

That You May Believe

William E. Johnson

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by William E. Johnson

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Chapter 1. John's Purpose Statement

(Message # 1 in a Series on John - "That You May Believe")

READ - *John 20:24-31*

TEXT - *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)*

THEME - The gospel of John was written with a specific purpose - that we might believe.

Introduction:

I would like to begin a series on the gospel of John.

Let's start this morning with some very general and introductory thoughts about the book.

We have 4 gospels in our Bibles - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

These are the only gospels that are the inspired Word of God, regardless of what you may hear in movies, books, or television. Others, such as the gospel of Thomas, and the gospel of Mary, are not inspired and are therefore not given equal standing with these 4 gospels. (That's a subject for another sermon, though.)

We know who wrote each of these books:

- Matthew was written by Matthew, also called Levi - the tax collector who left everything to follow Christ (cf. *Luke 5:27,28*). He was one of the 12 apostles.
- Mark was written by John Mark, and is usually considered the earliest of the gospels. John Mark was a companion of the Apostle Peter, and worked with Paul on his missionary journeys.
- Luke was written by Luke the physician, who was a companion of the Apostle Paul.
- John was written by John, the beloved disciple and member of the inner circle of disciples which included Peter, James and John.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are sometimes called the synoptic gospels, from a Greek term meaning "to see together" or "to share a common point of view." These three gospels share many similarities in approach and content. John's gospel, however, is different than the 3 synoptics, as we will see momentarily.

Each gospel seems targetted at a particular audience, and is therefore themed in such a way as to be meaningful to that particular audience:

- Matthew is written for a Jewish audience
Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah - the King.
- Mark is written for a gentile, primarily Roman audience
Mark presents Jesus as a servant.
Mark's gospel is a book of ACTION; fast paced narrative that would have appealed to the action-oriented Roman mind.
- Luke is written for a broader gentile audience.
Luke presents Jesus as a man - the Son of Man.
Luke was highly educated - a physician, and he used more sophisticated language than the other three authors.
- John presents Jesus as GOD - the Son of God.
We'll see more about his purpose in writing as we get into this study.

There are many interesting characteristics of this gospel.

John uses several key words that appear over and over - words like BELIEVE, LIFE, SON, SON OF GOD, and FATHER. These words appear much more frequently in John than in the other gospels. There are over 100 references to God as the Father.

John is the only author to record the great I AM declarations of Jesus, such as:

1. *And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)*
2. *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)*
3. *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. (John 10:7)*
4. *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)*
5. *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: (John 11:25)*
6. *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)*
7. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

John alone records Jesus' solumn "Verily, Verily I say unto thee..." statements. cf. *John 1:51; 5:19,24,25; etc.*

John records 8 miracles that are specifically intended to demonstrate Christ's divinity, and 6 of them only appear in this gospel:

1. The water into wine - *John 2:1-11*
2. Healing the nobleman's son - *4:46-54*
3. Healing the man at the pool - *5:1-9*
4. Healing the man born blind - *9:1-7*
5. Raising Lazarus from the dead - *chapter 11*
6. The great draught of fishes - *21:1-6*

It is INTERESTING is it not, that this gospel differs so from the other three. Why do you suppose that is?

May I suggest that John tells us EXACTLY why he wrote what he wrote. We have a specific purpose statement in our text. Let's spend our remaining few minutes looking at it.

Heading off the critics in advance

cf. vs. 30

Immediately after describing the miraculous appearance to Thomas, John issues the statement that Jesus did other miracles as well, WHICH ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK.

Almost as if John knew there would be critics who would question why his book contained things the others didn't, and the other books contained things that John didn't. (This is an argument used by some to try and cast doubt on the inspiration of the Bible.)

John's statement here shows:

1. Conscious choice and design.

This book was written to accomplish something, and John specifically chose things that would accomplish that purpose.

It's as if he was saying, I have a lot of things I could share with you, but these are the things you need to hear in order to understand what I want you to understand.

2. Focus (we've been talking about that a lot lately, haven't we?)

John didn't waste (unfortunate word, but I can't think of a better one - nothing written about Jesus could be considered waste) time or ink on events that did not fit in with his theme and purpose. This book is a FOCUSED EFFORT to bring a specific message to the reader.

I think there is a lesson here for us as a church. If we want to accomplish anything for God here in Randolph, then we must FOCUS... CONCENTRATE... KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING. DO those things that further our mission and IMMEDIATELY DISCARD those things that do not.

John emphasizes here that his focus is seen not just in what he INCLUDED, but also in what he EXCLUDED.

Note: (An example of this kind of thinking - I would like to review our missions programs, and see if there are any that do not fit in with our mission as a church. If so, we should discard them.)

I think there is also a lesson here for us as individuals. Do you let things get in the way of your walk with God? FOCUS on the Christian disciples that will keep you straight - Bible, Prayer, Fellowship with other Believers in Church, etc.

That you might believe.

cf. vs. 31

Here it is - John's purpose statement - "I WANT YOU TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD."

BELIEVING is KEY to SALVATION.

cf. Acts 16:31

Only believe,
Only believe,
All things are possible,
Only believe.

We KNOW we need to believe, but often we struggle with how to do that, don't we? When faced with so many contradictory claims and competing religions, HOW DO WE COME TO BELIEVE THIS ONE??

Some might say, "I'd like to believe Christ's claims, but what the claims of science that seem to contradict the Bible?" The answer is - READ JOHN. It will help you to believe.

Many ask, "I want to read the Bible, but I don't know where to start." The answer is - READ JOHN. It will help you to believe.

Many ask, "I have a friend that is not saved, and I've tried to convince him/her of the validity of Christ's claims, but they just won't accept Him. What can I do?" GET THEM A COPY OF JOHN - HAVE THEM READ JOHN - It will help them to believe.

That you might continue to believe.

I read one source (Scofield) that indicated this verse could be translated "so you will continue to believe."

Do you wonder sometimes, Christian, whether Jesus is really who He says He is? (ILLUS - John the Baptist, who having seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus, and having heard the voice of God from heaven declaring Jesus His Son, still came to doubt - cf. *Luke 7:19* - "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" When such doubts come - READ JOHN. It will help you continue to believe.

Does your faith waver sometimes, Christian? Are you like the man in *Mark 9* who cried out, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief?" READ JOHN. It will help you continue to believe.

Does life get you down sometimes? Are you in a valley where you can't seem to see your way out? Does discouragement test your faith? READ JOHN. It will help you continue to believe.

That you might have life.

Here, of course, is the ultimate result John wishes to accomplish.

The simple salvation formula is BELIEF = LIFE.

John knew that to give people life, you must get them to believe. That's why he included things like *John 3:16*; *John 3:36*

Conclusion:

So, we see John's purpose statement in our text. WHY DID YOU WRITE THIS BOOK, JOHN? *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)*

May I suggest some practical things you can do to make the most of this new study in John?

