who would baptize “in the Holy Spirit”, not merely with water (see also Matthew 3:11).

The Baptist then testifies (as a witness) that Jesus is “the Son of God”. This title has a wide range of meanings in scripture, but the most likely reference applicable here is in Psalm 2:

*“‘But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.’ I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.”* – Psalm 2:6-7. The Son of God was to be the anointed King, i.e. Messiah, who would rule over an everlasting kingdom.

John 1:35-42 – This next section (1:35-51) presents the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. A “disciple” is a student-follower, and Jesus eventually accumulated a large number of disciples. He later selected 12 of them to become “apostles”, which were the ones sent out with a very special commission. So we need to distinguish this initial calling to discipleship from the later selection of a few to become apostles (as described in Mark 3:13-19).

The first disciples were two of John the Baptist’s disciples: Andrew and another one that was unnamed (probably the apostle John). The Baptist pointed out the “Lamb of God” to them, and they immediately began following Jesus. Andrew then found his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus. Andrew’s statement that “we have found the Messiah” shows that from the time that they began to follow Jesus they believed Him to be the Messiah. But they had a lot yet to learn regarding what this really means, and in the process of learning, their faith was often tested.

Jesus then gave Simon a new name: Cephas (in Aramaic), or Peter (in Greek), meaning “rock”. This indicates that Jesus understood the heart of Simon, and that he would have a special role, as a new person who could be characterized as a “rock”. Jesus was exercising the authority of a master over his disciples in thus assigning a new name, and it was the same authority that God exercised when he renamed Abram, Sarai and Jacob.

John 1:43-51 – The next day, Jesus found Philip, and called him to discipleship; and Philip in turn found Nathanael, confessing that he had found “Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote…”. This was his way of referring to the Messiah. Nathanael was skeptical that such a good thing could come from Nazareth, perhaps indicating some rivalry between Bethsaida and Nazareth. Philip’s very appropriate response was “come and see”. Both Andrew and Philip are excellent examples of witnesses: ordinary people who accomplished extraordinary things by their witness. John will present several such examples in this Gospel.

Jesus’ greeting to Nathaniel, “behold an Israelite, in whom there is nothing false”, is likely a reference to Jacob. The name “Jacob” suggests a schemer and trickster, one seeking to gain advantage by worldly and deceitful means. This characterized much of Jacob’s life. But after his wrestling encounter with the Lord (Genesis 32:24-28), the Lord changed his name to

“Israel”, which means “strive with God”. This indicates a change from the worldly way of seeking success through scheming and trickery, to the way of seeking blessings from God. Jesus may be saying that Nathaniel has experienced that same kind of transformation: that he is an “Israelite”, in whom there is no “Jacob”. Nathaniel’s response, “How do you know me?” shows that Jesus’ comment was both meaningful and on the mark.

When Jesus replies that He had seen Nathaniel under the fig tree, Nathaniel immediately knows and confesses Him to be the Son of God, King of Israel. Whatever occurred under the fig tree must have been profoundly important to Nathaniel, and was apparently connected to the fact that Jesus knew him to be an “Israelite” and not a “Jacob”. A plausible explanation is that Nathaniel had a deep spiritual encounter with God, under the fig tree, comparable to that by which Jacob had become transformed into Israel. And Nathaniel realized that the only way Jesus could have known that is if He were indeed the “Son of God”.

Jesus then says that they will see much greater things than this as evidence for belief. “You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” This again is a reference to Jacob: his dream of a ladder on which angels were ascending and descending (Genesis 28:12-13). This was a picture of God’s active participation in fulfilling His promises, through Jacob. Jesus is now telling His disciples that in the same way the angels of God are ministering servants of God on our behalf, and that they will be ascending and descending on Jesus. Jesus is the ladder. Jesus is the means, or the mediator, through whom we have access to God, and through whom God is active in the world to bless His people and to fulfill His promises. His disciples will see this taking place, in the life of Jesus.

Jesus’ reply is the first use in John of the title “Son of Man”. This is the title that Jesus most often applies to Himself, and a title that no one else ever uses. It is a title much less frequently used than “Messiah” or “Son of God” in Jewish literature, which is why the disciples did not use it. That is probably also the very reason that Jesus Himself adopted it as His preferred title. The Jews had many false ideas about the Messiah, which had to be discarded, but they had few such pre-conceptions about “Son of Man”. It was therefore more effective for Jesus to talk about “the Son of Man”, and to teach them what it meant.

L5 – The First Sign and Temple Cleansing -- John 2:1-25

John 2: 1- 4 -- Jesus and his disciples were guests at a wedding feast in Cana, where they ran out of wine. This was a serious matter. A bridegroom had the solemn obligation to provide adequate food and drink at his wedding banquet. It was expected as a matter of reciprocity, in that everyone in the community were invited as guests to each other’s weddings, where the bridegroom provided the banquet and the guests brought gifts. If a bridegroom failed in this duty, it would seriously damage his reputation in the community. Beyond that, it was an issue of financial liability, which could be grounds for legal action.

Jesus’ mother was there, and informed Him of the problem, apparently with the expectation that He could and should do something about it. Jesus’ response, in verse 4, is literally: *“Woman, what to Me and to you?”* Addressing His mother as “woman” is polite and respectful in the original language, but it is nevertheless a strangely formal and reserved way to speak to one’s mother. It was a way of indicating that her relationship to Him, henceforth, was not primarily as mother, but rather as a disciple, among many disciples. This is reinforced by the phrase *“what to Me and to you?”,* which was a Hebrew idiom meaning “what is there between us?” or “what business do we have with each other?”

Jesus was making it clear that He is not and cannot take direction from His mother. He can attend to her requests, as He would to anyone’s requests, but He takes direction only from His Heavenly Father. This distancing from His mother is consistent with how He refers to her in Matthew 12:46-50, where He asks: *“who is My mother and who are My brothers?”*, and then identifies His disciples as His mother and brothers. This is not just an assertion of personal independence, it is the necessary assertion that everything He says and does is from the Father, and from no one else.

Jesus then makes the further comment: “*My hour has not yet come*.” This phrase appears also in John 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; and other references to “His hour” are in John 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1. From these verses, we see that “His hour” is the hour of His glorification on the cross. In the early phase of His ministry, He was cautiously hesitant to create public disturbances that could prematurely terminate His ministry. He knew He was headed towards the cross, but He first had to have time to teach and train His disciples. He knew that every miraculous sign would draw public attention, and bring Him closer to the end. And He could not allow His mother, or His brothers, or His disciples to push Him, before the time was right.

John 2:5-11 -- There were six stone waterpots, designated for purification rites, i.e. to store water for the ritual bathings spoken of in Leviticus 15. According to Jewish tradition, pots that had been consecrated for purification would become defiled if used for any other purpose. So, when the water became wine, the pots would no longer be useable for purification. Jesus was making a very definite, and controversial, statement: that ministry to the practical needs of people was more important than the observance of all the rules and regulations of Jewish traditions. It was the same kind of message as His comments on Corban (Mark 7:9-13), or when He performed healings on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17). The point was *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* – Mark 2:27.

This was His first sign. It manifested His glory, and His disciples believed. There are two ways in which His glory was manifested. It was first of all a demonstration of power and authority. He could not do such things if He were not from God. Secondly, the spiritual meaning, the content of the teaching, reveals grace and truth. He manifests a God of love and compassion, rather than a God of endless rules and regulations.

John 2:12-17 -- Jesus and His disciples then went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jews had come to Jerusalem from all corners of the known world to observe this feast, and to present guilt offerings (usually doves) at the temple (see Leviticus 5:7). Since it was a long journey for most people, and since the sacrificial animals and birds had to be approved by the priests as suitable for sacrificial offering, these animals were sold at the temple. And since the people came from many different nations, with different coinage, it was also necessary to exchange their money for the common coinage of the temple. These were all reasonable and practical accommodations for the convenience of the worshipers.

Some commentators have speculated that the moneychangers were taking unfair financial advantage of the people; but there is actually little evidence for that being the case. The more likely cause for Jesus’ outrage was more comprehensive. What was supposed to be an experience of worship, of communion with God in prayer, had degenerated into a superficial business enterprise. He was therefore consumed by zeal for God’s house, as in Psalm 69:9. Also: *“My zeal has consumed me, because my adversaries have forgotten Your words.”* – Psalm 119:139. His anger was directed not just to the money changers, but the entire temple system, and beyond that the entire institutionalized political system they represented: a system that had become utterly worldly, failing to reveal and serve the God whom they were supposed to glorify and serve.

John 2:18-22 -- The “Jews” then ask for a sign, to show that He has authority for this protest, and more specifically, Messianic authority to fulfill Psalm 69:9. This is similar to the previous occasion where the Jews asked John the Baptist about his authority to baptize (John 1:25). Jesus answered: *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”* (compare Matthew 12:38-40, regarding the sign of Jonah). No one could understand His meaning at that time, but His disciples later recognized that He was speaking of His body as the temple, and that this was the first foretelling of His death and resurrection.

John 2:23-25 -- While in Jerusalem, He apparently performed many unrecorded signs, and many people “believed” in Him. But Jesus did not “believe” in them. He knew their hearts, and knew that their belief was shallow, and not to be trusted. John teaches that there are various levels and depths of belief, and that the initial belief based on seeing “signs” was relatively weak and untrustworthy.

The sign at Cana demonstrates the principle that God desires compassion rather than sacrifice, love over ritual. And the cleansing of the temple reveals His wrath at what had become of His people, in their utter failure to fulfill His purpose. Just as chapter one introduced Jesus’ identity, chapter two introduces the nature of His ministry: a mission of confrontation and conflict that will lead to His glorification on the cross. Together, these two chapters set the tone and the agenda for the remainder of this Gospel.

L6 – The New Birth -- John 3:1-21

John 3: 1- 3 -- Nicodemus is identified as “of the Pharisees”, a sect that taught strict observance of both the written law of scripture and oral traditions. He was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the council that held ruling authority in religious matters. He came to Jesus, at night, which is most often thought to indicate he wanted the meeting to be in secret. John says later: *“many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue”* -- John 12:42

He acknowledges that Jesus must be a teacher from God, because of the signs He has performed. This is the first stage of belief. Jesus then immediately answers his unspoken question, which was apparently in regard to the kingdom. We know from the other gospels that Jesus’ teaching, especially in the beginning of His ministry, was primarily about the kingdom of heaven. The implied question from Nicodemus was to know more about this kingdom and how to enter.

Jesus’ answer is that one must be born again, in order to see the kingdom of God. The word for “again” can also mean “from above”, but the more usual translation of “again” is more compatible with Nicodemus’ response.

John 3:4-8 -- Nicodemus questions how this is possible. He raises the impossibility of re-entering his mother’s womb, which we should understand as a figurative way of asking how even a spiritual rebirth can be possible for a grown man. Jesus’ answer is that one must be born of water and Spirit. This is not a water birth plus a spirit birth; it is one birth that is of both water and spirit. Water refers to baptism, which had been practiced by the Jews to convert Gentiles (proselyte baptism), and more recently practiced by John, who testified that Jesus would baptize not only in water, but also in the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). That is the baptism Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus about.  It is a baptism that has the power of a new birth, because it is a baptism in the Spirit.

He explains further that “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” There is mystery in this, but no more than the mystery of the wind blowing, or the mystery of physical birth: *“Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.”*  -- Ecclesiastes 11:5. Every day of our lives, we must trust in the creative works of God that we can never fully understand.

John 3:9-15 -- Nicodemus claims that he still doesn’t understand. But Jesus sees that it is not a problem of intellectual capacity, but rather an issue of refusing to believe. Jesus therefore asserts that He speaks of what He knows, and that "our" testimony is true, and that Nicodemus simply refuses to accept the testimony. If Nicodemus is unwilling to accept the teachings regarding "earthly things" - i.e. what we must do in this age, on earth, to enter the kingdom, then how could he accept teachings about heaven itself? Jesus is saying that he must first accept and submit, by faith, to the spiritual new birth.  The necessary first step is the baptism in water and Spirit. Otherwise he will never see nor enter the kingdom, nor would he be able to learn anything more about the kingdom.

Only the Son of Man has seen heaven, so He is the only source of knowledge about heaven. Believing His testimony, having faith in Him, is the only way. But people were unwilling to fully believe. Therefore, just as the serpent had been lifted up by Moses as an object of faith (see Numbers 21:8-9), so the Son of Man must be lifted up as our object of faith. This will be the way not only for knowledge, but also for healing and for life.  His being "lifted up" would be necessary for instilling genuine saving faith. No other sign will suffice. Other references to being “lifted up” are in John 8:28 and 12:31-34. It is by this “sign” that people will finally believe, and thereby gain eternal life.

John 3:16-21 -- The style of the writing changes at this point, no longer referring to Jesus as “Son of Man”, but referring to Him as “the only begotten Son”, in the third person. This indicates a transition from Jesus' words to John's. “For God so loved the world…” tells us that God’s love is universal: it is for everyone. It does not teach a universalism of salvation, but it does teach a universalism of His love for all people, of all tribes and nations, and His earnest desire that none would perish.

The way that His love is expressed and executed and realized is in that “He gave His only begotten Son”. The words “only begotten” translate a Greek word meaning “only” or “unique”. It was used, for example, in speaking of Isaac in Hebrews 11:17. The meaning was that He is the Son in a very special and totally unique way. It is in this gift, more than anything else, that we can know the love of God, and that we can thereby know God. Those who open themselves up to Him, who place their trust in Him, who “believe into Him”, attain this personal knowledge that reconciles and unites them to God, in and through Jesus. This is the way of salvation and life. *“Those who believe in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

This was God’s purpose in sending His Son: to save the world, not to judge (see also John 12:47-48). The world is already under judgment, and it is therefore only by their refusal to believe, which amounts to a refusal of salvation, that non-believers remain under judgment.

John further explains that the reason people refuse to believe is that they love the darkness rather than the Light. They try to hide their evil deeds by avoiding the Light, to deny their sins by rejecting truth. But those who really value Truth, who are willing to humble themselves for the sake of truth and integrity, who practice the truth or live according to truth (see also 1 John 1:6), will be the ones who come to the Light. This requires humbling ourselves before God, as is taught several places in the books of wisdom: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”* -- Proverbs 1:7. What is finally decisive for belief or unbelief is not intellectual understanding, but rather this willingness to humbly “live by the truth”. Those are the ones who come to Jesus and who thereby find life.

L7 – The Baptist’s Final Testimony -- John 3:22 - 36

John 3: 22- 24 -- This section establishes the situation for the events and conversations that will follow. Jesus and His disciples were “in the land of Judea” – probably meaning the country districts of Judea (outside of Jerusalem). At this point, His preaching and teaching were similar to that of John: proclaiming the coming kingdom, and urging repentance (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). The baptisms performed by Jesus’ disciples at this time should be considered as of the same nature as John’s baptism: a baptism of repentance. The distinctive Christian baptism, in the Spirit, would not be initiated until Pentecost, after the resurrection.

John and his disciples were in “Aenon”. The location of this town is not definitively known, but the traditionally assumed site is in the Decapolis, about 50 miles North of where Jesus and His disciples were. Since these events are not mentioned in the other Gospels, John is pointing out that they occurred prior to his arrest.

John 3:25-30 -- Verses 25 and 26 provide specific background for the conversation that will follow. There was a dispute between John’s disciples and a “Jew” about purification. Consequently, they came to John with what sounds like a complaint: that Jesus is baptizing, and “all are coming to Him”. The dispute with the “Jew”, who was probably a Pharisee, may have been regarding the authority for John’s baptism (as in John 1:25), especially considering the alternative of Jesus’ baptism, which was now gaining a larger following. This would have led the disciples to raise this issue of “everyone” coming to Jesus to be baptized.

John’s answer shows that he accepts the fact that Jesus is gaining a larger following than himself. The first point is that Jesus’ followers must have been given “from heaven”. Secondly, he reminds his disciples that he had taught that he was not the Christ, but the one sent ahead of the Christ. Finally, he compares Jesus to the bridegroom at a wedding, and himself to the “friend” of the bridegroom. The “friend of the bridegroom”, the “shoshbin”, was similar to our present “best man”, but with more responsibilities for detailed preparations. In particular, he was one of the official witnesses, normally contributed financially to the wedding, and he was the one that brought the bride to the bridegroom. The bride belongs to the bridegroom, and the shoshbin rejoices in the marriage. The shoshbin steps aside, for the sake of the bridegroom. In like manner, Jesus must increase, but John the Baptist must decrease.

John the Baptist’s response and gracious attitude is an outstanding example for Christian ministry. We are witnesses, for the One who is greater than any of us. We are furthermore servants of one another. Our joy lies in our hope, which is the glorification of Christ, in the coming of His kingdom. Our joy is made complete, fulfilled, not in our personal success or glory, but in the realization of God’s will and purpose in others – in all those who are in Christ. This is what motivated John in his writings:

*“These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”* -- 1 John 1:4

This was also the attitude of Paul towards the Philippians:

*“make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”* Philippians 2:2

True Christian joy finds its fulfillment in others.

John 3:31-36 -- This section is most likely the words of the apostle John, providing further explanation of the difference between Jesus and the Baptist. John the Baptist was from the earth, he was of the earth, and he spoke of the earth (i.e. from the perspective of one who was of the earth). This is not a moral judgment against John, but simply a statement of his limitations, as a man of purely earthly origins. Jesus, however, came from above. He was from the heavenly Father, the only begotten of the Father. Therefore Jesus speaks and testifies of things that He has seen and heard that no one else has ever seen nor heard. This same distinction between earthly teachings and heavenly teachings had been made in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, in John 3:11-13. This is the basis of the superiority of Jesus to the Baptist.