1. READ JOHN! Every day read something from this book, and continue to do so throughout the study. When you get to the end - start over. Read it in different translations. READ JOHN! It will help you to believe.
2. Get and give away copies of John to those you have been praying for - encourage them to READ JOHN. It will help them to believe.
3. Participate in this study. Don't miss. Take notes. Pray about what you learn. Ask questions (use our new Q and A mechanism). It will help you to believe.
4. Invite others to this study, and especially those needing salvation. It will help them to believe.

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)

Chapter 2. The Ultimate Fact of the Universe

READ - *John 1:1-18*

TEXT -*In the beginning was the Word... (John 1:1)*

THEME - John's calling Jesus the Word indicates that Jesus is God.

Introduction:

I use a Bible study program on my computer, called Bibletime. When you launch the program, it shows a little thought for the day. This past week, I opened it up and was greeted with this thought, "The Bible was written so we could believe in Jesus." It referenced *John 20:31*. In our first lesson we learned that that is, indeed, John's purpose in writing his gospel - that you and I might believe. *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)*

Throughout our study, I'll remind you that this is the purpose of this book - that you, I, and every other reader might BELIEVE in Jesus Christ. This is a soul winner's book... an evangelist's book. This is a book designed to lead us to a Savior.

Today, let's consider these first few verses, and let's start with a question:

Is there such a thing as somebody you can trust? Somebody whose word is his bond? Somebody who is exactly what he says he is?

ILLUS - House TV show, which glorifies nastiness and other evils. Dr. House was asked to keep a confidence in a recent episode, and after promising to do so, immediately and openly broke it. Why do we think this is funny? Clearly that was the intention of this show.

ILLUS - Survivor, which I can't watch anymore because it is based on the premise that if you plot, scheme, lie, and cheat, you will be promoted and rewarded.

ILLUS - Scientists even get in on the act now. "Junk science" is a term that has become popular in recent years to describe the dishonest and silly notions some scientists put forth. Wait a minute - I thought science was the search for truth? Whatever happened to that?

Well, John introduced us to Jesus Christ in these first 18 verses. In doing so, he used a word to describe Christ, a word that is not used in the other gospels - "*In the beginning was the word*" - the LOGOS, a Greek word meaning a spoken word, or a thought. Let's study this idea for a few minutes. As we do, one thought will emerge - Jesus is Who He said He was. He is somebody you can trust.

Some definitions and explanations:

I read in one source that a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus first used the term Logos around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe.

And so based on that definition, John is saying that Jesus Christ is the reason or plan that coordinates a changing universe.

Here is how yet another commentator explains it:

- i. Jewish rabbis often referred to God, especially in His more personal aspects, in terms of His word. They spoke of God Himself as "the word of God." For example, ancient Hebrew editions of the Old Testament change Exodus 19:17 (Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God) to "Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet the word of God." In the mind of the ancient Jews, the phrase "the word of God" could be used to refer to God Himself.
- ii. The Greek philosophers saw the logos as the power which puts sense into the world, making the world orderly instead of chaotic. The logos was the power that set the world

in perfect order and kept it going in perfect order. They saw the logos as the "Ultimate Reason" that controlled all things.

iii. Therefore, in this opening, John says to both Jews and Greeks: "For centuries you've been talking, thinking, and writing about the Word (the logos). Now I will tell you who He is." John meets both Jews and Greeks where they are at, and explains Jesus in terms they already understood. (David Guzik, Calvary Chapel Bible College, Germany)

John used this term in other writings:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (1 John 1:1)

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. (Revelation 19:13)

John was using a term, therefore, that would have been quite meaningful to his readers, even if it doesn't seem as meaningful to us today. He was describing Jesus as the thought of God - the mind of God - the very essence of God! GOD HIMSELF!

NOW - consider what this means to you and I, practically.

If Jesus is the very representation of God... if that which makes up God, makes up Christ... then it comes to God, there is no difference between what He says and what He does - WORD = REALITY. *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 KJV)* NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORD AND REALITY! *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11, KJV)* NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORD AND REALITY!

Jesus is the ultimate fact of the universe!

And clearly, the application for you and I is that He is a person we CAN believe in - Someone Who is absolutely trustworthy.

Do you believe in Him today? You can... and you should.

John says a few other things about the Word, though. Notice

The Word CREATED US us. vs. 3

I know people look at me funny when I profess my rejection of the theory of evolution. I believe in creation, just as the Bible says - creation that took place in 6 literal days.

ILLUS - One person noted, "Frog + Princess = Handsome prince (this is called 'fairy tale'). Frog + 10 billion years = Handsome prince (this is called 'science')." (Source unknown)

If the Word is ABSOLUTELY TRUSTWORTHY, then why would He lie to me about something like creation? If He said it, in His Word, then I accept it.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1, KJV) - Why would He lie about this? If He said it, it is true. There is no difference between what He says and what He does and what He is.

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. (Psalms 33:6, KJV)

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. (Genesis 1:3, KJV) - There was no difference between what He said and what occurred! What He said, WAS! And WHAT HE SAYS, IS!

The Word INFUSES us with life. vss. 4

Only God can create life. All life comes from Him.

Yet over and over John proclaims that Jesus Christ is a creator of, giver of, and restorer of LIFE. (John uses the word LIFE 36 times.)

For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; (John 5:26, KJV)

For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. (John 6:33, KJV)

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: (John 11:25, KJV)

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (1 John 5:20, KJV)

John is demonstrating that Jesus is God, for Jesus gives life, and only God can do that!

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39 KJV)

1. Jesus is the author of physical life.

Note: This is why Christians cannot accept abortion - because Jesus is the author of life - we cannot take such upon ourselves. This is why Christians cannot accept euthanasia, and any other of the current belief systems that promote DEATH rather than LIFE. God is the only one who can decide these things.

ILLUS - Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate every one of the miracles Moses performed except one. They could not create lice from the dust of the earth - they could not create life. And they knew and told Pharaoh that only God could do that.

JOKE - One day a group of scientists got together and decided that man had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell Him that they were done with Him.

The scientist walked up to God and said, "God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so why don't you just go on and get lost."

God listened very patiently and kindly to the man. After the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well, how about this?"

Let's say we have a man-making contest." To which the scientist replied, "Okay, great!"

But God added, "Now, we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam."

The scientist said, "Sure, no problem" and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt.

God looked at him and said, "No, no, no. You go get your own dirt!" (http://jokes.christiansunite.com/Creation/A_New_Beginning.shtml)

2. Jesus is also the author of spiritual life.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (Ephesians 2:1, KJV)

Do you want to be forgiven?
Do you want to go to heaven?