This is also a distinction between John the Baptist, as one who was of the earth, and Christians, who are born from above, in Christ. This parallels the teaching of Luke regarding the Baptist:

*“among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”* -- Luke 7:28

The point is then made that many are unable to receive this heavenly testimony; but he who does, “sets his seal to this: that God is true”. At one level, this means that since God has spoken to us in His Son, our acceptance of the Son affirms that God has spoken the truth. But there is a more profound way by which accepting the Son affirms God’s truthful character. The Son revealed the glory of the Father, in that He was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). By accepting Jesus, we attribute His grace and truth to God. It is thus by knowing Jesus that we can genuinely say: “God is true.”

John then speaks of the essential role of the Spirit. Jesus spoke the words of God, because
God had given Him the Spirit “without measure”. For all prophets of the past, the Spirit was given only partially and temporarily. Even under the present new covenant, the gift of the Spirit that we have is in part. It was only for Jesus that there was no limit to this gift. This unlimited gift of the Spirit goes hand-in-hand with all things being given to Him. Examples of this are: all judgment (John 5:22, 27), life in Himself (John 5:26), His people and sheep (John 6:39; 10:29: 16:15; 17:6), and authority over all flesh (John 17:2).

Since life, and judgment, and all authority are given to Him, those who believe in the Son have eternal life, and those who do not, will not have life. The parallelism in verse 36 is informative:

He who believes in the Son ---- has eternal life

He who does not obey the Son ---- will not see life

This presents the consistent teaching from John that belief entails obedience; and disobedience corresponds to disbelief. There is no real belief without ensuing obedience. And this obedience of faith is the necessary and sufficient condition for eternal life.

L8 – The Samaritan Woman -- John 4:1 - 42

John 4: 1- 3 -- As stated in the previous chapter (3:26, 30), the baptizing ministry of Jesus was growing, and now exceeded that of John the Baptist. Jesus realized that He would therefore be drawing increased attention from the Jewish officials. In order to reduce the confrontations and opposition, at this early phase of His ministry, Jesus departed Judea to return to Galilee.

John 4:4 – John says “He had to pass through Samaria”. It wasn’t actually geographically necessary; there were alternate routes, which Jews would often take in order to avoid the Samaritans. But passing through Samaria was the fastest way to go from Judea to Galilee, and would be necessary if one were in a hurry. The most likely meaning here, though, is that this passage through Samaria was “necessary” as an important part of Jesus’ mission, because of what He would accomplish there.

They stopped at Sychar, which probably was the city of Shechem. The site presently identified as Jacob’s well, at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, is located about 250 feet from Shechem. See Genesis 33:18-20; 48:22 and Joshua 24:32, regarding Jacob’s gift of this land to Joseph. It was the “sixth hour”, which would be Noon.

John 4:7-9 – When Jesus asked the woman for a drink, she was quite surprised that a Jew could be asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. John’s statement that “Jews do not associate with Samaritans” should not be interpreted as absolute, because Jews and Samaritans did in fact have some association. For example, the disciples had gone into the city to buy food. The real point is that their dealings and interactions were limited in various ways. In particular, the Jews did not trust Samaritan women to maintain ritual purity, and therefore tried to avoid the kinds of contacts, such as sharing of utensils, that might make them “unclean”. Devout Jews would therefore not associate with Samaritan women. Jesus’ disregard for ritual purity in this encounter is similar to His disregard for the consecrated status of the purification water jars at the wedding in Cana. His mission and ministry take priority over these traditions.

John 4:10-14 -- Jesus offers the woman “living water”, which means water that is flowing, as in a river or from a spring, as opposed to water from a pond or cistern. It is water that is always fresh, supplied continually from an unlimited source. The living water that Jesus can give is special in that it becomes a spring within us, that never runs out, such that one will never thirst: a spring of water that supports eternal life. This living water fulfills the prophecies of Zechariah 14:8 and Ezekiel 47:6-12.

John 4:15-18 -- The woman, still thinking on the literal, physical level, asks for this water, so she will no longer need to return to this well. Jesus then leads her into the spiritual journey to obtain the living water. The first step is to honestly face and confess her sin, so He asks about her husband.

One interpretation is that she has had five husbands, who had divorced her, and is now living with a man that is not her husband. Another view is that the present man is her fifth husband, but Jewish tradition did not permit a woman to have more than three husbands, meaning that the fifth one does not count as a real husband. Either way, it was a case of sexual immorality.

John 4:19-24 -- Because of Jesus’ knowledge about her, she recognizes Him as a prophet (a situation similar to that of Nathaniel in John 1:47-49). She then changes the subject to a more comfortable topic: the dispute between Jews and Samaritans about the proper place to worship. Jesus first points out that the Jews have a more complete knowledge of God, such that their worship is better informed than that of the Samaritans. But the hour is coming, and now is, that the proper place to worship is not in any temple or holy mountain, but “in Spirit and truth”.

In this phrase, Spirit and truth are tightly linked together, as the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). And to be in Spirit-and-truth is to be under the influence and direction of the Spirit -- it is to have ears to hear the Spirit (as in Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). The proper condition for worship is not determined by a physical location, but by the disposition of the heart. And the essential point does not involve any special gift or altered state of consciousness, but an attitude of being receptive to the truth that the Spirit speaks to us. If we draw near to Him, with ears open to His voice, He will draw near to us. In these last days, when the Spirit is poured out upon God’s people, upon those baptized in the Spirit, the location for true worship is simply “in the Spirit”.

 John 4:25-26 -- Based on the authority of His teaching, the woman considers whether He might be the Messiah (Christ). Jesus’ answer is literally: “I, I am”, which is a way of saying “I am He”. This is the first record of Jesus revealing Himself as the Messiah.

John 4:27-30 -- When the disciples returned, they were amazed that Jesus had been speaking to this woman. It was considered highly improper for a rabbi to have an extended conversation with a woman. She then went back into the city and testified about this man that might be the Messiah, and the people responded by coming out to meet Him.

John 4:31-38 -- The disciples offered food to Jesus, but He said that He already had food. His food was to do the will and the work of the Father. This is an important example to us: spiritual nourishment is to be found in obedient ministry. He then quotes a proverb about the four months between seed-time and harvest, which speaks of the delay and time of waiting before one can begin the work of reaping. But He tells them that in the present case the reaping follows immediately after the sowing. The woman was sowing the seed in the city, and the people were already ripe for harvest. She had done the work of the sower, and Jesus and His disciples will immediately reap the harvest, and they will rejoice together. The task before them is urgent.

John 4:39-42 -- The response of the Samaritans illustrates two levels of belief: first the initial stage based on the woman’s testimony as a witness, and secondly the higher level based upon their personal encounter with Jesus. Their first impression may have been that He was surely a prophet. Their final realization is that He is the Savior of the world.

L9 – Two Healing Miracles -- John 4:43 – 5:16

John 4: 43 - 45 -- Jesus then proceeds to Galilee. The reason is given by quoting the proverb: “a prophet has no honor in his own country”. In the other gospels, this proverb is cited as the reason why Jesus could perform no miracles in Nazareth, and therefore went to other cities in Galilee (Matthew 13:57-58). In that case, “his own country” was the city of Nazareth. But in John, the situation and context are different: the proverb is given as the reason for departing Judea and going to Galilee. The initial statement of why He left Judea to go to Galilee was in John 4:1-2 -- the Pharisees in Judea were aware that Jesus was baptizing more people than John. His departure from Judea was apparently to avoid their persecution. So, in John, His own country, which did not honor Him as a prophet, was Judea. This is a particular case of what was presented in John 1:11 – “He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.” But in Galilee it was different. The people of Galilee welcomed Him, because they had seen the works He had performed in Jerusalem, during the Passover feast.

John 4:46 - 48 -- He then went to Cana, where He was met by a royal official (i.e. a servant of King Herod, tetrarch of Galilee). The official asked Jesus to heal his son, who was close to death. Jesus’ answer, “unless you (plural) see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe”, should not be regarded as harsh or insensitive. It is rather a general comment of disappointment -- that His message is not received for what it is, and He is not received for who He is, but He is compelled to perform these signs in order to stimulate faith. Although He was warmly received in Galilee, it was in most cases only as a “miracle-worker”.

John 4:49 – 54 -- After the official repeats his desperate plea, Jesus responds not by going down to Capernaum, as requested. He rather challenges the man’s faith by simply declaring that his son has been made well, without direct physical contact or presence. The official rises to this challenge, and departs, on the basis of believing what Jesus said. This faith in what He says, however, is still not at the same level as the saving faith of “believing into His name”. It is a faith in Jesus as a miracle-worker, not yet a faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.

On the next day, as the official was approaching Capernaum, his servant met him, and he discovered that the healing occurred precisely at the time Jesus had declared it so. “Yesterday at the seventh hour” would have been 1:00 pm. The distance from Cana to Capernaum was 25 miles, which is about a 1 ½ days journey. So it is likely that he stopped somewhere along the way for the night, then continued to Capernaum on the next day. As a consequence, “he himself believed…”, which indicates that his faith was confirmed and strengthened by seeing the evidence from this “sign”. By this time, Jesus had performed many signs (John 2:23; 3:2), but this was the second one that occurred in Galilee after arrival from Judea.

John 5:1-4 -- At some later time, Jesus then returns to Jerusalem for another feast. The major feasts were Passover, Pentecost, Purim, and Tabernacles. This is supposedly one of these, but it is not known which. The pool of Bethesda was just outside the “Sheep gate” of the city. It was about the size of a football field, and 20 feet deep, with five covered porches (one on each side and one in the middle, separating it into two pools). There seems to have been a popular cult, referred to in John 5:3-4, regarding special healing properties, that were effective whenever the water “stirred” (perhaps from water coming in from a spring). But this belief would have had no official standing in the orthodox Jewish faith, and it certainly is not endorsed or confirmed in this Gospel.

John 5:5-9 -- This healing is unusual in that Jesus takes the initiative, and the person healed has no faith; indeed, he had no idea who Jesus was. Jesus first asks if he wants to get well. This is a reasonable question, since the man had been ill for 38 years, and in many cases a person accustomed to a life-time of begging would not be able to make a living if they were healed. The man’s answer implies that he does want to get well, in that he offers the explanation for why he has been unable to enter the healing waters.

Jesus then simply commands him to “get up, pick up your pallet and walk” (which is similar to the healing of a paralytic in Matthew 9:6). In a case like this, where the person has no faith, and where there is no physical contact or special ritual procedure, nor even a spoken prayer, the healing clearly and forcefully demonstrates the effectual authority of Jesus’ spoken word. The following discourse shows that the issue of His authority is the primary teaching point of this sign. To introduce the following controversies, it is mentioned that this was on the Sabbath.

John 5:10 – 13 -- The “Jews” (meaning the authorities, probably Pharisees) then see the man carrying his pallet, and remind him that it is a violation of Sabbath regulations. The man answered that it was the one who healed him that told him to carry the pallet, but that he didn’t know who it was.

John 5:14-16 -- Later, Jesus meets the man (in the temple) and tells him to sin no more. Physical illnesses were not always a consequence of a person’s sin (see e.g. John 9:1-3), but in this case Jesus seems to be saying that it was, and therefore gives him this warning. The man seems, however, to be totally ungrateful (or extremely naive), for he then reports Jesus to the “Jews”. The result was that the “Jews” began persecuting Jesus for doing such things on the Sabbath.

L10 – Honor the Son, to Honor the Father -- John 5:17 – 47

John 5: 17 - 18 -- In this discourse, Jesus presents the most complete explanation of His relationship to God. To defend His doing works on the Sabbath, He points out that the Father is also still working, which was a teaching acceptable to the Jews. But what they were unwilling to accept was the way Jesus referred to Him as My Father, claiming a totally unique sonship. It was on the basis of this unique Father-Son relationship that Jesus justifies His doing good works on the Sabbath. Because of this, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him.

The Sabbath-breaking by itself was cause for opposition and persecution, but when He claimed God as His own Father, they took much greater offense, and therefore sought His death. They said He was “making Himself to be equal to God”. It is true that He is equal to God in His being (as taught in John 1:1). However, it was not true that He was making Himself equal to God, nor that He was equal to God in “rank” for exercising authority. In fact, the remainder of this chapter is a refutation of their claim that He was “making Himself equal to God”.

John 5:19-23 -- Jesus says that the Son does nothing by Himself; that is, He does nothing from His own initiative. Everything He does follows what He has seen the Father doing. Jesus is clearly stating that He is subordinate to the Father in all that He does. He is not of equal “rank” to the Father in this regard, nor does He seek to be. This is similar to the relationship of a son that learns the trade of his father, as an apprentice. He observes what his father does, as a master workman, and then follows his example. That is what Jesus is doing as He does the work of the heavenly Father. And because of the intimate loving relationship between Jesus and the Father, the Father shows Him everything that He does.

In the future, there will be much greater works that the Father will show Him: giving life to the dead, and executing judgment. These works, regarded as uniquely the works of God, are being handed over to the Son. As a result, those who see such works will honor the Son, as they honor the Father; and if they refuse to honor the Son, they will be refusing to honor the Father. The Jews had claimed that Jesus was dishonoring God by taking upon Himself the works of God. But, to the contrary, Jesus tells them that when they refuse to accept the Son, they are dishonoring the God and Father who sent Him.

John 5:24-30 -- Jesus then further explains His works of life and judgment. He first of all gives life to those who hear (i.e. accept) His word, which indicates that they believe the One who sent Him. This is the life and the salvation that “now is”, the power of the kingdom in the present. The one who believes and accepts Him thereby passes out of death into life. Jesus then says that “an hour is coming and now is” when those who hear will live. This points to the two phases of salvation: 1) the beginning of eternal life, being born again, when we first believe; and 2) the bodily resurrection on the Day of the Lord.

In addition to giving life to the dead, He has been given the authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Judgment is a necessary adjunct to giving eternal life, for there can be no secure eternal life without full and final destruction of all sin and evil. Furthermore, He is given this authority of judgment because He is the “Son of Man”. Two points are significant about the “Son of Man”. First, the reference in Daniel 7:13, where it says that one like a Son of Man will reign over the everlasting kingdom. To reign implies having the authority of judgment, particularly the judgment required to establish the kingdom. Secondly, mankind was intended from the beginning to exercise dominion over all things. To be consistent with this original intention for mankind, it is necessary that the everlasting kingdom be ruled by a “Son of Man”. In verse 30 is the final reminder that all He does is from the initiative and the will of the Father, and that therefore His judgment is righteous.

John 5:31-32 -- In the remainder of this chapter, Jesus identifies the witnesses to Him, which shows that He has not “made himself” anything; but others, as witnesses, have validated His claims. In verses 31 and 32, He states the legal principle that His own testimony would not be acceptable evidence unless verified by other witnesses. He then says that there is “another” who testifies “and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true.” The emphasis here, in verse 32, is concerning how Jesus Himself is convinced of the truth about Himself. It is by the testimony of “another”, who is the Father Himself. From Jesus’ own perspective, the Father is the supreme authoritative witness that convinces Him of the truth about Himself.

John 5:33-35 -- Jesus then refers to the witness of John the Baptist. This is a testimony that Jesus Himself did not rely upon, but it was a testimony that was of value to others. The Baptist served as a lamp that was burning for a while, which enlightened his followers. He was a lamp that directed people to the true Light.

John 5:36-40 -- One of the testimonies that is greater than the Baptist are the works that the Father had given Him to do. Those works testify that He was sent from the Father (as was recognized by Nicodemus, John 3:1-2). Secondly, there is the testimony directly from the Father Himself. He says that they (the “Jews’) have not received this testimony. They have neither heard His voice nor seen His form, and they do not have His word abiding in them. If they did, they would have believed the Son that the Father had sent. Similarly, even though they search the scriptures, which testify of Jesus, they still do not believe. They had failed to truly apprehend and accept the word of God. His word did not abide in their hearts.

John 5:41-44 -- The decisive factor in whether people receive the truth of God’s word is whether they seek glory and approval from God or from men (see also John 12:42-43). It all depends upon whom you love and from whom you seek approval.

John 5:45-47 -- He then refers them to Moses, whom they claimed to honor above all other prophets, and in whom they had set their hope. Jesus says that they in fact disbelieve and dishonor Moses, by rejecting the One whom Moses had prophesied. Therefore it will be Moses who will accuse them. Just as Paul had taught in the letter to the Romans that people are condemned according to their own conscience and their own standards, Jesus is telling the “Jews” that they stand condemned by disbelieving and disobeying the Moses they honored and in whom they had placed their trust. This conclusion serves as both an admonition and an encouragement to the Christians of Asia who first received this gospel: that those who reject Jesus, the Messiah, were in fact rejecting the Jewish faith and the Law.

L11 – Feeding the 5,000 and Walking on the Water -- John 6:1 – 21

John 6: 1- 4 -- The location of this event is given as “the other side of the Sea of Galilee..”, which suggests the eastern side. That would be consistent with Luke 9:10, which gives the location as Bethsaida. The Sea of Galilee was also given the Roman name “Tiberias”, which was the name it was more commonly known by at the time that this gospel was written. The comment about the Passover being near is probably to introduce the purpose and intended meaning of this miracle, given in the discourses that follow: regarding manna in verses 31-35, and the bread of life in verses 48-58.

John 6:5–9 – When Jesus asks Philip where they can buy bread, He does so “to test him”, i.e. as a teacher poses a question to a student, to engage him more deeply in the learning process. He may have singled out Philip because he was from Bethsaida (John 1:44). A denarius is one-day’s wages for a laborer, which is just enough to feed a family for a day. So 200 denarii, which would be a large amount of money, would still not be nearly enough to satisfy 5,000 families. It would be totally impossible for them to buy food to satisfy this crowd.

Andrew found a young boy who had five barley loaves and two fish (dried fish). In Mark 6:38, we see that Jesus had asked the disciples to go and look for food, and this was all they could find (see also Luke 9:13).

John 6:10-15 -- Jesus then gave thanks, and distributed the loaves and the fish to the people. In Mark 6:41, it is explained that this was done through the disciples. Giving thanks acknowledges God as the one who provides. It is emphasized that there was more than enough to satisfy everyone, and the 12 baskets of left-overs were gathered up so that nothing would be wasted. When the people saw this sign, they knew that Jesus was “the Prophet who is to come”, i.e. the prophet who would be like Moses, but greater than Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). But Jesus could see that they had intentions of forcing Him to become a king, and He therefore withdrew from them.

This should be compared to the similar miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44. In a time of famine, a man brought 20 loaves of barley to Elisha, to be given to the people to eat.

*“His attendant said ‘will I set this before a hundred men?’ But Elisha said ‘give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the Lord: They shall eat and have some left over’. So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord.”*

As had also been the case with the manna in the wilderness, the recurring theme is that the Lord can provide.

John 6:16-21 --

In Mark 6:45-46 there is a more complete explanation: Jesus sent the disciples to go ahead of Him to the other side of the sea, while He sent the crowd away, and went up the mountain to pray. So the disciples were crossing over to Capernaum, and the sea became stirred up by a strong wind.

After rowing about 3 or 4 miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, drawing near to them; and they were frightened. Again, Mark provides more information: that they thought they were seeing a ghost, and were therefore terrified at the appearance. It was a common superstition that ghosts of those who had drowned would sometimes appear on the sea. Jesus assures them by identifying Himself, with the phrase “I, I am”. John then adds an important detail that is not in Matthew or Mark: that when He entered the boat, they immediately arrived at the shore.

This sign is an epiphany – a manifestation of God. Only God walks upon the waters:

*“Who alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea”* - Job 9:8. In Mark 6:51-52 it is said that *“they were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves.”* Even His disciples did not understand from the feeding of the 5,000 that He was much more than a prophet. But this sign, walking upon the waters, utterly amazed them. It was a manifestation that He was God.

L12 – The Bread of Life -- John 6:22 – 71

John 6: 22-25 -- On the next day, the crowd sought Jesus, knowing that the disciples had left in a boat, without Him. So they departed in boats to Capernaum, where they found Him.

John 6:26-34 -- Jesus says they are seeking Him for the wrong reasons. They did not have a true faith based on the sign of the multiplied loaves; they were merely seeking a continuing supply of food. It was customary for political leaders to gain popular support by supplying free food to the people; this is what they were expecting from Jesus. He challenges them to seek instead the food that brings eternal life, by believing in Him.

The crowd then demands a “sign” -- that He provide manna from heaven as Moses had done in the wilderness. They cite scripture, probably Psalm 78:24 and Exodus 16:4,15. Jesus answers that the manna was not from Moses, but from “My Father”, who gives true bread, that gives life to the world. The people then ask Him for this bread. This is similar to Jesus’ previous conversation with the Samaritan woman, where He offers living water (John 4:13-15).

John 6:35-40 -- Jesus then identifies Himself as the true bread of life. He then explains that they do not believe, but assures them that He will not cast out anyone whom the Father gives to Him. The Father’s will is that the Son will not lose anyone who believes in Him, and that the Son will raise them up on the last day (i.e. the resurrection to eternal life). And we furthermore have the assurance that the Son is totally faithful and obedient to the Father’s will.

John 6:41-47 -- The people grumbled about this, because they had known him as the son of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth, and would not accept that He “came down out of heaven”. Jesus’ answer is that no one can accept Him unless they are led by the Father. It had been prophesied about God’s people in the coming kingdom: *“They shall all be taught of God”* – Isaiah 54:13. But these people in Capernaum did not believe, because they had refused God’s teaching; they had rejected the witness of the Father (see John 5:37-38).

John 6:48-51 -- Jesus then repeats: “I am the bread of life”. This is one of the seven “I AM” statements of Jesus’ identity. This bread differs from the manna in the wilderness: those who ate the manna, later died; but those who eat this living bread will not die. The Greek word for “eat” is in the aorist tense, indicating a once-for-all single act of receiving Christ. He then says that this bread, given for the life of the world, is His flesh. This is a shocking statement.

The traditional interpretation of the manna was that it represented God’s word, particularly the Torah. This was taught in Isaiah 55:1-3, 10-11, is further suggested in Deuteronomy 8:3, and is also the interpretation given in Matthew 16:11-12. Now, however, Jesus was saying that it was His flesh. This is the same extraordinary claim as in the prologue: *“and the Word became flesh”* - John 1:14. The perfect and final revelation of God is in the person of Jesus, in the flesh. Furthermore, the phrase “given for the life of the world” points to the sacrificial offering of His flesh upon the cross. The Greek preposition translated as “for” is *“huper”*, which John consistently uses with a substitutionary meaning. His flesh was not given just as a nourishment to sustain life, but rather as a substitutionary sacrifice of His life for ours.

John 6:52-59 -- The people cannot understand or accept this. But Jesus’ answer is to re-state His claim even more forcefully: *“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.”* This is deliberately crude, offensive and provocative. Jesus wants to shock them into recognizing how radical His message is – that they have to totally change their ideas about the Messiah and the Kingdom. This points to His death as a sacrifice, and the demand that they must accept and embrace that sacrifice. Accepting and partaking of this flesh and blood sacrifice is the only way to abide in Him, and is therefore the only way to partake of His life (see Romans 6:5).

John 6:60-65 -- Many of the disciples found this too difficult – not just difficult to understand, but difficult to accept. He then says that if they find this difficult, what about when they see “the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” This is referring to the final “sign”: His crucifixion and resurrection. That will be the ultimate challenge, which will separate those who accept and believe from those who will not.

It is by the Spirit, by being of the Spirit, that people can believe and accept Him; but those who are according to the flesh, who set their minds on the things of the flesh (the world), will not believe (compare Romans 8:5-8). Being led by the Spirit corresponds to what He had said previously about being drawn to Him by the Father.

John 6:66-71 -- As a result, many disciples turned away from Him. They were “of the flesh”, and could therefore not accept such teaching. He then asks the twelve if they will also leave, and Peter answers for them: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”*. Those who really knew Him, who were open to the Holy Spirit, were committed to Him, and would not leave. Even though there were many things they could not understand, they realized that Jesus was truly from God, and believed in Him as the Holy One, who spoke “words of eternal life.” In contrast to this confession, John points out that Jesus was aware that one of the twelve, Judas, did not share that faith: he was a devil (enemy) who would betray Him.

In this discourse, John shows us that when the gospel is clearly delivered, it presents such a radical challenge that people cannot be lukewarm or neutral in their response: they are driven to either violently reject it, leading to death, or to eagerly embrace it, resulting in life. The word of God is a sharp two-edged sword, that judges and divides.

There are considerable differences of opinion about how this discourse relates to the Lord’s Supper. We propose that *“He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood”* is one who fully accepts and embraces the sacrifice of Jesus, and becomes spiritually united with Him on the cross, dying with Him, in order to also be united with Him in the resurrection of life. That is the primary teaching here. But, secondarily, this spiritual union with Christ is symbolically represented by eating the bread and drinking the wine of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is not a “sacrament” that in itself is essential to eternal life, but it is rather an ordinance, an ordained ritual-prayer, by which we maintain and strengthen our bond of unity with Christ. *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing”.* And it is that spiritual bond with Him, in His death and resurrection, which is essential to eternal life.

L13 – Teachings at the Feast of Booths -- John 7:1 – 52

John 7: 1-9 -- Jesus continued in Galilee, since the “Jews” in Judea were seeking to kill Him. The tense of “seeking” is continuous: they persistently kept on seeking to kill Him. The Feast of Booths (tabernacles) was now at hand, which was six months after the feeding of the 5,000 and the teachings in chapter 6. His brothers urged Him to go with them to the feast, to promote Himself publicly in Jerusalem. They were thinking in a rather worldly manner, like campaign advisors to a politician. John’s explanation for their attitude, in verse 5, is that they were not believing in Him. The imperfect tense shows that their unbelief was a continuing attitude.

This illustrates what it really means to “believe”. Even though His brothers had faith in Him as a miracle-worker, and wanted Him to “succeed” in what they considered to be His mission, they were in fact non-believers. They did not understand Jesus’ true mission, nor did they submit to His judgment on how He should perform His mission. As long as they were trying to tell Him what to do, it showed that they did not fully accept Him as Lord, and therefore did not fully understand and accept who He really was. Jesus’ response was that it was not the proper time for Him to go up to Jerusalem, since He was hated by the world. But they should go; the time is always right for them, since they are not hated, and no one is seeking to kill them.

 John 7:10-13 -- After His brothers had gone (to Jerusalem), He later left, but not publicly. Most of the people went to the feasts in large caravans, in a very public pilgrimage. Jesus knew that if He joined such a group, He would receive much more attention than He should, earlier than He should. It would likely lead to His arrest before the proper time. He therefore went to Jerusalem later, privately. The crowds in Jerusalem were looking for Him, and there was “muttering” about Him: some defending and others opposing Him. These disputations were hushed, however, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities.

John 7:14-18 -- Jesus found His opportune time in the midst of the feast, where He began to teach openly, in the temple. It was a place with large crowds, where many of the people would be sympathetic: a situation where the officials would be reluctant to arrest Him. The people were astonished to hear such teaching from an “uneducated” man (i.e. one who had not received formal instruction from a Rabbi). This is similar to observations made in the other gospels (Matthew 7:28,29; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:32), where people were amazed at His wisdom and the authority with which He spoke. Jesus’ explanation is that the teaching was not His own, but “His who sent Me”. Anyone willing to do God’s will, would be able to discern if the teaching is of God. This principle was also stated in John 3:21; 5:37-38, 42-44; 6:44-45.

John 7:19-24 -- Jesus then confronts them with Moses, to convict them according to the Law of Moses, which they claim to honor (as in John 5:45-47). He asks why they seek to kill Him, for the “one deed” of healing on the Sabbath (John 5:2-9, 18). His argument is that the Law allows circumcision on the Sabbath; therefore healing an entire man on the Sabbath must also be according to the intent of the Law. This is to judge according to righteous judgment.

John 7:25-31 -- There then arose disputes among the people: some wondering why the authorities who wanted to kill Him were doing nothing. They then raised the issue of His origins. They knew where He was from (Nazareth of Galilee), but it was generally thought that the Messiah would simply make an appearance without any known origin. He then exclaims: “So, you think you know Me and where I am from?” He answers that He is from the One who sent Him, whom they do not know. As a result, some of them tried to seize Him, but were unable to, because “His hour had not yet come”. Others, however, believed in Him.

John 7:32-36 -- As a result of the crowd’s mutterings, the authorities sent officers to seize Him. Jesus then says He will “go to Him who sent Me”, and that they would not be able to find Him. The Jews didn’t understand, and thought He may be planning to go to the “Dispersion”, i.e. Jewish settlements among the Gentiles, outside of Israel. Just as they could not understand where He was from, they could not understand where He would return.

John 7:37-39 -- On the last day of the feast, at the climax, Jesus delivered the core of His teaching. Anyone who is thirsty, may come to Him and drink, and he who believes in Him will have rivers of living water flowing from his inner being. This is the same as His promise to the Samaritan woman in John 4:10, 14. Here, John explains that He is speaking of the Spirit. The Spirit, as the source of life, is represented by living water. John furthermore points out that the Spirit could not be given until after Jesus’ glorification (i.e. crucifixion and resurrection). The scripture that Jesus cites, about living water, is not clear, but possible references may be Isaiah 44:3; 58:11; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Joel 2:28-29; 3:18; Zechariah 14:8-9.

*“In that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem…”* -- Zechariah 14:8

Later in this gospel (John 19:34), this living water of the Spirit is represented by the water that flowed from Jesus’ side.

The traditions of the Feast of Booths provide important background and context to these teachings. During each day of the feast, there was a procession carrying water from the pool of Siloam, through the Water Gate, to the temple, where the priests would pour out the water at the base of the altar. This ceremony was accompanied by prayers asking for rain for the coming season. In the midst of these prayers and rituals, Jesus makes the dramatic claim that they will receive the prophesied living waters within themselves, if they believe in Him.

John 7:40-44 -- As usual, the peoples’ response was divided. Some of them believed Him to be the Prophet, others that He was surely the Christ. Others, however, thought that He could not be the Christ, since the Christ must come from Bethlehem. And, again, there were those who tried to seize Him, but they were unable.

John 7:45-52 -- The officers, that had been sent to arrest Him, reported back to the chief priests and Pharisees that “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks”. These Jewish leaders then scoff at them, for being taken in by His teaching. Nicodemus ventures a defense for Jesus, by pointing out that they cannot judge Him without first hearing Him. This provokes an insulting and intimidating response from the leaders, asking if he too was from Galilee. John here reveals the nature of the opposition: that they were determined to kill Jesus, in defiance of reason and in defiance of the Law.

L14 – The Adulteress / The Light of the World -- John 8:1 – 30

John 8: 1-6a -- It is generally recognized that this narrative (John 7:53 – 8:11) is not part of the original gospel of John. It is in none of the earlier manuscripts, it does not fit well into the flow of the surrounding text, and its style and vocabulary are different from the rest of John’s writings. Stylistically, it has more in common with the other three gospels than with John. Some manuscripts placed this section in the gospel of Luke (after Luke 21:38), but it doesn’t really belong there either. However, the internal evidence indicates that it is of early origin, contemporary with the rest of the New Testament, and it should be accepted as scripture.

Jesus is teaching in the temple, and the “scribes and Pharisees” brought to him a woman caught in adultery. They say she was caught in the very act, and point out that according to the Law she should be stoned (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22). They ask Jesus what He thinks should be done, in order to have grounds for accusing Him. This is similar to the testing of Jesus found in Mark 12:14-15, regarding payment of taxes. If He said they should stone her, it would violate Roman law and authority, for two reasons: only Rome could execute capital punishment, and by Roman law adultery was not a capital offense. But if He said not to stone her, He would be charged before the Sanhedrin with teaching against the Law of Moses.

John 8: 6b – 11 -- Jesus’ response was to write something on the ground, and He then said: “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” The significance of his “writing” on the ground is unclear, but He could be observing the Roman tradition whereby a judge would first write a sentence before reading it aloud. His answer is that the execution of judgment must be by someone “without sin”.

This is often interpreted to mean that no one can execute judgment, because no one is “without sin”. This, however, is not a proper understanding. The New Testament upholds the right of government to execute judgment, and the Law of Moses taught that the Israelites must enforce the law, even though they are not totally sinless. The proper interpretation of “without sin” in this context is that those who act as judges or executioners, must do so in an honorable manner, in good faith, in accordance with the law. There are several ways in which these accusers are indeed at fault, violating both the spirit and the letter of the Law.

Firstly, the law, in both Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22, prescribe the death penalty for both the man and the woman. So why did they not also bring the man? Secondly, just how were they able to “catch her in the act “? We must suppose that she had been set up, as a kind of “sting” operation. The man she was with would have been part of the operation, and so he was let go. A plausible scenario could be that her husband wanted to get rid of her, and considered this approach financially preferable to a divorce. With a divorce, she would keep her own money. But if she were executed, he would inherit and keep everything. In order to accomplish this, he enlisted “witnesses” to the set-up, and those witnesses were guilty as accomplices in the treachery. The scribes and Pharisees then used this as an opportunity to trick Jesus, as part of their plot to have Him accused and executed. In all of this, the accusers violated the standards of justice of both Rome and the law of Moses.

Jesus then continued writing, perhaps more specific judgments against the accusers. As a result, they were convicted in their consciences, and could not follow through with the plot. The older ones saw more readily what was happening, and decided they wanted to have nothing more to do with it. In the end, there were none left to accuse her. Jesus then said that neither would He condemn her. This should not be understood as “forgiveness” with respect to sin, but rather as mercy with respect to punishment. His admonition, then, is “go, and sin no more.” As with anyone, repentance must precede forgiveness. This is a valuable example of the mercy and righteousness of Jesus, as contrasted to the evil motives of His enemies.

John 8:12- 20 -- At some later time, Jesus resumes his teaching in the temple treasury (see John 8:20). He now makes one of the important “I AM” declarations: that He is the Light of the world. The Pharisees recognize this as an extraordinary claim, so they question its validity. Even if a claim is true, it is not legally valid unless supported by testimony from others. It was socially as well as legally improper for a person to make claims about himself.

Jesus’ answer is that His testimony is nevertheless true, even without other witnesses. He knows His own origin, and He knows where He is going. But they do not know, nor can they know, because they are of the flesh, and judge according to the flesh (i.e. from a worldly perspective). Furthermore, Jesus says He is not alone in His judgment: that his Father, who sent Him, also testifies to Him. He says that His own testimony and that of His Father constitute the two witnesses required by Law. But, as He had said previously (John 5:37-38), they do not believe, because they do not know the Father.

John 8:21-30 -- This section summarizes the recurring theme that to have life, the following steps are required: 1) receive the testimony from the Father; 2) accept Jesus' teachings; 3) believe in Him (into His name); 4) abide in Him, to know Him; 5) thereby know the Father.

Jesus' opponents were unable to take the first step, because they are "from below", or “of this world” (see John 3:31; 1 John 4:5). Because of this, they will not be able to follow where He is going (i.e. to the Father). Instead, they will die in their sins.

They are offended by this accusation, and ask: "who are you!" Jesus' response in verse 25 is literally: "the beginning that which I speak". This is quite difficult to interpret, and there are a wide variety of translations. One plausible translation that fits the context is: "To begin with, (accept) that which I speak (teach)."  This is to say that the foundation for a saving faith is the content of all His teachings. Like Peter, we follow Him because He has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). It is only then, by following Him, that we come to know Him.

This is similar to the response that God gave to Moses from the burning bush, when Moses asks for His name. God’s answer was: "I AM".  God cannot be defined by a name. He cannot be placed into any conceptual category, for there is none like Him. He can be known only by experiencing Him through His deeds. It is the same with Jesus. We can know who He is only through the personal experience of abiding in Him, and that begins with accepting what He has to say.

L15 – The Truth Will Make You Free -- John 8:31 – 59

John 8: 31-33 -- Here we see the stages of growth of faith. Jesus was speaking to those who already “believed Him”; but they were only believing things that He said, not yet putting their trust in Him. The next step is to continue in His word – to walk according to the teachings, and thus prove themselves as true disciples. The consequence of persevering discipleship, is that they would know the truth, and would thereby be made free.