Freedom from your sin
Peace and joy within
Only life worth living!
Do you want to live forever?
In a place where sorrow comes no never
Come and go with me all the way to Calvary
If you want to be forgiven!
(Lyrics to "Do You Want to be Forgiven" by Signature Sound)

Do you wanna live forever? JESUS IS THE AUTHOR AND GIVER OF LIFE - BELIEVE IN HIM! *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36, KJV)*

The Word ILLUMINATES us with light.vss. 4

In the Bible, light and darkness are contrasted:

Light = TRUTH
Darkness = ERROR and FALSEHOOD.
Light = HOLINESS and PURITY (1 John 1:5)
Darkness = SIN (1 John 1:6))

Intellectually - illumination, perception, understanding - all come from Christ.

Morally - understanding of good, holiness, purity, morality - all come from Christ.

- INTELLECTUALLY:

The source of man's intellectual and spiritual perception, his conscience as well as his consciousness, is the divine Word. There is thus an affinity between the light that man possesses and the greater Light from which it comes. By this light he is able to look outside himself, to contemplate and reflect upon the world into which he is born, to understand the working of its laws, to turn to his own use the physical forces latent within it, and to reflect something of its glory in his painting, his music and his literature. By this light also he is able to look inward upon himself, and to become conscious of the strange contradictions in his nature - his capacity for doing good and his propensity for doing evil, his heavenly aspirations and his earthbound desires, his reaching for the stars and his descent into the abyss, his hope and his despair, his piety and his godlessness. For the truth is that the light with which the Word illuminates all men that are born, is a light shining in the darkness. (R.V.G. Tasker, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries - John, pg. 42)

ILLUS - Dark parts of the world are those without Christ. Christian parts of the world are advanced - WHY? Because Jesus is the light of the world.

What do you need to know? Jesus is THE SOURCE OF LIGHT!

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7, KJV)

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. (Psalm 119:99)

ILLUS - Man who dropped out of church because he wanted to give his sons opportunity to go to Harvard and Yale! But worldly education is darkness apart from Christ. (Interesting, isn't it, how many of our educational institutions started out as Christian institutions?)

- MORALLY:

Notice that the good and decent parts of the world are the parts with the greatest Christian influence? Not a coincidence - it is because Jesus illuminates us with LIGHT.

Contrast with areas of the world where Christianity is not as influential - goodness and decency are not as prevalent, either.

And why should this surprise us? *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* (James 1:17)

Do you need enlightenment? THEN KNOW CHRIST - THE GIVER OF LIGHT.

Do you need to live a better, purer, cleaner and more holy life? THEN KNOW CHRIST, for ALL LIGHT COMES FROM HIM.

The Word CAME to us as ONE OF US. vss. 14

We covered this recently in our series entitled "What I Believe" so will just briefly touch on it today.

Jesus was and is GOD.

Jesus was and is MAN.

100% God and 100% Man. Just as much God as if He'd never been man, and just as much man as if He'd never been God.

He became one of us, so He could die in our place. He was Emmanuel - God with us.

The Word EXPLAINED GOD to us. vs. 18

What is God like? Look at Jesus. Jesus explained God to us.

Everything true of God is true of Jesus, and everything true of Jesus is true of God. Jesus explained God to us.

Jesus is God.

Jesus is TRUTH.

Jesus is the Word - the Logos.

Jesus is the very mind of God.

Jesus is the ultimate fact of the universe.

Conclusion:

And so, the obvious question I must ask today is, "Do you know the Word?"

He created you - do you know Him?

He gave you physical life - do you know Him?

He offers you eternal life - do you know Him?

He is the only source of light - do you know Him?

He became just like you, so He could pay the price for your sins - do you know Him?

He explained to you the very reality of God - do you know Him?

Chapter 3. A Man Sent From God

READ - *John 1:6-8;15;19-28*

TEXT - *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* (*John 1:6*)

THEME - John pointed out people's need by preaching repentance, and provided the solution to the need by pointing to Christ.

Introduction:

There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. In the Greek, the word EGENETO means "there appeared on the stage of history."

John the Baptist had a unique mission, one that had been prophesied by Isaiah, to prepare the way of the Lord.

His mission was announced by an angel before his birth. (cf. *Luke 1:15-17*)

His mission culminated with the baptism of Jesus, when he pointed him out to the crowd and cried "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*"

His mission ended with martyrdom when Herod had him beheaded for daring to preach against his sinful immoral relationship with Herodias.

Jesus would eventually say of this man, "*Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.*" (*Matthew 11:11*)

John the author tells us several important things about John the Baptist:

- He goes to great lengths to point out that John the Baptist was NOT the Messiah. (cf. *John 1:8*, where the emphatic language may have been because of the number of "John the Baptist Followers" in Ephesus, where John was probably writing from. (cf. *Acts 19:1-3* where many of John's disciples appeared to be in Ephesus.)

Where Jesus was WITH God and WAS God, John the Baptist was a MAN SENT FROM GOD. Good distinction to remember about all preachers, prophets, etc. On the one hand, they are mere men. On the other hand, they are sent from God.

- His ministry upset the religious leaders of the day - *John 1:19,24*. Several things about John upset them:

They didn't think they needed repentance, and so were offended at his message.

They wanted to have the pre-eminence, and so needed to make him look small. (And his fame was great, cf. *Matthew 3* - multitudes were influenced by his ministry.)

- He based his ministry in scripture.

When asked who he was he quoted *Isaiah 40:3*.

Any ministry should be based solely upon scripture. Man's opinions and ideas are meaningless.

Well, let's examine this man, John the Baptist, by concentrating on two things - his method and his message - both of which are described here in John.

John's Method

1. Ascetic living.

OK - maybe not everything about John the Baptist is mentioned in the Gospel of John! For this thought we must go to the other gospels.

And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. (Matthew 3:4)

John's lifestyle gave credence, and lent authority, to his message.

QUOTE (Matthew Henry) - John wrought no miracle, nor do we find that he had visions and revelations; but the strictness and purity of his life and doctrine... were plain indications that he was sent of God.

ILLUS - People revered Mother Theresa for her willingness to give up all to help the poor - her ascetic lifestyle made people think she was genuine. The opposite is true of TV preachers who people view as charlatans and fakes because they choose to live exactly opposite - lives of opulence and decadence.

We need to learn a lesson here from John the Baptist - if we would reach our worlds for Christ, we need to live simple lives that demonstrate the reality of our commitment to Christ - not lives of worldliness and greed.

2. Preaching / Witness *Matthew 3:1; John 1:7,15,26-27,29*

I wonder how John the Baptist would fare today. People today are offended if you tell them how to live. Yet John did just that!

He rebuked sin, calling the Pharisees and Sadducees a generation of vipers. *cf. Matthew 3*

He warned of coming judgement, saying that Jesus was *One Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:12)*

Primarily, he preached repentance, a turning from sin, as we'll discuss shortly.