The particular meanings of “knowing truth” and “being free”, must be carefully defined. To know truth is more than just knowing the facts. It is the deeper understanding that discerns the reality behind appearances. It is the ability to see underlying meaning and destiny. The term “revelation” pertains to this, revealing the truth behind the things that are seen. This level of knowledge comes only from knowing God, as a person; and it is made possible only by knowing Jesus. If you abide in His word, you will acquire this kind of knowledge of truth.

To be “free” is to have the social status or standing of a free person, rather than a slave – a status generally conferred by ancestry. “Free” persons have the right and the responsibility to make decisions, and knowing “truth” qualifies and enables one to act as a free person, to make intelligent decisions. A slave, on the other hand, is expected to simply obey orders, and is not necessarily expected to understand their meaning or purpose. Jesus made a similar distinction in John 15:15, where He revealed things to His disciples because they are friends, rather than slaves. Similarly, by becoming the adopted children of God (John 1:12; Galatians 4:4-7), we acquire the status of a free person, rather than a slave. It should further be noted that being set free by knowing the truth is the work of the Spirit. He is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17: 15:26; 16:13), and as such, He makes us free (Rom 8:2, 14-17; 2 Corinthians 3:17).

To summarize, the sequence of events are:

    Believe Him (his words)

    Abide in His word, to be true disciples

    Know the truth (by the Spirit of truth), to be set free

The Jews took offense at this, because He was basically “demoting” them to slaves, and saying that they had to become His disciples in order to become free persons. They took pride in themselves as already being free, because of their heritage as descendants of Abraham. They were the children of promise, and to imply that they were slaves was insulting.

John 8:34-38 -- Jesus then responds with two points. First, those who are sinners are slaves of sin, a teaching also found in Rom 6:16; 7:14, 23-25; 2 Peter 2:19. Secondly, even though they were physically descended from Abraham, their behavior shows that they have another spiritual father whom they listen to. Jesus speaks the things of His heavenly Father; but they seek to kill Him, because they are obeying another father.

He also comments on the distinction between a son and a slave, in that a son abides in the house forever, while a slave does not. This pertains to both our eternal life as sons, and to the power of the Son to grant eternal freedom. A similar distinction is made in Hebrews 3:5-6 between Jesus’ status as the Son, and Moses’ status as a servant.

John 8:39-47 -- The Jews continue to assert that they are children of Abraham, and Jesus continues his argument, that their opposition to him, and especially their seeking to kill Him, shows that they are not truly of Abraham, for this is something Abraham would never do. This same point was made by Paul in Romans 9:7 – *“nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children.”*

They then claim that they were not born of fornication, but have one Father, God. The reference to fornication probably pertains to idolatry (spiritual adultery). They claim to be the spiritually faithful people of God. Jesus counters, again, that this cannot be, for they are opposing the word of God that Jesus speaks. They are unable to recognize and receive God’s word, because their father is actually the devil. They are like the devil, in that he was a murderer from the beginning, and a liar. Calling him a murderer “from the beginning” could be speaking of his tempting Eve, leading to death for mankind. It could also be referring to his role in leading Cain to commit the first specific murder, as indicated in 1 John 3:12 -- *“…Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother.”* And Jesus’ statement that “*because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me*” shows that they are of the “father of lies”. This repeats the idea of John 3:20 – *“everyone who does evil hates the Light.”*

John 8:48-59 -- The Jews then accuse Jesus of being a “Samaritan” and having a demon. Charging him with being “a Samaritan” is primarily a means of casting an insult, but it could also have more specific reference to the Samaritan view that the Jews have no exclusive claim to being God’s chosen. To say that he has a demon probably does not mean they think he is actually possessed by a demon, but rather that he is mentally deranged. Jesus counters by saying that He honors the Father in the things that He says. Furthermore, he does not seek His own glory, but that it is the Father who seeks and judges.

He then repeats the claim that “if anyone keeps My word he will never see death” (see John 5:24; 6:63; 8:31). The Jews think this is insane, for even Abraham died; how can Jesus claim to be greater than Abraham? Jesus takes up this challenge, and says that “Abraham rejoiced to see My day…”. The likely meaning here is not some specific vision or revelation, but rather the persevering faith of Abraham: his assured hope that his descendants would possess the holy land, and would become a blessing to all nations. Abraham rejoiced in this hope, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is in that sense that Abraham “rejoiced to see My day”.

When they question how Jesus could have seen Abraham, He answered: “before Abraham was, I AM.” This is the clearest claim to deity that Jesus had yet made, and the Jews clearly understood it. They considered it the height of blasphemy, and therefore tried to stone Him. This section began with Jesus proclaiming “I AM the light of the world” (John 8:12), highly suggestive of divinity, and now concludes with the definitive assertion: I AM. The acceptance or rejection of this testimony is a matter of life and death, and we see that the majority of “Jews” chose to reject Him, and thereby chose death.

L16 – Healing the Blind Man -- John 9:1 – 41

John 9:1-5 -- As Jesus was leaving the temple, He passed by a blind man, who was known to have been blind from birth. It was commonly assumed that afflictions were due to sin, but when someone was born with a disability or deformity, it was difficult to explain. Some taught that it was due to the sins of a parent, based on teachings such as Exodus 20:5 – *“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.”* Others thought that pre-natal sins could explain such situations. It was a controversial question of the time, and the disciples took this opportunity to ask Jesus about it. Jesus’ answer is that this case of blindness was not due either to his sins or those of his parents. The explanation did not lie in some prior spiritual cause, but rather in a purpose for the future: an opportunity for God to work.

There is a general principle here that much of the evil in the world is not the consequence of sin or of God’s judgment. The right way to understand evil, to find meaning in it, is to look at the good works of God in overcoming evil. God has created a world that is free and independent, in which evil is therefore permitted, for a time. But God’s role is not as the cause, but as the One who wages war against such evils, the One who makes all things work out for the good, the Redeemer and Savior who will in the end achieve complete victory over sin and evil. And this is the work that He has given to the Son, and the Son must be faithful in doing these good works while there is opportunity (while it is day).

John 9:6-7 -- We have seen that Jesus can perform healings simply by command (John 4:50; 5:8), but in this case He chose to use a traditional method, applying spittle and a kind of “ointment” (mud), and telling the man to cleanse himself in the pool (similar to Elisha’s healing of Naaman, in 2 Kings 5:1-14). This shows that His works, particularly His work of enlightenment, is performed in a way that we can understand and relate to, and in a way that involves us as free, contributing participants.

John 9:8-17 -- Those who knew him were amazed that he had received his sight, and wanted to know how it happened, and who was responsible. The man said that He was “the man called Jesus”, but seemed to know nothing more about Him. They then brought him to the Pharisees, who questioned him about the healing, and about Jesus. They were convinced that Jesus was not from God, because He did this work on the Sabbath; but others thought that a sinner could not perform such signs. When they asked the blind man what he thought, he answered that Jesus is a prophet.

John 9:18-23 -- The Jews then wondered whether he had in fact been blind, and whether there really was a healing. So they questioned his parents, who testified that he had indeed been born blind, but they had nothing to say about how he was healed. They were unwilling to comment about Jesus, for fear of being cast out of the synagogue. This is a situation much like that of the Jewish Christians in Asia who first received this Gospel from John. They too faced the threat of being cast out of the synagogue for confessing Jesus, and were oftentimes abandoned by their parents.

John 9:24-27 -- The Jews (Pharisees) then interrogated the blind man more forcefully, admonishing him to “Give glory to God…”. This phrase is most likely a kind of legal “swearing in”, with the meaning of “confess the full truth”. It is used in this way, for example, in Joshua 7:19. All that they can see, in their hostility towards Jesus, is the fact that He performed a work on the Sabbath, which they regard to be a sin. They therefore try to force the blind man to retract, and deny the miracle healing. The man’s response is simple: the one thing that he knows is that he was healed. In his impatience with the interrogation, he counter-attacks by asking if they also want to become disciples of Jesus.

John 9:28-29 – This provokes them, and further hardens them in their hostility. They emphatically assert that although he is a disciple of Jesus, they are disciples of Moses. They then contrast Jesus from Moses by saying they know that God spoke through Moses, but they do not know where Jesus is from. This parallelism indicates that the question of where Jesus is from is ultimately the question of whether or not He is from God and speaks the true word of God. This is the decisive question for those who are confronted by Jesus’ teachings and signs.

John 9:30-34 -- The blind man finds it amazing that the Jews did not know where Jesus is from. Never before had anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. It is therefore obvious to him that Jesus must be from God. Otherwise, God would not hear his prayers, and He could do nothing. In response to this, the Jews “put him out”, which most likely means that they expelled him from the synagogue.

John 9:35-41 -- Jesus then found the blind man, and revealed to him that He was the Son of Man. At this point, the man took the next major step of faith to “believe in the Son of Man”, which means fully placing his trust in Him, as the One sent from God. Jesus then explains that he came into the world “for judgment”, which means He came as a revelation, the divine Word, challenging people to either accept Him or to reject Him. That is the judgment, by which the blind receive sight, and those who see become blind.

The Pharisees then ask if they too are blind. The answer is that if they were truly blind, they would have no sin. In that case they would be innocent in their ignorance. But since they actually claim to “see”, based on the fact that they do have a considerable knowledge of the law, they cannot claim innocence. Their rejection of truth and light is a willful act of rebellion, and they are therefore in sin, and their sin remains as long as they are in such a state of willful rebellion. This is the same teaching as in Romans 4:15 --- *“the law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.”* Sin is not associated with physical blindness, but rather with willful spiritual blindness.

This healing is an excellent example of the two ways that people respond to Jesus. The blind man accepted the witness of the sign, and his faith progressed from a confession that Jesus must be a prophet, to becoming a disciple of Jesus, and finally to worshiping Him as the Son of Man. He progressed from spiritual darkness to walking in the fullness of the Light. On the other hand, the Jews were focused on the violation of their Sabbath rules, and progressed in their hostility and the hardening of their hearts until they became subject to judgment for willfully rejecting the truth. They showed themselves to be of the darkness, hating the Light (see John 3:19-21).

L17 – The Good Shepherd -- John 10:1 – 42

John 10:1-6 -- In this parable of the shepherd and his sheep, Jesus and his adversaries are represented in various roles. It is therefore often considered to be a compilation of several different parables. However, according to the literary conventions of the time, we should regard this as one extended parable, with several teaching points, representing Jesus in various ways. Each part is to be understood on its own as making a particular point.

In the first part of this parable, verses 1-6, Jesus distinguishes between a true shepherd and a stranger (thief and robber). The shepherd enters by the door, his sheep recognize his voice, and they follow him. The stranger, who is a thief and robber, climbs over the wall, the sheep do not know his voice, and they flee from him. The people of that time would have been familiar with what Jesus was describing: a flock of sheep would be gathered into a fold each evening for protection from wolves and robbers. A fold would typically be surrounded by a stone wall, with a gate, and usually a gatekeeper. Furthermore, the sheep learned to recognize the voice of their shepherd, and would follow him, but they would flee from anyone else. Jesus’ audience understood these literal things about sheep and shepherds, but they did not understand the figurative meaning: what Jesus was attempting to teach.

John 10:7-9 -- Jesus explains that He is, first of all, the door. Anyone who is a true shepherd, would enter through the door. Any true teacher or prophet of God’s people would come to them “through Jesus Christ”. This refers both to the past (the old testament prophets) and to the future (apostles and elders of the church). Only those who come in the name of Jesus will be true shepherds, and God’s people will recognize their voices. They can discern true prophets and true teachers. On the other hand, “those who came before Me” are thieves and robbers. This pertains especially to the spiritual leaders of that time: the Pharisees and Sadducees. God’s sheep would recognize that they were false shepherds, and would not follow them.

Jesus is also a door for the sheep. Through Him they go out to find pasture (spiritual nourishment), and come back for protection from their enemies. Through Him, they are saved.

The Jewish audience would have been familiar with this imagery of sheep and shepherds. In particular, Ezekiel 34:1-10 admonishes the evil shepherds of Israel, Ezekiel 34:11-16 says that God will care for them as a shepherd, and verses 23-24 are a Messianic prophecy that promises a good shepherd in the coming kingdom. *“I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd”* - Ezekiel 34:23

John 10:10-21 -- Jesus then contrasts Himself with the thief, who comes to steal and kill; Jesus comes that they may have life. He then identifies Himself as the good shepherd. A hired hand, who is not the owner, will flee and abandon the sheep in the face of danger; but Jesus, as the good shepherd, lays down His life for the sheep. As stated before about a true shepherd, He knows the sheep, and the sheep know Him. The reason for this is that He knows the Father (the owner of the sheep) and the Father knows Him. Jesus’ closeness to the Father is the basis for His relationship with the sheep who belong to the Father.

Also, because Jesus loves the sheep, as the Father loves them, He will lay down His life for them. He emphasizes that no one takes His life, but rather He lays it down, in obedience to the Father. Also, the point is made in verse 16 that there will be other sheep, from another fold, that become part of the one flock. This is a reference to the Gentiles, who would become united with Jews as the one people of God, as the one body of Christ. As usual, there was a divided reaction. Some thought he was possessed by a demon; others thought that could not be, because He had opened the eyes of the blind. This reminds us of the blind man, an example of a sheep that belonged to the Father, and who was able to hear and recognize the shepherd.

John 10:22-29 -- It is now the season of the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), and the Jews press Him to say plainly whether He is the Christ (Messiah). His response is that He has already said enough, and performed enough works, for anyone who belongs to the Father to hear and understand. His sheep will hear Him and recognize His voice, and follow. The Jews who are questioning Him do not hear and follow, because they are not His sheep.

Jesus further promises that He will give His sheep eternal life, and no one will be able to snatch them out of His hand (compare John 8:51). Verse 29 is difficult to translate, and can be either:

1. “My Father … is greater than all”, meaning He has greater power than any enemies, and is therefore able to protect and keep the sheep. OR

2. “What My Father has given me is greater than all”, meaning that He values, and loves, His sheep so much that He will not allow anyone to take them away.

Both of the above are true teachings, but the textual evidence seems to favor the second translation. Also, in favor of this translation, is the emphasis that John places on God’s love as the source and the assurance of our salvation. To build up our faith and hope, what we need most to hear is not about God’s power, but rather about His love for us. This a major theme in John’s gospel and his letters.

 John 10:30-39 -- Jesus then makes another claim to deity, in saying: *“I and the Father are one”*. Consequently, the Jews again try to stone Him, for making Himself out to be God. Jesus then quotes scripture to defend His claim: *“I said, you are gods”* -- Psalm 82:6. In that passage, the judges and rulers of Israel are called “gods” because of the authority that God had delegated to them, as His representatives to the people. Jesus says that He has been given much more authority, as the One whom *“the Father sanctified and sent into the world”*, and therefore has the right to claim to be the Son of God. He then asks them to believe Him because of His works, to recognize that *“the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”* In response, they again tried to seize Him, but He eluded their grasp.

John 10:40-42 -- Probably to avoid further violent encounters, since His time had not yet come, He departed Jerusalem and went into the wilderness regions beyond the Jordan. Many people there, who had heard the preaching of John the Baptist, recognized and accepted Jesus as the One whom John had spoken about.

This section of John’s gospel, presenting all the public works and teachings of Jesus, thus concludes with the two extreme responses: 1) those who tried to kill Him; and 2) those who believed in Him. This sets the stage for the second half of the gospel, where Jesus sets His face towards Jerusalem, and the cross, and prepares His disciples for what is to come.

L18 – Resurrection of Lazarus -- John 11:1 – 46

John 11:1-6 -- Jesus receives word from Mary and Martha, of Bethany, that their brother Lazarus was sick. Mary is identified as the one who wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair (see John 12:1-8), and Lazarus as “he whom You love”.

Jesus comments that this sickness will not end in death, but for the glory of God. The Spirit revealed to Jesus the intended outcome. As with the blind man, it is not that the affliction was caused by God, but rather that God responds to the affliction in a way that accomplishes something good, thereby glorifying both the Father and the Son. The primary purpose here, the real meaning of glorification, is not just for Him to receive praise, but rather to reveal His true nature. But when His true nature is thus revealed, He will consequently be praised.

Verses 5 and 6 make the special point that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and that He therefore stayed where He was for two days longer. This certainly sounds strange. The first thing to note is that by the time Jesus received this message, Lazarus had already died, and Jesus knew it. This can be deduced from verse 17, where it says that when He arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead four days.

Another clue is in verse 15, where He tells the disciples He is glad for their sakes that He was not there, so that they would believe. Given that Lazarus was already dead, the best thing He could do, both for the disciples and for Lazarus and his sisters, was to take this opportunity to fully reveal Himself, and hence build up their faith. It was a popular belief that after four days a dead person could not be resuscitated – and that the only remaining hope would be to await the resurrection, on the Day of the Lord. It was therefore only after the full four days that Jesus could reveal Himself as “the resurrection and the life”. And that revelation was of far greater benefit to His friends than for Him to arrive earlier to offer consolation, or to perform what would be interpreted as a more conventional resuscitation-healing.

John 11:7-16 -- Jesus then tells the disciples that it is time to return to Judea, but they raise the objection that the Jews there had just recently tried to stone Him. He responds by saying that one must walk during the daytime, in the light, so as to not stumble. If one tries to walk after the night comes, he will stumble in the darkness, because “the light is not in him”. The meaning here is that while there is opportunity, during the 12 hours of daylight, we must walk. When the Spirit leads us, we must respond, without delay. When the time is right, we must act. If we do not, darkness will fall, and the opportunity will be lost. Jesus knows that this is the time to return to Judea, that His hour is coming.

Jesus then tells the disciples that He must awaken Lazarus from his sleep, and explains that He is speaking of raising him from the dead. Thomas responds, on behalf of the disciples, by declaring his commitment to follow Jesus, even unto death.