The thing to note, though, is that HE PREACHED! Preaching is and always has been a primary method used by God.

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (2 Timothy 4:2)

God give us more John the Baptists! What America needs today is not more politics... not more democracy... not more stock market success... not cheaper gas... not more American Idol! America needs more John the Baptists who will thunder the truth of God and call America back to God!

3. Baptism in water - *John 1:26,28*

- What is baptism?

DEFINITION - baptizo bap-tid'-zo - to immerse, submerge; to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet); used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial ablution, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian baptism:--Baptist, baptize, wash. (Strong's)

Another source indicated the word was used to describe the process of dying cloth.

Various modes exist today, but only immersion (such as we practice) fits the definition of the word.

Note: Had the translators just translated the word "baptizo", our Bibles would all read "immersed." But they didn't translate the word, they transliterated the word, turning "baptizo" into a new English word "baptize."

- Why did John baptize?

He was very specific (in the other gospel accounts) that his baptism was indicative of repentance - turning from sin - washing away sin - cleansing oneself in preparation for the coming Savior.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: (Matthew 3:11)

QUOTE (Barnes Notes) - "At the time of John, and for some time previous, they had been accustomed to administer a rite of baptism, or washing, to those who became proselytes to their religion; that is, who were converted from being Gentiles. This was done to signify that they renounced the errors and worship of the pagans, and as significant of their becoming pure by embracing a new religion. It was a solemn rite of washing, significant of cleansing from their former sins, and purifying them for the peculiar service of Jehovah. John found this custom in use; and as he was calling the Jews to a new dispensation, to a change in their form of religion, he administered this rite of baptism, or washing, to signify the cleansing from their sins, and adopting the new dispensation, or the fitness of the pure reign of the Messiah. They applied an old ordinance to a new purpose."

- APPLICATION - Is baptism a requirement for a Christian? Is it necessary for salvation? What is its purpose?

- a. Christians are NOT baptized because it saves. BAPTISM DOES NOT SAVE. cf. *Acts 16:31, Romans 10:13*

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:15-16)

ILLUS - Thief on the cross

If you die having believed in Christ, but never following in baptism, I'll see you in heaven, just like I'll see the thief who died next to Christ.

BUT if you die having been baptized, but having never believed, you will go straight to hell. cf. *(Mark 16:15-16)*

- b. Christians are baptized because Jesus was baptized. If it was a good thing for Him to do, it is a good thing for us to do. cf. *Matthew 3:13-15*
- c. Christians are baptized because it is the New Testament pattern; it was the FIRST STEP OF OBEDIENCE for new converts.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38, KJV)

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41, KJV)

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (Acts 8:36-38)

- The believers at Pentecost were baptized - *Acts 2:41*
- The converts in Samaria were baptized - *Acts 8:12*
- The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized - *Acts 8:38*
- Saul of Tarsus was baptized - *Acts 9:18*
- Lydia of Thyatira was baptized - *Acts 16:15*
- The Philippian jailor and his household were baptized - *Acts 16:33*

- The believers in Corinth were baptized - Acts 18:8
 - The Ephesian disciples were baptized - Acts 19:5
- d. Christians are baptized because we are COMMANDED to baptize in the great commission:
Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (Matthew 28:19, KJV)
- e. Christians are baptized because it symbolizes the washing away of our sins, and identification with Him.
Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:12, KJV)
- Pictures his death, burial, and resurrection.
For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13, KJV)
- Pictures our identification with the family of God.

Christians should be baptized. You can progress no further in the Christian life than the steps of obedience you are willing to take. The first step is baptism. God won't show you the next step until you're obedient to the first. So many Christians are stuck on that first step - going nowhere.

If this is a step the Holy Spirit is convicting you about, you need to take it.

John's Message

1. Repentance (*John 1:23, Matthew 3:2-11, Luke 3:3*)

DEFINITION - Repentance is agreement with God about our sin (i.e. confession), that leads to a change in action and lifestyle. Repentance goes beyond confession in that repentance in an action.

John taught that repentance is VISIBLE:

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. (Luke 3:10-14)

ILLUS - Lyons Lawson's hitchhiker.

APPLICATION to us? Repentance does not save, but repentance is a necessary step leading to salvation. You cannot be saved until you are lost!

ILLUS - I saw a bumper sticker yesterday that said "Try Jesus - If you don't like Him, the devil will be glad to take you back." Cute - terrible theology. We don't try Jesus as an experiment. We come to him lost and undone, helpless and recognizing our need. We come to him in repentance, and He graciously saves us.

ILLUS - We come to him like Peter sinking in the waves - "Lord save me."

ILLUS - We come to him like the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda - completely helpless, knowing our need, and knowing we can do nothing about it.

Have you seen yourself lost? In need of repentance?

2. Somebody is coming (*John 1:26-27,29*)

He was a witness for Christ - something we all should be.

He pointed out their need by preaching repentance. He pointed to the solution when he pointed to Christ!

He was an EYEWITNESS for Christ - something nobody had been able to be up until that point.

Unlike other prophets who had simply given the truth that the Messiah was coming, John actually pointed him out. He was able to say, "This is the one!" For so long the children of Israel had awaited a Messiah, but were unsure who He was. John knew, and pointed Him out. He said, "He stands among you and you don't even see Him!" WE know too, and have the ability to point Him out.

He was a FOCUSED witness for Christ - always pointing to Christ, and only to Christ.

Later he would say, "He must increase, but I must decrease." IT'S ALL ABOUT HIM, NOT ME!

ILLUS - Franklin Graham gave an interview and was asked why his father, Billy Graham had seen such success in his ministry. Franklin said, "Because he always stayed on message."

Application to us - we must always stay on message as a church. We preach Christ and Him crucified. Let others tell of other things - we have only one message!

Conclusion:

Will you listen today to the voice that cried in the wilderness?

Will you learn from his methods?

Will you heed his message?

Perhaps the Holy Spirit is saying to you, "Repent!"

Perhaps He is saying, "be baptized."

Perhaps He is saying you need to do both.

Tomorrow may never come, my friend. If you hear the voice, you need to obey it today.

Chapter 3. A Man Sent From God

Chapter 4. Come and See

READ - *John 1:29-51*

TEXT -*He saith unto them, Come and see. (John 1:39)*

THEME - Evangelism can be boiled down into two thoughts - bring them to Jesus, challenge them to come and see.

Introduction:

John the Baptist's ministry was to point out Jesus Christ to the world, and proclaim Him as the Messiah. This ministry he fulfilled:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29, KJV)

Jesus came to John, was baptized by him in the Jordan River. His authenticity was testified to by both a voice from heaven and the visible sign of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and resting upon Him. (cf. Matthew 3:16,17; John 1:32)

And so, there had been a 3-fold testimony to Jesus Christ and His deity - the voice from heaven, the Holy Spirit, and John's proclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

I love that phrase, "taketh away the sin of the world." Jesus doesn't just forgive sin - He takes it away.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. (Hebrews 10:17)

Have you let Him take away your sins, my friend? Only He can.

But now the introductions were over, and Jesus' ministry began. In the scripture we read this morning, we see a couple of firsts - His first public words and His first disciples.

1. Notice, for example, His first public words - cf. *vss. 38-39*.

- When they sought Him, He immediately stopped what He was doing and turned to meet them.
- "What seek ye?" The same question that He asks all who come to Him even today - What is your need? What is it that you seek? We come to Him needy, because He is the One who can meet the need.
- "Come and see." A casual conversation was not enough for them to consider His claims. They might walk away from such a talk unconvinced. But to spend time with Christ, to get to know Him, to "come and see," was to come away saved. It is the same today. Do you wonder about the claims of Christ? "Come and see." Spend some time with Him, with His people, in His church, in His Word, and you will be convinced that He is the Son of God.

2. And consider His first followers... His first disciples.

Other than John the Baptist and the Savior, Himself, there are five men mentioned in this passage:

- 1 - Andrew (one of John's disciples)
- 2 - Unnamed disciple of John
- 3 - Simon Peter
- 4 - Philip
- 5 - Nathaniel

We learn some interesting things about a couple of them:

- The evidence suggests that the unnamed disciple was John, himself. This would be consistent with his method throughout, where he seldom names himself.

"The other was doubtless our Evangelist himself. His great sensitiveness is touchingly shown in his representation of this first contact with the Lord; the circumstances are present to him in the minutest details; he still remembers the very hour." (Jamison, Faussett, and Brown Commentary)

This is an interesting point because it reminds us of the importance of knowing when we were saved. Do you remember your salvation experience, my friend? If you can not remember being saved, it is likely that you never were.

- He gave Simon a new name - Cephas.

Notice *vs. 42*. Jesus looked at Peter and said two amazing and wonderful things to him:

- "Thou art Simon."
- "Thou shalt be Cephas."

We come to Jesus one way, and leave changed. We come lost, and leave saved. We come sick, and leave whole. We come needy, and leave rich. We come dead, and leave alive. We come as enemies, and leave as adopted sons and daughters of the King.

With those two statements, Jesus summed up Peter's life. He was not a rock. He was unstable, changeable, rash, foolish, cowardly, and in every way the opposite of a rock. But look at him after Pentecost - he was a changed man - a rock, right up until the time he gave his life as a martyr for the cause of Christ.

- Jesus so impressed Nathaniel, who was very skeptical, that Nathaniel immediately confessed Him as the Son of God. *vss. 45-51*

Nathaniel was a skeptic, and yet Jesus easily convinced him:

- Philip found Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree.

Such a place was commonly a place of devotion and study. It is therefore probable that Nathaniel was engaged in his personal devotions, reading scripture, praying, and / or meditating on the things of God.

- Although Jesus was nowhere near the fig tree, he pointed out to Nathaniel that he had seen him there. Something about this completely and immediately convinced Nathaniel.
- Some believe that Jesus' reference to angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man (*vs. 51*) was an indication that Nathaniel may have been reading the story of Jacob's dream in Genesis, where Jacob had seen just such a vision. Furthermore, He said of Nathaniel that he was a true Israelite, in whom was no guile or deceit. This could also indicate that he had just come from reading about Jacob - the deceiver.

Whatever the details, the fact is the skeptic was immediately convinced of Christ's reality. And any skeptic who comes face to face with the claims of Christ will come away a believer. Christ can melt the hardest of hearts.

Well, all of these are interesting lessons from today's scripture, but I want us now to spend our remaining few minutes on one particular topic, and that topic is evangelism. For in these few verses we have wonderful truth about how to bring people to Christ - how to witness - how to evangelize.

Remember we said there are 5 people in this passage who came to Jesus? (Andrew, John?, Simon, Philip, Nathaniel) Each of them came to Him in a different way, and we can learn from each. Notice:

Andrew and John listened to the preacher

cf. vss. 35-37

I don't understand preaching. It is a phenomenon that is constant throughout history. From the earliest recorded time, we see men preaching, and people listening. We see God sharing His Word with us through preachers.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

Even today, in the midst of all our technology... even today when we have means of communicating that seem so much more advanced... even today, in this age when communications can circle the globe in a nanosecond of time - GOD STILL USES PREACHING as His primary means of reaching people.

ILLUS - Alistair Begg - right up the road from us. People flock to hear him.

ILLUS - When communism fell in the former Soviet Union, missionaries flocked to share the gospel in the newly open frontier. I have videos in my collection from BIMI showing unbelievable crowds of people thronging to hear the preaching.

ILLUS - Up until he became too aged to do it, Billy Graham was filling stadiums around the world with people who just wanted to hear the gospel preached.

And there are untold thousands more illustrations - GOD USES PREACHING.

Are you yet unsaved, and yet seeking? Keep listening to the preaching of God's Word. I don't say this to just build this congregation for my personal benefit. I say it because I know it's God's way - it works.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:13-14)

MAY GOD SEND US MORE PREACHERS!

Are you still unconvinced of Jesus and His claims? STAY IN CHURCH - KEEP LISTENING.

Are you burdened for that loved one who is lost? DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO GET HIM OR HER IN CHURCH - GET THEM TO LISTEN TO PREACHING!

Simon was reached by a family member

cf. vss. 40-42

You could sum up the Biblical record of Andrew with that little phrase in vs. 42, "he brought Him to Jesus." Andrew was always bringing people to Jesus.

ILLUS - cf. *John 6:8-9* - Andrew brought the boy with the 5 loaves and 2 fishes to Jesus.

There is no indication that Andrew was eloquent, but he knew how to say, "We have found the Messiah" (vs. 41).

All of us can do that.

There is no indication that Andrew had great technique or ministerial training, but he "brought him to Jesus" (vs. 42).

All of us can do that.

What of your family, my friend? I have family members I've prayed for for years. Some of you are the same. You're like Paul who said of his extended family, Israel, that:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Romans 9:1-3)

Be an Andrew to your family. Be willing to share the simple truth that you have found Him. Be willing to bring them to Jesus.

Philip was sought out by Jesus, Himself.

cf. vs. 43

This is interesting, isn't it? There seems to be no human intervention at all. Christ went to Philip directly.

As a church, we need to be evangelistic. We need to share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ constantly. I need to preach it. You all need to witness to it. We need to be doing everything we can to reach people for Christ.

And do you know that when we do these things, God will often bless in ways we had not envisioned? We may witness to one person, and God will honor that effort by bringing in a completely different person into the kingdom.