John 11:17-27 -- When Jesus arrived, Martha came out to meet Him, and she declared her faith that He could have saved Lazarus if He had been there. She knows that God gives Him whatever He asks. Jesus then says that her brother would rise again, and Martha acknowledges and agrees that he will arise “on the last day.” She believes in the resurrection, on the day of the Lord.

Jesus then responds with the most dramatic claim He has yet made: *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* The eternal life of the resurrection, which she is anticipating in the last days, is actually here in the present, in the person of Jesus. Martha then responds with a confession of faith in him as the Christ, the Son of God, and “He who comes into the world” (i.e. the Prophet). But she still doesn’t fully comprehend what Jesus is saying.

John 11:28-37 -- Martha then summons Mary, who comes to Jesus and falls at his feet, weeping. She also confesses that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus was deeply moved by her grief, and He wept. Even though He knew what was going to happen, that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, that did not prevent Him from fully and genuinely sharing in Mary’s grief. He was deeply, profoundly, moved. An important lesson here is that He has real compassion for us in all our suffering and in all our grief. This foreshadows the fact that prior to the resurrection, He must share and bear all of our griefs. He must pass through death, with us, before He can be raised, with us, unto eternal life. This also serves as an example, in our fellowship with one another. We are to share each other’s burdens and griefs, weeping with those who weep. We can share the joy of the resurrection only after sharing in the pain of death.

John 11:38-46 -- Jesus then commanded that the stone be removed from the tomb, to which Martha objected, since Lazarus had been dead for four days. Jesus reminds her that if she believes, she would see the glory of God. So they removed the stone, and Jesus thanks the Father for hearing Him. He says this so that the people would know that what takes place is from the Father. Jesus is not acting on His own, but as the One sent from the Father.

So, He cries out: “Lazarus, come forth”. And the man who had died came forth. By raising one who had been dead four days, Jesus shows that He is more than a healer. He reveals that He is indeed the resurrection and the life, and He thereby glorifies both the Father and the Son. The consequence, predictably, is that many of them believed in Him, but others reported him to the Pharisees.

L19 – Friends and Enemies -- John 11:47 – 12:19

John 11:47- 53 -- The ruling council of the Jews, consisting of the chief priests and Pharisees, convened a special meeting to consider what to do about Jesus. They admit that they have been ineffective in opposing Him, and fear that He will gain support from all the people, with the consequence that Rome would “take away both our place and our nation”. The “place” probably refers to the temple, by which the priests exercised authority; and the nation is Judea as a land distinctively of the Jews. Their concern is that a movement led by Jesus as the Messiah would upset their political arrangement with Rome, with the result that these leaders would lose their political power, and that the nation would lose its Jewish identity.

Caiaphas, who was the high priest, rudely admonishes them: “you know nothing at all”. He declares that it is politically expedient for one man (i.e. Jesus) to die, in order to preserve the nation. John comments that the high priest had unwittingly made a prophecy: that Jesus would die for the nation, and indeed for all of God’s children (i.e. including Gentiles). In response to this, the council began to make plans on how to kill Jesus.

John 11:54-57 -- To temporarily avoid this immediate threat, Jesus and His disciples departed to Ephraim, in the wilderness. Then, at some later time, as the Passover was approaching, Jews started arriving from the countryside and going up to Jerusalem, where they were seeking Jesus, wondering if He was going to come to the feast. John notes here that the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was must report it to them, so they could have Him arrested.

John 12:1-8 -- Six days prior to the Passover, Jesus visits Lazarus, in Bethany. This is the same occasion as described in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. During the evening meal, Mary takes a pound of pure nard, a very expensive perfume, and anoints Jesus’ feet, and then wipes His feet with her hair. This is quite unusual in three respects. First, the perfume is quite expensive: about one year’s wages, according to verse 5. Secondly, an anointing like this is normally done on a person’s head. To anoint His feet is an act of special humility and subservience. Thirdly, to loosen her hair, and wipe His feet with her hair, is a further sign of humble devotion.

Judas objects to this, noting how extravagant and wasteful it was. The value of the perfume could have accomplished much in feeding the poor. John explains, however, that Judas was not motivated by a concern for the poor; but that, as the treasurer, he used to steal from the money box. Jesus’ answer is to leave Mary alone. She was doing something very special for Jesus, preparing Him for burial. She was making good use of the limited time and opportunity to honor Jesus, since He would not be with them much longer. But there will be many more opportunities in the future to give to the poor. We should not be governed by materialistic calculations, but we should act in ways that honor God, in accordance with the present unique situations and opportunities.

John12:9-11 -- When the crowds of Jews, who were in the vicinity of Jerusalem, learned that Jesus was there, they came to Bethany to see both Him and Lazarus. The reaction of the chief priests, however, was to try to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus, because the testimony of Lazarus, having been raised from the dead, was leading many people to believe in Jesus.

John 12:12-19 -- On the next day, which would have been the Sunday prior to Passover, a large crowd came out to meet Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. They brought palm branches, and shouted:

*“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* -- Psalm 118:26

Palm branches were traditionally waved during the triumphal entry of a King or general into a city. They were, in effect, welcoming Jesus as a Messiah-King, with the expectation that He would seize political victory and dominion. Jesus tries to moderate their expectations, however, by seating Himself on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy: *“Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”* -- Zechariah 9:9. This indicates that even though he is a King, He comes as a Prince of Peace, not as a warrior (see Zechariah 9:10).

John then says that those who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus continued to testify of Jesus, with the result that even more people went out to meet Him. And the Pharisees complain to one another that they have failed to suppress this movement, but that “the whole world has gone after Him.”

This section has presented three different kinds of responses to Jesus. First, there are His enemies, who believed that Jesus and His followers, if successful, would bring about the destruction of the temple and of the nation. This was actually true, but not in the manner that they expected. Their concern for the temple and the nation was focused on political power and authority. They assumed that the will of God is served by the political methods of this world, and that it is best served through them as they sought to maintain their political control.

Secondly, there is the example of Mary, as a devoted disciple. She knew that the way to serve God’s purpose is not by the ways of the world, but by faith in Jesus and humbly submitting to Him and honoring Him. Her act of anointing was a preparation for burial, indicating an acceptance of the way of the cross.

Thirdly, there was the response of the crowds that welcomed Him into Jerusalem. They considered themselves as followers and supporters, but they were misguided. They were hoping that Jesus as the Messiah and King would seize political control, and that in this way their hopes would be realized. They were like the chief priests and Pharisees, in that they placed their trust in the methods of this world. They would have nothing to do with a Suffering - Servant Messiah, and they could never accept the way of the cross.

The church has ever since been faced with the same choices. Those who seek to advance the kingdom through political methods of this world are like the crowds that welcomed Him into Jerusalem. They gave lip-service, but their hearts and minds and methods were totally contrary to the way of Jesus. But Mary knew her Lord, she shared His mind and His purpose, and she humbly accepted the way of the cross. It is Mary, not the crowds, who must be the example for Christians and for the church today.

L20 – The Hour Has Come -- John 12:20 – 50

John 12:20-26 -- Some Greeks ask to see Jesus, and are brought to Him, but John does not provide any ensuing conversation. What John considers to be important about this encounter is that it triggers Jesus' response that His hour has come, to be glorified.

The meaning and means of glorification are then explained. A grain of wheat must "die" (be planted in the ground) before it can bear fruit. The next verse is the interpretation: to be willing to let go of this life (to “hate” life) is the necessary means of obtaining the fullness of fruitful and eternal life. But if one clings to this life (loves life), it will come to a fruitless end.

The point here is that Jesus has accomplished all that can be done in His Jewish-focused Earthly ministry. In order to reach out to the Gentiles (Greeks), to bear fruit throughout the entire world, He must lay down His life. The hour has now come for Him to go to the cross. He then teaches that the same principle applies to His disciples. They too must follow in the way of the cross (see also Mark 8:34-35, Matthew 10:38-39; Luke 9:23-24). A dramatic example is the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch. As he went to his death at the Roman coliseum, in AD 108, he cried out: “I am God’s grain”.

John 12:27-30 -- Even though Jesus knows the necessity of the cross, and is resolved to be obedient, He is nevertheless emotionally distraught. This is an example of how He shares fully in our humanity. His question: “shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’?”, and its resolution: “but for this purpose I came to this hour”, are equivalent to the prayer in Gethsemane in the other gospels (Matthew 26:38-43; Mark 14:34-36; Luke 22:42-44). This emotional agony is an essential part of what He shares with us, on our behalf.

Jesus declares to the Father that He will carry out the mission, by which the Father will glorify His name. This is the counterpart to “Thy will be done”. The answer, thundered from heaven, affirms that the Father’s name shall indeed be glorified, and that it has already been glorified. This revelation was not needed for Jesus, but was for the sake of those who were with Him. It reveals, again, that what Jesus spoke was from the Father, and it reveals that all that Jesus had done and said up to this point had served to glorify the Father. It is an endorsement from God similar to that which occurred at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8).

John 12:31-33 -- Jesus then further explains the meaning and purposes achieved by the cross. First, there is the judgment upon the world: that the ruler of the world “will be cast out”. His death on the cross will be a decisive victory over evil. Satan rules the world because of the universal sinfulness of mankind, which makes all people “of the world” slaves of sin. By the cross, Jesus achieves victory over sin, provides forgiveness, and liberates us from sin. He therefore “casts out” the ruler of this world (Satan), in that He takes away Satan’s power to enslave, to condemn and to destroy. This parallels what John says in Revelation 12:7-9, that the dragon, who is called the devil and Satan, was thrown down to the earth. That is to say, Satan no longer has authority before God as one who can accuse and condemn.

The second point is that by being lifted up, Jesus will draw all men to Himself. The “lifting up” has two meanings: 1) being raised up, literally, onto the cross; and 2) being figuratively lifted up, or exalted and glorified. This is the core of the gospel, which will go out to the world, to bring people from all tribes and nations to Jesus. This is the answer that the Greeks, in verses 20-22, were seeking.

John12:34-36 -- The crowd, who were probably the same ones who had welcomed Jesus into the city (verses 12-19), could not see how the Christ could be “lifted up” on a cross. They were convinced that the Christ was to remain forever (probably thinking of prophecies like Psalm 89:36; 110:4; Isaiah 9:7; and Daniel 7:14). Jesus does not give a direct answer, but rather repeats what He had often said before about “walking in the Light”, while the Light is present. They did not need more doctrine or more detailed explanations. What they needed was an attitude and a heart that would accept Jesus as the Light, and the will to walk in that light by following Him. More teachings or more signs would not convince them. What they needed could only be accomplished by the ultimate signs of the cross and resurrection, and the subsequent out-pouring of the Spirit. This is another indicator that His hour had come.

John12:37-43 -- It was perplexing to the early Christians that the Jews had rejected Jesus, that they were unconvinced by the teachings and by all the signs. Paul expressed a similar perplexity and sorrow in Romans 9-11. John addresses this issue by referring to prophecies from Isaiah 53:1-3 and 6:9-10. He thus establishes from scripture that the consequences of sinfulness are the hardening of hearts and blindness. Because of this, the people had rejected the prophets, and they were now rejecting the Messiah Himself.

John also makes the distinction that there were some who believed, but were unwilling to confess. In particular, many of the “rulers” (like Nicodemus), who feared being cast out of the synagogue.

John 12:44-50 -- Jesus then concludes His public teachings with a summary about His mission. Firstly, He faithfully reveals the Father: to see Him is to see the Father, to believe in Him is to believe the Father. He is thus the Light of the world.

Secondly, He did not come to judge, but to save (see John 3:17; 8:15). But judgment from God will be the consequence of His mission, in that the words He has spoken will judge mankind. It is because those words are the words of God, the Father, and anyone who rejects these words is rejecting God, and thus brings judgment upon himself. Sinners condemn themselves to a fate of eternal separation from God, because they willfully reject God when they reject His words and His Word. They willfully choose to be eternally separated from God, and therefore from life.

L21– Teachings at The Last Supper -- John13:1 – 38

John 13:1-20 -- John introduces this section on the Lord’s supper with the observation that Jesus knows His hour had come, and that He has loved His own, unto the end (or to the uttermost). Then, rather than describe the formal institution of the supper, which was already well known and faithfully observed in all the churches, he describes an event that serves a teaching purpose more relevant to the present needs of the church.  He writes about Jesus washing the disciples' feet - the most humble form of service that a person could perform.

When Peter objects to this, Jesus tells him *“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”*

Peter than asks Him to wash his hands and head also, to which Jesus replies that he is already clean, i.e. sanctified (by the word, as stated in John 15:3; 17:17). The point of the foot-washing is not for cleaning or purification. It is rather a lesson in humble service. He was showing His love for them, as indicated in verse 1, and doing so in the humblest possible way. This accords with other events where showing love is more important than ritual cleansing or purity (the Cana wedding in chapter 2 and His conversation with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4). Furthermore, it is an example for us, to likewise love one another, for the slave is not greater than his master.

But this deed of washing the disciples' feet is more than a lesson in humble service, it also points particularly to His sacrifice on the cross: the necessity for us to accept that sacrifice, and to then follow Him. Anyone who refuses this service *“has no part with Me”.* The word for “part”, in verse 8, is the word used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to the portions of land given to God’s people. It is talking about receiving a share of the “promised land”. In order to share this inheritance with Jesus we must accept His humble service, which is the way of the cross. We are first sanctified, or cleansed, by receiving His word. But we then receive our share of inheritance in the kingdom, with Him, by accepting His sacrifice, and following His example.

John 13:21-30 -- Jesus' betrayal by Judas was difficult for the disciples, and the church, to understand, and thus requires special discussion. That Jesus was betrayed by one of His chosen disciples is a specific example of His more general rejection, noted in the first chapter: He made the world, but the world did not know Him; He came to His own (the Jews), but they did not receive Him.

John also explains the betrayal as, first of all, based on Judas' predisposition, as a thief. This parallels the teaching that it is only those who “practice the truth" who come to the Light (John 3:20-21). Secondly, Satan is behind it, as he is the tempter and the source of all evil. A third point is that Jesus deliberately and knowingly allows it. He is in no way a helpless or hapless victim. It is even presented as a fulfillment of scripture: *“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”* – Psalm 41:9. Lifting up the heel is a sign of contempt, probably associated with the way that a horse lifts up its heel before kicking. Jesus’ knowing acceptance of this betrayal is an example of the more general principle that God accepts and permits evil, using it to accomplish His purpose.

John 13:31-35 -- Jesus then declares that it is time for His glorification, along with God’s glorification, which means the manifestation of His true being, in majesty and in love. This refers back to the remarkable statement in 13:3, that the Father had given all things into His hands. We should understand this in the widest possible sense. The accomplishment of the entire eternal purpose of God, from the beginning of creation, now depends totally upon the faithfulness of this one man, Jesus. Absolutely everything depends upon Him willingly submitting to the cross. And Jesus knows it.

He also knows that it will all subsequently depend on the continuing faithfulness of His disciples. In these final hours, He must do all that He can to prepare them. And the foundation of this preparation is the new commandment: *“that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another”.* This commandment is “new” mainly in that it is the commandment that characterizes the new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). It is the counterpart of what the ten commandments were for the old covenant. The final phrase, “that you also love one another”, has the sense of “in order that you may love one another”. The idea here is that His love for us is more than an example, it actually enables us to love one another. His love for us is the source of our love for others. This is the teaching in 1 John 4:19 – *“We love, because He first loved us.”* It is by this that the world will know Jesus, and that the world will know God. Just as all things were being handed over to Jesus, all things will also be handed over to Jesus' followers; and it will be only by their love that God's eternal purpose will be brought to completion.

To further prepare the disciples, Jesus also tells them that He will be leaving them, going where they cannot follow. This is what He had previously told the Jews (John 7:33-34), but with the difference that the disciples will follow later, just not now. Peter objects to this, claiming he would follow Jesus anywhere, even laying down his life. Jesus responds by telling him that he will in fact deny Him three times. Peter is sincere and enthusiastic, but he has not yet developed the level of faith and spiritual resources needed to follow all the way. This further underlines the theme that the faithfulness of full discipleship is a development that takes time. Initial belief and commitment is only the first step in the process.

L22– Encouragement for the Final Days -- John 14:1 – 31

John 14:1-3 – The disciples are understandably troubled by what Jesus has said: that He is going to a place where they cannot follow.  He was their best friend, they had given up everything to follow Him, placing all their hopes in Him; and now He is taking a path they can neither follow nor understand. So Jesus now asks them to cease being troubled, by having faith in God, and by having faith in Him. There are various ways this statement can be translated, but it is most compatible with the context to understand it as two imperatives: *“believe in God, believe also in Me.”* Even though they cannot immediately follow, and they cannot yet understand, they can nevertheless gain peace and encouragement, first by trusting God, and then by trusting Jesus. They especially must trust that He is totally obedient to God.

Jesus then speaks of their ultimate destiny, the fulfillment of their hopes, assuring them that a place is being prepared for them.  The Father’s house is a temple, a place where God dwells, where His presence can be found. Jesus had referred to Himself as God’s temple (John 2:19-21), and we further know that this is fulfilled in the church, as the body of Christ (1 Cor 3:16). God’s people, in Christ, constitute the dwelling place of God.  This is pictured in Revelation 21:1-4, 10-27 as the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven.  So this place that Jesus will prepare for us is actually the church, it is us. He is going to the cross to prepare us to be God’s dwelling place. And since the ultimate objective is that we all be united with God as His dwelling place, Jesus will be coming back for His people.

John 14:4-7  -- Jesus then says that they know the way.  Thomas, probably speaking for all the disciples, believes they don’t know the way. But Jesus explains that He is the way; since they know Him, personally, they actually do know the way.  They know more than they realize, by knowing Him - knowing but not knowing that they know.  By knowing Jesus, a disciple becomes united with Him, and this union with Him is the way to the Father. Furthermore, this union, this personal knowledge of Him, is how we know truth and how we attain life. To know Him is to know the way, to know Him is to know truth, and to know Him is to have life. Therefore He says:  *“I am the way and the truth and the life.”*

Jesus also says that there is no other way.  What Jesus reveals, and what He will do, are absolutely unique. He is the gate for the sheep, and there is no other.  There is no other name by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12), and there is no other gospel  (Galatians 1:6-9). By knowing Jesus, we know the Father.  No other person can ever make that claim.

John 14:8-11 -- Philip is slow to understand, and Jesus is disappointed. In all the time they have been together, Philip should know that Jesus' words and works are precisely the words and works of the Father. If he believes this, then he will know that Jesus is in the Father, and the Father in Jesus. He would then know that he has indeed seen the Father.

John 14:12-14 – Jesus then provides more encouragement to His disciples by telling them they will do even greater works than He, because He is going to the Father. The greater works are the works of the church, which indeed are much greater in terms of the number of people to be reached, as well as the depth of the rebirth that will be realized. The power to accomplish such works will be a gift from Jesus, to anyone who asks “*in My name*”. To ask “in His name” is not a mere formula or incantation. To act in His name is to act as His agent or representative. To ask in His name is to ask for His sake, according to His will, and with a view to accomplishing His purpose. He will answer any request that meets these conditions. It is not an empowerment to do as we wish, but an empowerment to do what He wishes.

John 14:15-17 -- This promise is first clarified by restating the condition: that you “keep My commandments”. Obedience is the necessary result of loving Him, and is the necessary condition for abiding in Him. Secondly, the promised gift of empowerment is specifically identified as the gift of the Spirit. This is similar to the identification found in Luke 11:9-13 between “good gifts” and the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word that John uses here for the Spirit is “Paraclete”, which has been translated several different ways: Helper, Counselor, Comforter, Advocate, or Intercessor. It has the meaning of One who is called along side to provide help, and it has both a legal aspect (as a counselor at law) and a personal aspect (as a friend). He is the Spirit of Truth, Who guides us into the way of truth. And this “Paraclete” shall remain; He will be with us forever. People who are of the world do not know this Spirit, and cannot receive Him. But Jesus’ disciples have the heart to receive Him, and the eyes to see, because they have been walking with Jesus.

John 14:18-24 -- Jesus explains further that He will not leave them as orphans, i.e. He will not abandon them, but makes the promise that “*I will come to you*”. There are various ways in which Jesus “comes” to His people. He comes to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and on the last day He will come again in glory, in our resurrection. But in these verses He is speaking about His own resurrection, which will occur “after a little while”. At that time they will see Him, but the world will not see Him. This is confirmed by the resurrection appearances described in the gospels: they were appearances only for His disciples, not for the world. And when the disciples see Him in His resurrection, they will believe, and understand, and they will have life because of His life. Again, keeping His commandments is the sign of love for Him, and that is the condition for Him to disclose and reveal Himself. He will not, and cannot, disclose Himself to the world, because the world does not love Him.

John 14:25-31 -- Jesus acknowledges that the disciples are not able to understand most of what He has been teaching. But the Holy Spirit will at a later time bring it to their remembrance, and will teach them. The present purpose of these words is to grant them peace, that they may not be troubled or fearful. They cannot yet understand most of what He has said, but at least they can have faith that His going away to the Father is necessary, that it is for their benefit, and it is temporary (He will return). They will carry on His mission performing even greater works, with the gift of the Paraclete, and the empowerment of receiving anything they ask “in His name”. Their faith will be further built up by the fact that He is telling them in advance the things that shall take place.

Jesus then says the time has come to conclude this conversation, “*for the ruler of the world is coming*”. This is to say that Satan is about to perform the deeds that will lead to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. The statement that “he has nothing in Me” means that Satan has no hold or claim upon Jesus. Jesus is without sin, and is not about to be taken in by Satan’s temptations. To the contrary, Jesus will do exactly as the Father has commanded.

L23 – The Vine and the Branches -- John 15:1 – 17

John 15:1-3 -- This parable of the vine and branches develops the theme of abiding in Christ: maintaining a vital connection with Him, in order to live and to bear fruit.

Jesus is the true vine, and the Father is the vinedresser. By identifying Himself as the true vine, He indicates a contrast to alternative vines. In particular, the disciples were familiar with scriptural references to Israel as a vine or vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Ezekiel 15:1-8). The prophets announced judgment against Israel as a vineyard that had failed. Jesus now presents Himself as the true vine.

This contrast to alternative vines also applies to Gentiles. We are by nature social beings, vitally interconnected with family, friends, tribes and nations, in ways that are decisive for determining our identities and behavior. But the true vine, the personal connection and dependency that is of the truth, that enables us to live according to truth, is Jesus.

And the vinedresser cares for this vine in two ways: by removing dead branches, and pruning the live branches. The means of distinguishing the dead from the living is by whether they bear fruit. The "fruit" is first of all our character and behavior, corresponding to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11). But such virtuous character and behavior also has consequences in the lives of others. Love, and all the ministries of love, will be to the benefit of others, thus bearing fruit in their lives. Such fruit distinguishes a living branch, just as it distinguishes a good tree (Matthew 12:33). To preserve the health of the entire vine, the dead branches must be cut off. Persistent failure to produce spiritual fruit is evidence of spiritual death, and of a willful choice to not be a functioning part of the vine.

The second thing the vinedresser does is to prune the live branches, to make them more fruitful. The things of the old way of life that distract us, that dissipate time and energy, that hinder true service for God, must be discarded to make us more fruitful. This is the same kind of teaching as in the sermon on the mount:

*"If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off..."* - Matt 5:30.

The leaves of a branch are self-serving for the branch, but fruit is produced for the nourishment of others, and for the sake of the next generation. It is the fruit that serves His eternal purpose.

The word for pruning also means cleansing, so it is fitting that Jesus adds the comment that the disciples have already been made clean, by His words. See also Ephesians 5:26. This is what He had already told them during the foot-washing in chapter 13. So the pruning is a purification, a sanctification, that is accomplished when they receive His teachings. That is what calls them out from the world, to be His people.

John 15:4-6 -- It is also necessary to abide with Jesus, to be vitally connected to the vine, in order to bear fruit. This abiding, or remaining, pertains both to the intimacy of the relationship, and to its endurance - perseverance through trials.

Notice that the keys to fruitfulness are 1) cleansing by His word, and 2) abiding in Him. These are much more critical to being "successful" in His kingdom than the "practical" ministry skills that many people today are preoccupied with. The practical skills may be effective for achieving personal goals, but they will not ensure achievement of God's purposes, unless we abide in Christ and are cleansed by His word. These must have priority.

John 15:7-8 -- The promise is repeated that He will provide whatever we ask. Before, in John 14:14, the condition was "in My name". Here, the equivalent condition is the twofold requirement that we abide in Him and that His words abide in us. (i.e. cleansed by His word). The consequence, and purpose, is God's glorification. The best examples of prayer in scripture explicitly state this as their purpose (e.g. Daniel 9:15-19).

John 15:9-11 -- Jesus then assures the disciples of His love for them, and asks them to abide in His love, by keeping His commandments. This parallels Jesus' abiding in the Father's love, by keeping His commandments. To abide in His love means to live and walk in a manner that fully acknowledges and is responsive to His love. This is equivalent to being rooted and grounded in His love (Ephesians 3:17). It is to live in a state of grace and gratitude before Him, it is to return His love, by being obedient. To do otherwise would amount to rejecting His love.

This way of life, abiding in Him, is a life of joy. As was indicated previously, from the example of Abraham (John 8:56), this is a joy that is immune to present circumstances, because it rests in our hope, and that hope is made presently real to us when we abide in Him.

John 15:12-17 -- Jesus then repeats the "new" commandment, given previously in John 13:34, to love one another "just as I have loved you". Here, it is further explained what kind of love this is. It is the greatest love one can have: laying down your life for your friends. The restriction to friends, and particularly friends defined as those who keep His commandments, is not actually a restriction on the extent of His love. We know from other scripture that He died for the entire world, while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). The restriction pertains to the efficacy of His love, for achieving its purpose. He loved us and died for us in order that we might be saved, but that saving purpose is realized only for "friends", which are those who are obedient.

The other thing special about a friend is sharing what you know and what you are doing. In these teachings, Jesus has shared what He is doing, treating them and relating to them as friends, not as slaves.

Jesus then concludes with a restatement that the disciples have a purpose: to bear fruit. It is for this that He had chosen them. Furthermore, He will provide whatever they need (ask for) to ensure success. But the foundational commandment, upon which all depends, is "that you love one another".

L24 – Confronting the World -- John 15:18 – 16:15

John 15:18-25 – Jesus now speaks about the relationship between the disciples and the world, which is a relationship of hostility. When they discover that the world hates them, they should remember that the world also hated Jesus. It is because they are not of the world, and the world loves its own, but it hates those who are not of the world. This is why the world hated and rejected Jesus. They love darkness and hate the Light (John 3:19-20), and they hate Jesus because He testifies that its deeds are evil (John 7:7). The meaning of “the world” is clarified in John’s first letter:

*“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and boastful pride of life, is not from the Father but is from the world.”* -- 1 John 2:15-16

John later speaks of the hostility of the world to Christians and to the gospel:

*“Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”* -- 1 John 3:13

If the Master suffers persecution, it should be expected that the slaves will also. It is for His name's sake that the world will persecute the disciples. The world will hate them because they represent Jesus (in His name); and they hate Jesus because He reveals the Father. Such hate for God and God’s people is nothing new; it fulfills the scripture: *"they hated me without cause"* - Psalm 69:4.

John 15:26-27 -- But, in their persecutions, He promises they will have a Helper (Paraclete). The situation is described as a court trial, in which the Spirit will give testimony about Jesus (to the disciples), and they in turn will present that testimony to the world.

John 16:1-4 -- Jesus is telling them these things so that they will be spiritually prepared when the persecutions come. Being forewarned, they will not be surprised, and can face it with confidence. More specifically, He tells them they will be cast out of the synagogue and will be killed, by those who believe they are serving God. This is precisely the situation of the Christians in Asia (in the vicinity of Ephesus) that John wrote this gospel for. When the Jewish Christians were being expelled from the synagogue, they were thus made subject to Roman persecution, which could result in capital punishment for refusing to worship Caesar. The Jews of the synagogues in Asia were effectively handing the Christians over to the Romans for execution, just as the Jews in Jerusalem had handed over Jesus 60 years earlier. This immediate need of the Christian community for encouragement in a time of persecution was a key purpose of John in writing this gospel.

John 16:5-11 -- Jesus wonders how it is that none of them asked “where are You going”. Although the question had been asked previously (John 13:36; 14:5), the point is that they were not now asking it, in the context of the present conversation. It is something that they should be eagerly seeking to understand, and the answer to this question would be of the greatest help to them at this time, to avert the sorrow that had filled their hearts. So to answer this question, or rather the related question of why He is going away, He speaks again about the Paraclete. This Helper, the Spirit, can be sent to them only if Jesus goes away (to the Father), and this will be to their advantage.

In John 15:26, Jesus had said that the Paraclete would give testimony about Jesus. He now speaks more specifically about the kind of testimony:

*He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*

The Greek word that is translated here as “convict” is sometimes translated as “convince”, as it can have a general meaning of persuading or convincing; but it more often pertains to an argument or case being made in a court of law, hence to “convict”. John had made the point that the world cannot receive the Spirit or hear what the Spirit has to say (John 14:17), so it would be out of place to interpret this as the Spirit “convincing” the world. To the contrary, in this context of an adversarial relation between the disciples and a hostile world, where Jesus is about to be arrested and tried, and where the disciples are told that in the future they will suffer similar trials and persecution, it is appropriate to understand this as a testimony of the Spirit (Paraclete) as a prosecutor Who convicts the world in the high court of God’s justice. It is to God, and to persecuted Christians, that the Paraclete is speaking, to convict the world.

This is a threefold conviction:

* + 1. concerning sin, in that they do not believe in Me
		2. concerning righteousness, in that I go to the Father
		3. concerning judgment, in that the ruler of this world has been judged

What the world is being convicted of is that they are in the wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment. Concerning sin, they claimed that Jesus was a sinner and blasphemer (John 5:16-18; 9:16,24; 10:33); but, in fact, their disbelief in Him is sin. Their willful rejection of Jesus proves that they are not of the Father, that they are in darkness, and that their deeds are evil. Disbelief is itself the primary sin and the evidence of their sin (John 3:18-19; 5:38; 6:29; 8:24; 12:48).

They are in the wrong about righteousness, in that they thought themselves to be standing up for righteousness in their opposition to Jesus, upholding Moses and the Law. But, in fact, they rejected and opposed the righteousness of God in Jesus. His righteousness will be proven when He is raised from the dead and goes to the Father, thus convicting the world on this count.

They are in the wrong about judgment, in that they believed they were executing Godly judgment by handing Jesus over to be crucified; but in fact the cross was a judgment by Christ against Satan (the ruler of this world).

John 16:12-15 -- As said in John14:25-26, the Spirit will at a later time bring things to remembrance and will teach them. He will teach them what they are presently not ready to receive and properly understand. Furthermore, He will guide them on how to apply Jesus’ teachings to the particular situations they will encounter, as they occur. And they can be assured of the reliability of His testimony. Just as Jesus had spoken only the words of the Father, the Spirit of truth will speak only the words of Jesus, and the Father. We can count on Him as the Spirit of truth, just as we can know that Jesus Himself is the Truth.

L25 – Promises of Joy and Peace -- John 16:16 – 33

John 16:16-19 – The disciples are puzzled about Jesus' statements that "in a little while" they will not see Him, and again “in a little while” they will see Him. He had previously said He was going to the Father, where they cannot follow, and where they would no longer see Him (John 13:33; 16:10). So what does it mean that they will at some later time “see Him” again?

John 16:20 -- Jesus answers by saying that they will mourn, while the world rejoices, when He leaves. This is similar to what is said of the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-12. They signify the church, which will be persecuted just as Jesus was, with the same consequences: the world will rejoice for a short while over their death, but they will later be vindicated in the resurrection. As with the Master, so with the servants, as taught in John 15:18-21.

John 16:21-22 -- He then compares this with the pain of a woman’s labor that leads to the joy of childbirth. This image of labor pains had been used in the scriptures regarding the tribulations of Israel, to be followed by new life in the resurrection (Isaiah 26:16-19; 66:7-13; Hosea 13:13), and in giving birth to the Messiah (in Revelation 12:1-6). The pain is not worthy to be compared to the ensuing joy (as in Romans 8:18).

Jesus says that when they see Him again, their mourning will be turned into joy, and no one ever again will be able to take away that joy. As taught elsewhere in the New Testament, He will be with His people until the end (Matt 28:20), and nothing can separate them from His love (Rom 8:38-39). This answer is not a full explanation of how they will see Him again; but it gives them encouragement. It is an encouragement based primarily on faith (see John 14:1), rather than a knowledge and understanding for which they are not yet ready (John 16:12).

John 16:23-28 -- Jesus' statement that they will no longer need to ask Him questions is based on the promise of the Holy Spirit, Who will teach them and guide them into all truth (John 16:13). He will speak plainly, not "figuratively". This was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:34, and also appears in John’s first letter:

*“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”* - 1 John 2:27

Jesus also tells them again that that the Father will give them whatever they ask, "in His name". The precise Greek phrasing here is not us asking “in His name”, but the Father giving to us “in His name”. But in the next verse, He says the disciples will ask “in His name”. So both our asking and the Father’s giving are in the name of Jesus. We ask, on behalf of Jesus, for His sake, as His agents. Similarly, the Father gives on behalf of Jesus, for His sake. The requests are therefore immediately accepted by the Father, with no need for Jesus to persuade the Father. The Father loves us with the same love that He has for Jesus, and with the same love that Jesus has for us, because we are in Christ, abiding in His love, united with Him. Those who belong to Jesus are clothed in Him (Galatians 3:27), such that when the Father looks upon us, He sees the Son, Jesus Christ. This is the grace of justification, the grace of acceptance by the Father and access to the Father.

John 16:29-32 -- When the disciples say that there will be no need for them to question Him, their point is different than what Jesus had said in verse 23. They are saying that Jesus knows what is on their minds and can give them answers before they ask, without their asking. This is a situation seen many times in this gospel, and was regarded as evidence of divinity. This idea is also seen in the teaching on how to pray: *“your Father knows what you need before you ask Him”* -- Matthew 6:8. They therefore make a confession of faith: that they know by this that He is from the Father. But they miss the point about future learning and understanding, and are overconfident in thinking they understand, and thinking their faith is stronger than it really is. This is similar to Peter's assertion of faith and commitment in John 13:37. Once again, Jesus corrects them. They will actually scatter and desert Him when the time of testing comes.

John 16:33 -- As He had done previously, in John 14:29; 15:11; 16:1, Jesus explains why He has been saying these things: so they may have peace. This is the motivation of the discourse from its beginning (John 14:1 – *“stop being troubled”*)*.* It is also a repetition and summation of John 14:27, where He says He gives them peace. Here, in verse 33, it is made clear that this peace does not deliver them from afflictions. The disciples will have tribulation in the world. But they will have courage by knowing that He has overcome the world. It is not a peace that is made with the world. There is a raging warfare with the world that will continue unto the end. But in the midst of the warfare, we have an inner peace based on the assurance of victory.

L26 – The High Priestly Prayer -- John 17:1 – 26

John 17:1- 5 – This farewell discourse, in accordance with literary custom, concludes with a prayer on behalf of the disciples. This follows the tradition of the farewell song and blessing offered by Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy chapters 32 and 33.

In the first part of the prayer, Jesus asks for glorification, with the ultimate purpose of glorifying the Father. This request is based on the fact that the Father had given Him authority over all mankind, in order to grant them eternal life; and this eternal life consists in knowing the Father. Glorification of the Father is essentially revealing the Father, that He may be known. And this is accomplished only through knowing the Son, which in turn means glorifying the Son. So this prayer for glorification is a prayer that God will be revealed through the Son, and it is to take place especially at this hour, because this is the hour of His crucifixion. It is the cross that reveals and hence glorifies both the Father and the Son. Jesus had thus far been faithful in accomplishing the Father’s work, and He is now asking that the work be brought to completion, through Him, in the crucifixion.