ILLUS - Richard Wurmbrand, founder of The Voice of the Martyrs ministry, was a pastor and leader in the underground church in communist Romania. He was captured and imprisoned and placed in solitary confinement for years of his life. Let me quote from an article in the "Voice of the Martyrs" newsletter:

Stripped of all human dignity, he was left to rot in a solitary cell.

It was during this time, and this time alone, the imprisoned pastor questioned his belief. Even a session of torture would have been preferred over being forced to spend day upon day and week upon week and month upon month in a solitary cell. If tortured, at least he could offer a few words of hope to the one beating him.

Richard was torn by trying to reconcile his teaching with his current situation. It was the ultimate test. A test he faced alone. There was no one to benefit from his words. No person to share his pain. He later stated, "God had granted only suffering."

In an effort to maintain his sanity, Richard set a routine every day which included prayer and preaching. He did not concern himself with who was listening. The angels could listen. Faithfully, he practiced this routine day after day for two years.

Then one day a tap was heard in his cell, then another. A prisoner in an adjacent cell heard the muffled sounds of a man speaking, and he was trying to get his attention.

(The story goes into detail about how these two men learned to communicate with each other by developing a code of taps. And how years later Richard would meet this man who he had never seen or heard, but whom he had saved nonetheless - because Richard faithfully preached even when nobody was listening.

(From "Tapping on the Wall", Voice of the Martyrs, Special Issue 2007, pg. 14)

The point? Keep throwing the seed, Christian, even if you don't see results. God blesses the effort - sometimes in ways we can't see.

Our job is to witness - it's His job to save souls.

In times of war we hear of "collateral damage," i.e. casualties that were not meant to happen - people just got in the way. In evangelism, there is "collateral success," when God saves people we didn't directly speak with, but as a result of our faithfulness in speaking at all!

Nathaniel had to be reasoned with and convinced.

cf. vss. 45-51

Remember earlier we learned that Nathaniel was probably engaged in devotions while sitting under the fig tree? We can glean from that that Nathaniel was a thinker - somebody who reasons things out.

Have you ever tried to witness to an intellectual? I work at a college. Such highly educated people are hard to reach.

But Nathaniel proves they are reachable!

Philip REASONED with him. vs. 45

And if you are such a person, one who needs to reason things out, one who needs proof before you will believe, then I CHALLENGE YOU to consider the claims of Christ. For they do make sense, and they are believable. *Come now, and LET US REASON together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18)*

And then, he CHALLENGED him to "come and see".

We said it before and repeat it now - the arguments of the most hardened skeptic will crumble before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Are you a skeptic - Come and see and you will believe.

Are you praying for a skeptic - keep reasoning with them from scripture - keep challenging them to COME AND SEE. There is hope for them.

Conclusion:

Such a rich passage - so many truths we see here. But evangelism is the theme of the passage, and if we learn nothing else let us learn to bring people to Jesus. Let us learn that when people are challenged to come and see, they often come away believing.

Look around you this morning, friend. Do you see empty pews? How the Lord must weep to see it. Let's fill them up! Let's bring people to Jesus.

And if we were to take a field trip this morning and drive up and down the roads of Randolph, Ohio, what would we see? Hundreds mowing lawns, firing up grills, going fishing, and engaging in activities that seem perfectly harmless on the surface, but which in many cases indicate a soul that is LOST and in need of what only Christ can bring.

Let's go out and challenge them to simply COME AND SEE! Let's bring them to Jesus.

Chapter 4. Come and See

Chapter 5. A Mother's Wisdom

READ - *John 2:1-11*

TEXT - *And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. (John 2:3) His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. (John 2:5)*

THEME - Jesus is the only Way, and so we must obey Him.

Introduction:

Jesus chose a marriage as the backdrop for His first miracle. It is popular in our culture to diminish the importance of marriage. People live together today before marriage, and sometimes without ever being married. This used to be called "living in sin" which was a correct description. It is still "living in sin" whether the world calls it that or not. Wicked people in positions of power try continuously to redefine marriage as something other than what it really is - a man and a woman committing their lives to one another, and only to one another, forever.

Of marriage, the Bible says *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. (Hebrews 13:4 ESV)* Adultery = sexual relationships with another's spouse. Fornication = (a broader term) sexual relationships and behavior outside of one's own marriage. Marriage is the oldest institution, defined by God in *Genesis 2:18-24*. And when Jesus attended and participated in this wedding, He put His stamp of approval on marriage, and reminded us of its importance.

From this story we could infer that Jesus blesses weddings. Happy the bride and groom who invite Him to their's!

But I don't think the wedding is the central theme.

I think, actually, that the jist of the message can be seen in the words of His mother, Mary. She preached two wonderful sermons here. And she only spoke 11 words.

Notice:

They have no wine

Mary was invited to the wedding. It seems that Jesus and His disciples were invited because of her. Some infer from this that the wedding party and Mary were friends. Notice that Joseph is not mentioned - strong evidence that he was already dead by this time.

1. They ran out of wine. This was a social disgrace and would have had serious repercussions for the reputations of bride and groom.
 - It's possible that they ran out because they were poor, and simply couldn't afford enough wine. It's possible that they ran out because Jesus and His disciples inflated the roster - something that was not planned for. It's possible that they were just poor planners in the first place.
 - But the real reason is seen in *vs. 11* - that Jesus might show His glory, and that people might believe in Him.

Nothing happens by accident. This problem was planned by God and was used by God to demonstrate the glory of the Savior - to help others to believe in Him.

Be encouraged by this when difficulties come your way - it may be that God is using that difficulty to teach you, make Himself known to you, or even to bring you or others to Him.

ILLUS - When I think of difficulties in life and how God uses them, I often think of Joseph's comment to his brothers who had sold him into slavery: *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good...* (Genesis 50:20)

2. Mary brought it up to Jesus. "They have no wine." This implies she thought He could do something about it, even though we are aware of no miracles He had performed before this. But she knew Who He was, and had no doubt seen much of His glory in the silent years where He lived in submission to His parents, and before He began His ministry.

But did her words point to a greater need? Jesus' response says He saw the greater need.

"Woman..." Many consider this demeaning to say to His mother. Many think it unkind or insulting - because they apply the usage of today to the first century. "Woman" (Greek GUNE) was not a derogatory term, but rather an endearing one.