John 17:6-10 -- Jesus then prays on behalf of His disciples, who will be entrusted to carry forward the mission after He departs to be with the Father. He identifies them as especially belonging to the Father: He had revealed to them the divine name, “I AM”; they were called out from the world, given to Jesus; and they were entrusted with the words of truth, which they fully accepted. It is by His words that they were sanctified (John 15:3) and shall be sanctified (John 17:17). In particular, and most importantly, they accepted and believed that Jesus was from the Father. Because of this, Jesus is glorified in them, meaning that He is revealed in and through them. Therefore He makes special requests on their behalf, beyond what He would ask for “the world”.

John 17:11-13 -- Jesus will soon no longer be in the world, but these disciples will be left behind in His stead, to represent Him and to continue His mission. He therefore makes this special request on their behalf: that they be kept in the Father’s name, and that they would thereby be one. It is by their faithfulness to the Father, abiding in Him, that they will be able to act as one body and speak with one voice. This is essential to the continuing fulfillment of the mission. It is a request that the Father continue to keep them and protect them, just as Jesus had done for them up to this point. As a consequence, the disciples will be filled with the joy that is in Jesus.

John 17:14-19 -- Jesus had given God’s word to them, and as a consequence the world hates them. Like Jesus, they are no longer “of the world”; they have been sanctified. The request He makes is not to take them out of the world, because that is where they must remain for a while, to carry out the work. But He asks that they be protected from the evil one. This corresponds to the request in the model prayer (Matthew 6:13), to be delivered from the evil one. This protection is to be carried out by sanctification in the truth. It is the truth in God’s word that will cleanse them and keep them safe from the corruptions of the world.

Jesus then gives two parallels between Himself and His disciples:

1. The Father sent Jesus into the world; Jesus sends the disciples into the world
2. Jesus sanctifies Himself, for their sakes; the disciples are to be sanctified, in truth

Jesus was sent into the world, with a mission; and that requires His sanctification, a setting apart for God’s purpose, like the sanctification of a sacrificial lamb. Similarly, the disciples are being sent into the world, to continue the same mission; and that requires that they too be sanctified, set apart from the world, by the word of truth. Based on previous teaching (John 16:13-15), this sanctification by the truth will be by the gift of the Spirit.

John 17:20-23 -- Jesus now expands the scope of intercession, by praying for all future believers: all those of future generations who will believe through the word of the disciples. He prays that they also will all be one. He asks that they will have the same kind of unity that exists between the Father and the Son. The result and the purpose of such unity is that the world will believe that the Father sent Jesus, and that the Father loves them.

The kind of unity that is requested is not constructed by human design or effort, it is not the result of negotiated compromises or authoritarian organizations. It is rather a unity of being of the same mind, of genuinely and freely sharing the same purpose. As in the parable of the vine, in John 15:1-11, the unity among the branches depends upon each branch being connected to the true Vine, and abiding in His love. It is similar to the analogy Paul makes in Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27, that we are to be united as members of one body that submits to one Head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16). This unity reveals a love for one another, which shows that they are His disciples (John 13:35). More importantly, this love, made visible to the world, reveals they were first loved by the Father. And that is the final and highest purpose: to reveal the love of the Father, to show that God is love, and thus to glorify the Father and the Son.

Based on this prayer, we should conclude that the most powerful and most effective witness to the world, to glorify God, is for the church to reveal itself as one united body, bound together in love for one another. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 that words, gifts, knowledge, faith, generosity and self-sacrifice are all worthless and ineffective if they are without love. So it is with the church. It’s testimony to the world in deed and word will all be worthless and without effect unless it is backed up by a demonstration that the members love one another, and such love is revealed when it is seen that they are united, as one body.

John 17:24-26 -- The prayer concludes with one more request, and a final promise, for all believers and disciples. He asks that they will be brought into His presence, to see His glory. This is a prayer for the resurrection and the new creation, where they will see Him clearly and fully, as He is (1 John 3:2). At that time the glory of God’s eternal love, the love that He has had from the beginning, will be fully revealed to them.

Jesus then promises that just as He has made the Father’s name known to them (John 17:6), He will continue to make it known. This again is a promise fulfilled in the gift of the Spirit, available to us in the present age. The consequence is that His love will be in us, and that Christ Himself will be in us. This is our “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). This is how He “prepares a place for us” (John 14:2), and how the kingdom is established.

L27 – The Arrest and Interrogation -- John 18:1 – 27

John 18:1- 3 – After the teachings of chapters 14-17, Jesus and the disciples departed to a garden, identified in the other gospels as Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives. Judas then arrived with a cohort (probably a detachment of Roman soldiers) and officers from the chief priests. Judas knew where to take them, because Jesus and the disciples had often met there (Luke 21:37).

John 18:4-9 -- When the soldiers arrive, Jesus takes the initiative, asking whom they are searching for, and identifying Himself. As is characteristic in John’s gospel, Jesus is completely in control of the situation. When He tells them “I am”, they are startled and fall backward to the ground. They are struck down by the power and authority of the divine name and His manner of speaking. This is similar to the earlier occasion in John 7:32, 44-46, where officers were sent to seize Jesus, but they were unable to, because “never has a man spoken the way this man speaks”. But this time, Jesus’ hour has come, so He asks them again: “Whom do you seek?” Since He is the One they are seeking, He asks that they let the disciples go. He is protecting the disciples, fulfilling the promise He had made in John 17:12, that none of them would perish.

John 18:10-11 -- Peter then drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s slave. This is characteristic of Peter, being assertive and impetuous. It shows his courage and devotion, as he had professed earlier (John 13:37). But it also shows his lack of understanding. Jesus tells him that He must drink of this cup, the cup that He had just previously accepted in prayer (Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42). This is the Father’s will and purpose, and He must allow it to be fulfilled.

John18:12-14 -- The soldiers and officers then bound Jesus and led Him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest. Annas, who had previously served as high priest, was succeeded by his five sons, and by Caiaphas, but throughout his retirement retained unofficial influence and authority. This would be due in part to the conviction of many that the high priest should serve a life term, and not be replaced by Caesar’s appointments. So Annas had the privilege of being the first to examine Jesus, before proceeding to an official hearing before Caiaphas. John reminds us here that Caiaphas, presiding over the Sanhedrin, had already advised that one man (i.e. Jesus) should be put to death, for the sake of the nation (John 11:49-50).

John 18:15-18 -- Meanwhile, Simon Peter and “another disciple” were following Jesus. Although he is not identified, it is likely that this “other” disciple was John. It is noted here that this disciple was allowed entry into the courtyard of the high priest’s residence, because he was “known” to the high priest. It may be that John had family members who had served in the priesthood, and that could have been the basis for this personal acquaintance. He then spoke to the slave girl who kept the door, to let Peter in also. The girl asked Peter: “You’re not one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” This was asked in a manner that expected a negative answer, so it was easy for Peter to rather thoughtlessly agree with her. He wanted to gain entry through the gate, and it would have seemed of little consequence what a slave-girl might think. Peter then joined the slaves and officers who were standing around a fire, to keep warm on a cold night.

John 18:19-24 -- Annas then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teachings. The main point of the questioning seems to be to obtain information that would incriminate Jesus as a political subversive: to determine if He had some secret teachings, shared only within His inner circle, if any of His followers had a criminal or revolutionary background, and perhaps to obtain names of disciples who could also be arrested and investigated. The hostility of the Jewish leaders towards Jesus was primarily religious, but in order to present Him to Pilate they had to charge Him with political crimes.

Jesus says nothing about the disciples, still protecting them. Regarding His teachings, He says there was nothing hidden. His private teachings were no different in substance and import from His public teachings. Many people had heard and knew of His teachings, and they could be asked about it, rather than asking Jesus. Jesus is appealing to the legal principle that a defendant is not expected to testify against himself; it was rather the prosecutor’s responsibility to bring forth witnesses to make the case.

In reaction to this, one of the officers slapped Jesus, for supposedly being disrespectful to the high priest. But Jesus challenges him to find anything wrong in what He had said. Annas apparently concludes that there is no point to further questioning, so he sends Him on to Caiaphas. The hearing that then took place before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin is not described in John, but is included in the other gospels (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:66-71). This second hearing, meeting the legal requirement of a day-time proceeding (just after dawn), had the official standing similar to that of a grand jury. It was the means of bringing charges for the subsequent trial before Pilate.

John 18:25-27 -- Shifting scenes, we see that Peter was asked by some of those standing with him around the fire as to whether he was one of the disciples. He denied it, perhaps for the sake of consistency with what he had said to the servant-girl at the gate. Later, one of the slaves of the high priest, who was a relative of Malchus, said: “Didn’t I see you in the garden with Him?” This was certainly a more serious accusation, which could really get Peter into trouble – not just for being a disciple, but for attacking Malchus. This time Peter’s denial was not just from convenience, but out of real fear, for self-protection. And immediately the rooster crowed.

John presents a dramatic contrast between Jesus and Peter, with Peter being representative of the disciples. Jesus was courageously accepting what must take place, what He had come into this world to do. And He was faithful in protecting the disciples. But Peter faltered, initially from carelessness, but ultimately from fear and self-interest, demonstrating that his faith was not yet up to the challenge. John presents Jesus as being fully in control, of willingly “drinking from the cup”. But He had no support from His disciples; He bore this burden alone.

L28 – Trial Before Pilate -- John 18:28 – 19:16

John 18:28-32 – They (i.e. the Jewish authorities and Sanhedrin officers) took Jesus to the Praetorium for the actual trial and sentencing. This was the official residence of Pilate, the governor (prefect) of the province of Judea, while he was in Jerusalem; his normal, permanent residence was in Caesarea. The Jewish leaders would not actually enter the Praetorium, because entering any Gentile household would make them ritually unclean. The cleansing process after such a defilement would take seven days, which means they would not be able to take part in the Passover feast. The particular reference in the Law that governed this is in Numbers 19:11, regarding defilement for coming into contact with a corpse. The Jews assumed that there was always a risk of such contamination in a Gentile household. Their specific concern was that when Romans had abortions, they disposed of the bodies through the sewage system, which would contaminate the entire house. The irony, which John surely intends us to see, is their scrupulous concern for ritual purity and observing the Passover feast, while they were scheming to kill the Messiah, the Passover Lamb of God.

Pilate goes out to meet them, it being politically expedient for Roman officials to accommodate such customs in the provinces. He requested a formal statement of the charges. But the Jews, not having a well-defined or convincing case for any crimes that would concern Rome, impatiently asked him to just trust them – that they wouldn’t have brought Jesus to him if he were not an evil-doer. Pilate’s response seems to be an angry outburst: “take Him yourselves…”.

The uneasy political relationship between the Jewish and the Roman officials was always tense. They despised each other, but had to try to get along for their mutual self-interests. Pilate is demanding a little more respect in this particular encounter, and so the Jews explain “We are not permitted to put anyone to death”. This indicates that the charge is a capital offense, which would require trial and sentencing by the Roman governor, which generally would be a charge of insurrection. That was not the “crime” that the Jews were interested in, it was not the reason they wanted Him executed, but they knew it was the only kind of crime for which the Romans would give a death sentence.

More particularly, John points out that this indicates the kind of death. The Romans used crucifixion for executing insurrectionists; and even if the Jews were granted special permission for an execution, they could not and would not directly perform a crucifixion. The hatred that the Jewish leaders had for Jesus was such that they were not content with any other means of execution; they wanted Him to suffer the humiliation and disgrace that was especially associated with crucifixion. They were probably also calculating that they would reduce the opposition from Jesus’ followers if they could pass off the responsibility to the Romans.

John 18:33- 38a -- Pilate now summons Jesus and begins the questioning: “Are You the King of the Jews?” This is apparently the charge that had been made by the Jews. Jesus then asks whether it is Pilate’s own question, or if it was what others, i.e. the Jews, had charged. The distinction is that the meaning of “King of the Jews” is somewhat different from a Roman perspective than from the Jewish perspective. The Jews see it as a claim to be the prophesied Messiah, while the Romans would see it simply as political insurrection. The answer depends on which kind of “King” is under consideration. Pilate answers that it is a charge that came from the chief priests, and then asks Jesus what He had done, to warrant such a charge.

Jesus’ reply, “You say I am a king”, is neither an affirmation nor a denial. But He then gives Pilate the proper explanation of what kind of King He is. His kingdom is not of this world, as evidenced by the fact that His disciples are not fighting to defend Him. When Peter started to fight, Jesus told him to put away the sword. Pilate rightly concludes that Jesus is indeed some kind of a King, and Jesus gives further explanation. His purpose, for which He was born, and for which He came into the world, was to testify to truth. This is what He had done (in answer to Pilate’s question in John 18:35). His Kingship is established not by the sword, but by revealing the truth; and those who are of the truth, hear and accept it. People submit to Him as King only as they willingly submit to the truth that He reveals. His kingdom is established by preaching and teaching truth, not by armed insurrection. Pilate’s cynical remark is: “Truth? What’s that?”

John 18:38b- 40 -- Pilate then announces to the Jews that he finds no guilt in Jesus, i.e. that Jesus presents no threat of violent insurrection. But instead of simply dismissing the case, he attempts to gain further political advantage. He thinks he may be able to appease the Jewish leaders, perhaps helping them to “save face”, by releasing Jesus not on the basis of innocence, but on the basis of their customary release of a prisoner for the Passover. Another likely motive is that it would be a way of avoiding the release of Barabbas, who was a murderer and a truly violent and dangerous threat. Furthermore, he might gain some points with Jesus’ followers. But this was a serious political miscalculation; the Jews would not accept the deal: they demanded the release of Barabbas, not Jesus.

John 19:1-7 -- Pilate then took Jesus and had Him scourged. Scourging was the most severe form of beating, done with a whip of several thongs, loaded with bits of bone and metal. The result of a scourging was a flaying of the flesh, sometimes exposing bone and entrails. It was generally done prior to a crucifixion, not only as part of the punishment, but also to “mercifully” speed up the slow death of a crucifixion. Pilate’s intention here, however, is that it might serve as a punishment that would be accepted as a substitute for crucifixion.

The soldiers then mocked Him by placing a crown of thorns on His head and clothing Him with a purple robe. This was a common practice of Roman soldiers, playing “games” of mockery with condemned prisoners. They would have had no personal animosity toward Jesus, but were motivated by a general dislike and contempt for the Jews. After this, Pilate again brings Jesus out and declares that he finds no guilt in Him. One point he is making is that he was unable to extract any kind of confession, in spite of the severe scourging. He may also be displaying Him, in this pitiful condition, to show that such a man cannot conceivably be any threat to Rome as an insurrectionist.

The Jews then respond by giving their real reason for wanting Jesus executed: He claimed to be the Son of God, violating their law (Leviticus 24:16). This is the supposed blasphemy that on prior occasions led them to try to kill him (John 5:18; 10:33).

John 19:8-12 -- This statement, about Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God, made Pilate even more fearful. Previously, Pilate’s concerns were merely political: seeking to avoid a riot, or a worsening of relations with the Jewish leadership. Now, from the pagan Roman perspective, he had a superstitious concern about whether Jesus might actually be some kind of a “son of a god” (see also Matthew 27:19, concerning the warning from Pilate’s wife). So he then asks Jesus: “where are you from?” This is the kind of question one would ask of someone making such an extraordinary claim (compare John 6:42; 7:27, 41-42; 9:29).

Jesus refuses to answer, for Pilate did not have the proper understanding or attitude to be able to comprehend the real answer. Pilate, upset at Jesus’ silence, reminds Him of the authority he has to release or to crucify Him. Jesus’ answer to this is that he has no authority except for what is given from above. The authority “from above” is referring to authority from God. In this case, it is not the general delegated authority that God grants to all rulers (as described in Romans 13:1). What is pertinent here is the specific authority to have Jesus crucified. As John makes abundantly clear, this execution will occur only because it is by the will of the Father and by the submissive will of the Son. Without their agreement, Pilate could do nothing. God has arranged events such that Pilate will feel compelled to pronounce the sentence. Pilate’s offense is regarded as a sin, but the far greater sin is that of the Jewish authorities. They were in a privileged position to know God, but they freely chose to reject Him, to hate Him, and to kill His only begotten Son.

Pilate sought to find a way to release Jesus, but the Jews insisted, and essentially blackmailed him, implying they would report to Rome that Pilate had released a man who claimed to be King, thus opposing Caesar. Pilate had previously been in trouble, was vulnerable to being exposed for several prior misdeeds, and he was losing his meager political support in Rome. He was in no position for a political confrontation of this kind.

John 19:13-15 -- Pilate is thus convinced of what he must do, and presents Jesus to the Jews one final time. He says: “Behold your King”. It is a sarcastic statement, intended to publicly display a man that is by any worldly standard no king. Pilate is conceding, but he wants the Jews to look ridiculous in what they are doing. He requires that the Jews clearly make their demand that this “king” be crucified, for them to take clear responsibility, and thus partly relieve himself of responsibility for executing what might be a “son of God”.

The chief priests then give their answer: “We have no king but Caesar”. This is a remarkable confession to be made by the chief priests of the Jews. The whole purpose and hope of their people and their nation was in the expected Messiah, who would rule from the throne of David, in a kingdom where ultimately their One God is their only king. They have at this point denied and forsaken all that they are supposed to stand for. This is the counterpart of the self-condemning confession found in the other Gospels: “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” In this trial, it is not Jesus who stands condemned, but the leadership of the Jews.

L29 – The Crucifixion -- John 19:17 – 42

John 19:17-22 – Jesus was then handed over to the soldiers, to be crucified. As was the usual procedure, He carried His own cross, which would mean the cross-piece, or transverse beam. After nailing His wrists to this beam, the soldiers would have then lifted Him up and attached this cross-piece to an upright stake that was already in place. The other gospels mention that Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry this cross-beam, but that was probably only after Jesus was unable to carry it any longer; John prefers to emphasize that Jesus initially carried it Himself. Some commentators compare this with Isaac’s carrying the wood up Mt. Moriah, to be sacrificed by Abraham (Genesis 22:6). The location of the crucifixion was known as “the place of the skull”. It is not known how the place got this name, but it is often assumed to have been a hill that may have looked like a skull.

A sign was prepared, at Pilate’s direction, identifying Jesus as “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”. It was common practice for a condemned person to be labeled with such a sign, indicating the crime for which he was being executed. In this case, the Jews objected that it identified Him as “King of the Jews”, rather than as one who claimed to be King of the Jews. Pilate insisted on leaving it as he had written, probably as sarcasm, to antagonize the Jews, as was his previous statement in 19:14. In pointing out that the inscription was in the three languages, John may be suggesting that He is actually the King for all tribes and nations.

John 19:23-24 -- The soldiers then took His clothes, which also was customary practice. They were allowed to take the clothing of a person they were executing, and any other personal possessions they may have on them. The inner garment, or tunic, was woven as one piece, which would make it more valuable if kept in one piece, rather than tearing and dividing it. So they cast lots for the tunic. John interprets this as a fulfillment of scripture:

*“They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing”* -- Psalm 22:18

John 19:25-27 -- Nearby, there were four women: 1) Jesus’ mother; 2) His mother’s sister; 3) Mary of Clopas; and 4) Mary Magdalene. Comparing to the other gospels (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40), it is likely that the second one, His mother’s sister, was Salome, the mother of Zebedee’s sons (i.e. mother of the apostles James and John).

Jesus speaks to His mother, asking her to accept the beloved disciple (John) as her son, and He asks John to accept her as his mother. At one level, this is simply an act of kindness, to see that his mother will be properly cared for, by a believer. But it is likely that John includes it here because it also symbolically teaches something more general. Mary can be viewed as representing the nation of Israel, which gave birth to the Messiah, and subsequently as the church, continuing to give birth to all future children of God. The beloved disciple, John, is representative of future believers. The application here is the responsibility of all Christians to the church, which gives birth to them. This accords with the symbolism of Revelation 12, where a woman gave birth to the Messiah, and later to all others “who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus”.

John 19:28 – 30 -- When Jesus knew that all was completed, He said he was thirsty, and they gave Him a drink of wine. After this, He said “It is finished”, and He gave up His spirit. The request for a drink may have been to moisten his throat so that He would be able to loudly cry out (as in Matthew 27:50) His final statement: “It is finished”.

This manner of stating His death, that He “gave up His spirit”, is unusual. Normally, death is expressed as something that happens to a person. Here, it is described as a matter of willful choice and timing. Death in a crucifixion was usually by suffocation, as the person hanging from his hands is unable to exhale. The victim could continue to breathe only by lifting himself up by the feet. Jesus could choose His time of death by no longer raising himself up to breathe.

John 19:31-37 -- The “day of preparation” was the day preceding the Sabbath, i.e. Friday, with the Sabbath beginning at sunset. This would be a “high” Sabbath, because it was during a feast, the Passover. In order to have no dead or dying bodies present that would defile this high Sabbath, they asked Pilate that the legs of the crucified be broken, to force their immediate death (i.e. suffocation); the bodies could then be taken down and properly buried before sunset. Since Jesus had already died, they did not need to break His legs, but the soldier pierced His side, to confirm His death. A corpse would not bleed the same way as a live person.

The flow of blood could have been due to piercing a cavity where a pool of blood had collected. What was especially unexpected is that there would also be water. One explanation is that the soldier may have pierced the pericardium, the sac surrounding the heart, which contains a clear serous fluid. Another, more likely, theory is that he pierced the pleural sac between the rib cage and the lungs. If it had been previously injured by the scourging, the blood collected in this cavity could have separated into a clear serum on top, with the denser red blood cells at the bottom. There could then be a flow of both blood and “water”.

The symbolism of water would be that of the living water, which represents the Spirit (John 4:10-14; 7:38-39). The blood is the blood of a substitutionary sacrifice, of the Passover lamb. These witnesses reveal the true meaning of the crucifixion, as the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and as the necessary means for giving us the Spirit (See 1 John 5:6,7). John interprets these events as further fulfillment of scripture. According to the Law, the Passover lamb’s bones must not be broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12), and according to the prophet Zechariah: *“They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and mourn for him…”* – Zechariah 12:10.

John 19:38-42 -- Joseph is an example of a "secret" disciple (see John 12:42-43). It is interesting that when the regular disciples lost courage and scattered, these two secret disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, found the courage to come forward. Permission from the governor was needed to take down and bury the body, and on a special occasion like the Passover such permission would be granted. The amount of spices, about 80 pounds, was exceptional. It is a quantity that would be used for royalty, and is another acknowledgment of Jesus as the King.

The main theological points that John makes are that the crucifixion and death are according to God's plan, under Jesus' control, and in accordance with scripture (compare 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Furthermore, it is emphasized that Jesus is King, His death is necessary to provide life for God's people, and it is the glorification of both Father and Son. Even prior to the resurrection, this crucifixion is to be understood not as a defeat, but as a victory.

L30 – The Resurrection -- John 20:1 – 31

John 20:1-2 – Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, just before dawn on Sunday morning. When she saw the empty tomb, she ran to tell Peter and the other disciple (John) *“they have taken away the Lord”.* Although she, and the others, believed in Jesus, and in the resurrection, they regarded the resurrection to be a general resurrection of all God’s people, on the “Day of the Lord”. No one expected a separate resurrection of the Messiah, as an individual, within history. She therefore assumed that someone had stolen the body.

John 20:3-10 -- So Peter and John ran to the tomb, with John arriving first, but stopping at the entrance. Peter then entered the tomb, and John followed. John makes a special point about the linen wrappings lying where the body had been, and the face-cloth rolled up and placed separately. Some commentators see this as evidence of the body rising and passing through the cloths, leaving them undisturbed. But the fact that the face cloth is separated from the linen wrappings does not support such a theory. Furthermore, the scriptures make a special point about how the resurrection body is physically substantial, in that it was touchable, and He ate and drank with them (Luke 24:39-43; Acts 10:41). The earthly corpse was transformed into a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 50-54), not just a “spirit”.

The real significance of the linen wrappings and the face cloth is that the body had not been stolen. If someone had taken the body, they would not have removed the wrappings and face cloth, neatly folding them and leaving them in the tomb. John immediately understood the significance: it must have been the resurrection that Jesus had promised. Since he did not yet understand the scriptures, he had to see this physical evidence before believing.

John 20:11-16 -- After Peter and John left, Mary remained at the tomb, weeping. When she looked in, she saw two angels, who asked her why she was weeping. Turning around, she saw Jesus, but did not recognize him. She thought He was the gardener. This is similar to other appearances where disciples did not recognize him (Luke 24:13-16, 31; John 21:4). But when He called her by name, she knew it was Him. Jesus is not known by visual appearance, but by personal interaction. He calls His sheep, and they know His voice (John 10:3, 27).

John 20:17-18 -- Jesus tells Mary to *“stop holding on to Me”*. The best translation is “hold”, or “cling”, not “touch”; and the Greek grammar indicates that she is presently holding on to Him, and He is telling her to stop. The reason is *“I have not yet ascended to the Father”.* He will be ascending, and she is to tell the disciples so, but this ascension is not yet completed.

He had previously said:

*“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.”* – John 16:7

The full knowledge of Christ, and union with Him, is possible only by the Holy Spirit, Who will be given after Jesus departs to be with the Father. Clinging to His body, on earth, is not the answer. She must therefore let go, both physically and emotionally, and allow Him to depart.

By referring to “My Father and your Father”, Jesus is indicating that His disciples are brought into the family as children of God and as His brothers. The reference to “My God and your God” means we are brought in to the new covenant. This reminds us of Ruth and Naomi:

*“Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”* - Ruth 1:16

and the prophesied new covenant:

*“I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* - Jeremiah 31:33

*“They shall be My people, and I will be their God”* - Jeremiah 32:38

John 20:19-21 -- On the evening of Easter Sunday, the disciples were together in a room, with the door locked because of fear of the Jews. Jesus came to them there, stood in their midst, and said *“Peace be with you.”* Supernatural appearances of this kind can be overwhelming and terrifying, and it is important to assure them that He comes in peace. (Compare other reports of epiphanies and appearances, in Isaiah 6:1-7; Matthew 14:26-27; 17:5-7; Luke 1:26-30). In this “appearance”, Jesus was suddenly present, without coming in through the door. It is not to be thought of as “passing through” a door or wall, because scripture elsewhere emphasizes that his resurrection body is a substantial “body”, not a vaporous phantom. It is better to think of His appearing as a coming out from the realm of eternity, into space-time existence. Then, at the conclusion of each appearance, He simply disappears, returning to the Father (e.g. Luke 24:31), Who is eternally omnipresent.

Jesus again bids them peace, and gives them their commission: *“as the Father has sent Me, I also send you”*. This fulfills what He had said during the last discourse: *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you…”* (John 14:27), and what He had said in the high priestly prayer: *“As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”* (John 17:18)

John 20:22-23 -- Jesus then breathed upon them, that they may receive the Holy Spirit. This parallels God’s breathing into Adam the breath of life, that he would become a living soul (Genesis 2:7). Similarly, in the new creation, Jesus breathes the breath of life, giving us the Holy Spirit, represented earlier as living water (John 4:14; 7:37-39). He is able to now do this, because He had ascended to the Father. As a result of this gift, they are commissioned and empowered to carry out His mission on earth, which is summed up here in the authority to declare forgiveness of sins. A translation that properly reflects the Greek grammar is:

*“If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”*

It is a promise of guidance into truth, so that our declarations shall correspond to the prior will of God. This precisely parallels Jesus’ earthly ministry, whereby everything He did and said was by direction from the Father.

Consider Jesus’ explanation that He did not come to judge, but that it was His word that judges (John 12:47-48). We should similarly understand our commissioning and authority as applicable to proclaiming His word. It is in this way that we are instruments of judgment. When we speak His word, the gospel, those who accept will be forgiven their sins, and those who reject will be judged according to their sins. Furthermore, these promises and directives should apply to all who are in Christ, not just the apostles and “ordained apostolic successors”. All who believe in Him and are baptized receive this gift of the Holy Spirit, we all receive the peace of God, we all receive the mission to go into the world. We therefore all receive this empowerment of forgiveness and judgment that is a consequence of declaring His word.

John 20:24-29 – John points out that Thomas was absent from this meeting, and when the other disciples told him about it, he was unable to take their word for it. He would not believe it *“unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side.”* Thomas is probably not much different than the other disciples in this regard: none of them believed until they personally saw the evidence with their own eyes. That is why these resurrection appearances were necessary.

On the following Sunday, they were gathered together again. Since the general resurrection (the “Day of the Lord”) did not occur on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, it seems they were expecting it might occur on a following Sunday. This was the rationale, in the beginning, for a weekly meeting each Sunday, which might prove to be “the Day of the Lord”. As before, Jesus appeared in their midst, and gave them His blessing of peace. He then spoke to Thomas, asking him to touch His hands and His side, and thereby to believe. But when Thomas saw Him and heard Him speak, there was no need to touch. He believed, and made the highest confession of faith recorded in this gospel: *“My Lord and my God!”*

Jesus then comments on how Thomas believes only after seeing, but that those who believe without seeing are blessed. This does not mean there is no blessing for Thomas and others who required seeing before believing. But He is telling us that those who believe based on testimony, without personally seeing, have no less blessing. As Peter had said:

*“though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory”* – 1 Peter 1:8.

It was necessary that there be a few eyewitnesses to give the initial testimony, but those who did not see Him are at no personal disadvantage. To imagine we have missed out on special blessings by not being present at that time and place in history, to see with our own eyes, is a misunderstanding of what it means to know Christ. We have, by the Spirit, no less opportunity to know and abide in Him, and therefore share fully in the blessings of His presence.

The significance of the resurrection is first of all that by it Jesus is vindicated, and declared to be the Son of God (see Romans 1:4). Secondly, the fact of a bodily resurrection shows that God is not abandoning this world, but He redeems it by transformation (Romans 8:18-25), and that in eternity we each retain our personal individuality and identity.

John 20:30-31 -- John here gives what was probably the conclusion of the original form of this gospel (assuming that chapter 21 was added by an editor). He points out that there were many other signs, not written here. This gospel is not a “complete” account, but selections that would serve the purpose. And this purpose is: *“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”* Life requires belief in Him. And that belief is presented as two-fold: Jesus is both the Christ, and the Son of God.

As the Christ, He fulfills all that is prophesied of the Messiah, Son of David, King of kings. But as Son of God, He is much more than anyone had been looking for: He is God Himself, the “I AM”, the Word become flesh. This reflects the same confession that Peter made in Matthew 16:16, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”.* This belief and confession, continually renewed and exercised throughout our lives, is the source and foundation of eternal life.

L31 – The Conclusion -- John 21:1 – 25

John 21:1-8 –Peter and six other disciples set out on a boat to fish at the sea of Tiberias (Galilee). When the night was over, they had caught nothing, but at dawn, they saw Jesus standing on the beach. He called out to them, telling them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. When they did, they caught so many fish that they were unable to haul them into the boat. This is similar to the event reported in Luke 5:4-11, where Jesus called them to become fishers of men. The beloved disciple (John) recognized by this that it must be the Lord. Peter then put his outer garment on, and swam ashore.

John 21:9 -11 -- When they arrived at the shore, they saw that Jesus was preparing fish and bread over a fire, and He asked them to bring some of their fish. When they drew the net to land, they found they had 153 fish. Some commentators have speculated about a symbolic meaning for this number, but it is more likely just an eyewitness detail, with its main import being the exceptionally large number.

John 21:12-14 – Jesus then invites them to have breakfast with Him, sharing the fish and bread. This represents a continuing fellowship, and a participation in His life in the same way as was represented by the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6). No one asked who He was, because they knew it was the Lord. This suggests, as in other appearances, that He was not readily recognizable by sight, but rather by personal presence and interaction.

John 21:15-17 – There follows a conversation with Peter, where Jesus asks him three times if he loves Him “more than these”. This could be interpreted in three different ways:

1. Asking if he loves Jesus more than he loves these things – i.e. the fishing business, representing his past way of life and livelihood.
2. Asking if he loves Jesus more than he loves his partners – i.e. comparing his love and devotion to Christ to his attachment to friends
3. Asking if he loves Jesus more than these others do, i.e. compared to the other disciples’ love for Jesus.

Most scholars have concluded that the third interpretation is the best. Peter had previously professed a love and commitment that he claimed to be greater than the others (Matthew 26:31-33). Jesus is now challenging him to live up to and to prove his love.

In this dialogue, two different Greek words are used for love: agapao and phileo. In the first two questions, Jesus uses agapao, and Peter answers with phileo. The third time, both Jesus and Peter use phileo. Commentators sometimes interpret this as having some significant meaning related to different shades of meaning of these two words. However, in John’s writings, these two words are used interchangeably, with no definitive difference of meaning. Furthermore, in Hebrew and Aramaic (the original spoken language) there is only one word for love. So it is best to conclude that the use of these two Greek words was simply for stylistic reasons, with no doctrinal significance. Similarly, Jesus uses three different words for sheep/lambs, but these variations are unlikely to have any meaning.

The point of this interchange is to give Peter the ministry and delegated authority of a shepherd, both to feed the sheep, and to “tend” them. This is both a ministry of preaching and teaching the word and a delegated authority of oversight. It is based on Peter’s love for Jesus, which is the primary qualification for such ministry. Furthermore, the way for Peter to demonstrate his love is by faithful obedience in this ministry. His love shall be shown not only by word, but by deed.

The repetition three times brings to mind Peter’s denial, meaning that this conversation is intended for rehabilitation, to reinstate Peter to a position of pre-eminence among the disciples. It should also be noted that it was an accepted legal practice to repeat a verbal contract three times, before witnesses. So this three-fold repetition confers official standing upon this commissioning of Peter to be the shepherd for the flock.

John 21:18-19 – Jesus then foretells Peter’s destiny. He contrasts the prior life of his youth, of self-sufficiency and self-determination, with how his life will end, being bound and led to where he does not want to go. John interprets this as indicating how he would die: it will be a death of martyrdom, glorifying God. More specifically, it probably means that he would be crucified, which is implied by the hands being stretched out. According to historical tradition, Peter was in fact crucified, about 65 AD. After revealing this destiny, Jesus says “follow Me!”. This is what Jesus had previously said after Peter’s confession of faith: *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”* -- Matthew 16:24. This is the supreme expression of love (John 15:13), and it is the mark of the good shepherd (John 10:11).

John 21:20-23 – Peter than asks about what will happen to the beloved disciple (John). Jesus’ reply is that it should be none of his business or concern: *“If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”* Each one of us has our own unique ministry and destiny, and we must be primarily concerned with being faithful to our own assignment, without wondering or speculating about how or why other people’s assignments are different. We are to simply follow Him, accepting our own lot, and accepting one another.

Because of this, there had been false expectations that John would not die until Jesus returns. The author of this chapter offers this correction: it was only indicated that John might remain until Jesus returns, not that he definitely would. If John had died just prior to the completion of this gospel, it would be important for the people to understand that there was no definitive prophecy that Jesus should have returned during John’s life.

John 21:24-25 – In the concluding statements, there is first the assertion that this disciple, i.e. John, is the one who testified and wrote this gospel. The meaning of “wrote” is not necessarily literal writing, but is more likely to mean that he was the source of the content. He had been their teacher and preacher, for many years, and this gospel faithfully records what he had taught. Secondly, it is again conceded that there are many other things that Jesus had done, much more than could ever be committed to writing. This gospel is a faithful witness, one of several witnesses, but the full knowledge of Jesus Christ far exceeds what this or any other witness can ever express. To experience the full revelation, one must follow Him, and abide in His love.