It is the same term by which he tenderly addressed Mary Magdalene after his resurrection (READ *John 20:15*), and his mother when he was on the cross (READ *John 19:26*. (Barnes Notes)

"Our Lord's answer to his mother, if properly translated, is far from being disrespectful. He addresses the virgin as he did the Syrophenician woman, Mt 15:28; as he did the Samaritan woman, Joh 4:21, as he addressed his disconsolate mother when he hung upon the cross, Joh 19:26; as he did his most affectionate friend Mary Magdalene, Joh 20:15, and as the angels had addressed her before, Joh 20:13; and as St. Paul does the believing Christian woman, 1Co 7:16; in all which places the same term, GUNE which occurs in this verse, is used; and where certainly no kind of disrespect is intended, but, on the contrary, complaisance, affability, tenderness, and concern and in this sense it is used in the best Greek writers." (Clarke Commentary)

"What have I do to with thee?" Again, some look at this as a derogatory comment Jesus made toward His mother, but consider:

"'What have I to do with thee' translates the Greek equivalent of a Hebrew idiom 'What to me and thee.' It's meaning depends not a little on the context in which it is found. In the Old Testament it often means 'Don't bother me, leave me alone.' On the lips of the demoniacs in *Mark 1:24* it implies 'What have we in common with you?' Here... the probable meaning is 'Your concern and mine are not the same.'" (Tasker, Commentary on John pp. 59-60)

It may well be that by some mysterious association of ideas the brief but poignant words of His mother, 'they have no wine' (3), expressing her sensitive concern for the distress of their host, suggested to Jesus the much deeper need of humanity that He had come to earth to satisfy. It was because men 'had no wine', because they had no inherent strength to save themselves from the dire predicament in which they stood as sinners, that Jesus was destined, in Isaiah's words, 'to tread the wine-press alone' (see Isaiah 53:3), and pour out the wine of His most precious blood. (Tasker, p. 56)

Jesus knew they had no wine - the old water of Judaism could not save the souls of men and women - they needed a Savior, and He was that Savior. Jesus use of the phrase, *Mine hour is not yet come*, always referred to the hour of His death. Here in the midst of revelry and celebration, the mind of Christ was on the cross. Here at the very beginning of His ministry, His goal was the completion of it. He came to seek and to save the lost, and His every thought, word and action related to that mission. He came to take away the sins of the world, and He was already busy about that.

They have no wine - it was true then, and it's true today. Apart from the blood of Christ, there is no salvation for mankind - no hope.

They have no wine. Those pots of water that were sitting there were filled with water used in Jewish purification, washing of hands and utensils. These pots

are a symbol of the Old Testament economy, and they were useless to meet the need of the hour.

They have no wine. Only when Jesus changed the water to wine was their need met. Their bodies, minds and souls were refreshed. Their joy was made complete.

Listen to me, my friend. Only in Jesus Christ can you find the solution to your need. He alone can save and make you whole. He alone can quench the thirst of your soul.

Here, at the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry... at the scene of His first public miracle, we see the very reason He came - the great need of mankind - "They have no wine." They are sinners, and all the religion in the world (seen symbolized in the water jars) could not save them. They are sinners, and only the blood of Jesus Christ (seen symbolized by the wine), could wash them clean. "They have no wine." But Jesus will provide the wine they need. Jesus will meet the greatest need of mankind.

Whatever He says to you, do.

This may be the simplest and best sermon preached in the entire Bible, and it was preached by Mary. No problem would be unsolved if we would listen to this sermon.

1. The servants listened and obeyed:

- He said "fill the pots with water" and they obeyed.

(Although they probably were wondering and questioning among themselves about how this was solving their problem - they needed WINE not water!)

- He said, "Draw some and take it to the governor" and they obeyed.

(Although they probably feared what would happen when they presented what was supposed to be wine to the governor and he discovered it was only purification water.)

- They saw an amazing result:

They KNEW it was water that they had put in the pot.

They KNEW that they and they alone had touched it - Jesus never did.

They KNEW that they had drawn water from the pots, and that it was water when they drew it.

They SAW that when they poured it into the governor's cup, it was wine.

Jesus had not physically touched it, but had nonetheless miraculously created wine from water.

- The disciples believed.

Of course, this was the goal of the whole thing. (Remember John's purpose in writing this book (READ *John 20:30-31*))

2. Oh that people today would listen to and obey the Savior!

ILLUS - There is a song we often sing entitled "Trust and Obey." It came to be when the title expression (Trust and Obey) was used in a testimony meeting, following an evangelistic crusade in Brockton, Massachusetts, by Dwight L. Moody. A young man stood to speak, and it soon became clear he knew little Christian doctrine. But he finished by saying, "I'm not quite sure - but I'm going to trust, and I'm going to obey." Daniel Towner, who was in the meeting, jotted down the words, and gave them to John Sammis, who developed the lyrics from them.

And there such simple truth in those lyrics:

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

James said the same thing when he wrote, *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (James 1:22)*

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

Samuel said the same thing to Saul when he said, *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)*

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

He said to Abraham - "Leave your home and start walking to a land which I'll tell you about eventually." Abraham could have said, "What??? I don't understand. Tell me WHERE and I'll decide if I want to obey." But *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. (Hebrews 11:8, KJV)*

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

Later on He said to Abraham, "You're going to have a son when you're 100 years old." Which of you elderly brothers and sisters here today would have believed if you heard such a thing? But then, after that miracle, He said again, *And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Genesis 22:2)*

ILLUS - I watched a movie once about this event (I can't remember the name, and it portrayed Abraham as yelling and crying out words of defiance to God when he heard this demand. But I don't think that's accurate. The Bible says he simply obeyed.

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

He said to Gideon, "I want you lead my people in battle against their enemies, the Midianites." Gideon was not a very brave man, and he was afraid. But he prayed about it some more and obeyed. He gathered together an army of 32,000 men and prepared to fight. But God said to him, that's too many men - send home the ones that are afraid. Gideon watched in horror as 22,000 of them left! God said, "That's still too many" and proceeded to whittle down the troops further until Gideon had only 300 men! He could have said, "This is nuts," and headed for home. But he simply obeyed what God said, not understanding it in the least, and God wrought a mighty victory through those 300 men.

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

Mary was no stranger to this concept. God had said to her once, "You, a virgin, are going to get pregnant and bear a son." She could have said "What? I'll be a social outcast" "People will laugh at me... despise me." My husband, Joseph will hate me." She could have said no, but she said, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. (Luke 1:38)*

Whatsoever He saith unto you, DO IT.

When you do whatever He says to do, you declare yourself to be a person of faith. And the Bible is filled with those *Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the*

violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (Hebrews 11:33-34)

- It doesn't matter whether you understand it now. Just DO IT, and someday you will understand.
- It doesn't matter whether it makes sense now. Just DO IT, and someday it will make sense.
- It doesn't matter what others think. Just DO IT. The only opinion that matters is His.
- It doesn't matter what the culture of the day says. Just DO IT. When God says one thing and culture another, we must always choose God's way.
- It doesn't matter if you're the only one doing it. Just DO IT.

Be like Paul who said, *let God be true, but every man a liar (Romans 3:4)*

Be like Elijah who thought, *I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. (1 Kings 19:10)*

WHATSOEVER HE SAITH UNTO YOU, DO IT.

Now understand this - when Jesus spoke to these servants, it was normal verbal communication, such as you and I might have one with another. When He speaks with us today, it is through His word. And so Mary's words could be respoken today as "Whatever He has said in His Word, do it."

Just as the servants saw miraculous results when they obeyed, so too will we.

Just as the disciples believed when the servants obeyed, so too will others believe when we obey. The best soul winners are those who with a full and pure heart DO WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ALWAYS.

Conclusion:

Which of these powerful statements made by Mary apply to you, this morning?

1. *They have no wine (vs. 3)*

Perhaps you have never started trusting in Jesus Christ as the only One who can meet your needs, solve your problems, heal you of all your diseases, cleanse you of every stain and forgive you of every sin. Perhaps you are not a believer. You have no wine. Will you trust Him today?

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12 NIV)

2. *Whatever He saith unto you, do it. (vs. 5)*

Obedience is hard. Nobody said it isn't. But it is the simplest way to explain the Christian life.

Read your Bible, and do what it says.

How are you doing on this one? Do you have obedience problems? Is the Lord pointing out areas of your life where you are not in compliance? You can fix that this morning. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

Will you, this morning, determine in your heart that you are going to obey the Lord?

Chapter 5. A Mother's Wisdom

Chapter 6. The Ultimate Sign

READ - *John 2:12-25*

TEXT - *Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (John 2:19)*

THEME - The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof of His authority, the ultimate reason we should believe in Him and the ultimate incentive to live lives that glorify Him.

Introduction:

Jesus went to Capernaum (*vs. 12*). A quick study of His life reveals that He liked Capernaum, and spent a lot of time there. And a visit to Israel helps shed insight on why, for Capernaum is in a beautiful part of Israel - mild weather, tranquil setting - it's just a nice place.

But He didn't stay there long (*vs. 12b*). Something was happening in Jerusalem that, even at this early part of His ministry, He needed to be faithful to. The Passover celebration - Every male among the Jews was required by the law to appear at this feast.

Jesus always modeled submission, and provided a good example of it here for us.

When He got back to Jerusalem, He cleansed the temple. The other three gospel writers describe a cleansing of the temple that occurred at the end of Jesus' ministry, and led up to His crucifixion (cf. *Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45, 46*). Some say this is an example of an error in scripture - John just got it wrong. Nonsense - there are no errors in scripture (cf. *Every word of God is pure (Proverbs 30:5a), All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (2 Timothy 3:16), For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21 NKJV)*) Jesus simply performed this act twice - one at the beginning of His ministry, and one at the end of it.

Notice three main thoughts I see in this passage:

Why did He cleanse the temple?

(PICTURE THE SCENE - DESCRIBE the cleansing - small cords, used to shoo animals - no evidence He struck any people, but merely shooed the animals out. He DID, however, flip over tables and CHASE people out.)

He did this twice - at the beginning of His ministry, and at the end. THIS TELLS US IT IS IMPORTANT. (Repetition principle of Biblical hermeneutics - "That principle under which God repeats some truth or subject already given, generally with the addition of details not before given." J. Edwin Hartill, Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics)

PARENTHETICAL - It's interesting, isn't it, to picture Jesus this way? Not as the effeminate girlie-man that the renaissance artists often depicted, but a man's man. Somebody that MEN could and can believe in. (He had been a carpenter, manual laborer, up until this point. He was in the prime of His life, physically.)

Why did He do it? The answer is in *vs. 17* - *zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*.

DEFINITION - ZEAL = Greek ZELOS = excitement of mind, ardour, fervour of spirit, ardour in embracing, pursuing, defending anything (Strong's Greek Lexicon)

DEFINITION - EATEN ME UP = Greek KATESTHIO = to consume by eating, to eat up, devour, and metaphorically - to utterly consume (Strong)

Other translations are helpful here:

Zeal for your house will consume me. (John 2:17 NASB and NIV)

Passion for God's house burns within me. (John 2:17 NLT)

And so, Jesus demonstrated what He thinks about the house of God - as a starting point for His ministry, and as a final statement before the cross. HE HAS AN ALL CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD!

I wonder how many who name the name of Christ have such a mindset today? And I wonder what would happen to our churches across the land if we demonstrated such a mindset?

I see 2 applications here:

APPLICATION # 1: Your BODY is the temple.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; (1 Corinthians 6:19 NIV)

- Is your temple holy?
- Are there things about your body - your life, that Jesus would take a whip to today?
- Does your body, and what you do with it, glorify God?
- This is why Christians should not look like the world. Our bodies are the temple of God!
- This is why Christians should not live like the world. Our bodies are the temple of God.
- This is why Christians should be PURE. Our bodies are the temple of God.
- This is why Christians should be HOLY. Our bodies are the temple of God.

Christians should have an ALL CONSUMING PASSION for the temple of God - an ALL CONSUMING PASSION TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE THAT PLEASES GOD.

Churches are drying up today because they are filled with so-called Christians who are just as worldly as the world they claim to be reaching. The world sees no difference, and therefore the world sees a room full of hypocrites.

Does God need to cleanse your temple?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

Application # 2 - The church is a temple.

I wonder sometimes, if Jesus came to this local assembly today, would we find Him braiding together a whip?

As a church, do we have a membership that is marked by an ALL CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD?

As a church, do we have officers - elders and deacons, that demonstrate by their daily lives, their selfless service, and their dedication to the Word of God and the work of God, that they have an ALL CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD?

When people walk into this church, what do they see? Do they see a people who want to be different from the world, and separated unto the service of God? Or do they see people who dress just like the lost world, talk just like the lost world, act just like the lost world. Do people see in us an ALL CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD?

You say, PREACHER, HOW CAN WE KNOW IF IT IS SO?

ANSWER - Here is a thought process that helps me - Is everything we do here on the Lord's Day EXCELLENT? Or do we just do enough to get by? Only our absolute best - only a desire to serve God with EXCELLENCE demonstrates that ALL CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD.

ILLUS - I like to think of it this way - if I would do more in service for my employer, or in preparation for a job interview, or in preparation to visit with the president of my country, then I'm not doing enough to serve my King! I should prepare in every way as if I were doing it for my King. I should appear before God's people on this platform dressed only as I would if I were to meet the King.

It doesn't stop with the Lord's Day, though! The rest of the week is important too! When people meet the membership of this church on Monday - Friday outside the confines of this building, do they see a people that have an ALL CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD?

Give of your best to the Master;
Give of the strength of your youth;
Throw your soul's fresh, glowing ardor
Into the battle for truth.
Jesus has set the example;
Dauntless was He, young and brave,
Give Him your loyal devotion,
Give Him the best that you have.

Give of your best to the Master;
Give Him first place in your heart;
Give Him first place in your service,
Consecrate every part.
Give, and to you shall be given;
God His beloved Son gave;
Gratefully seeking to serve Him,
Give Him the best that you have.

This is why Jesus cleansed the temple - He had such a zeal for the house of God that when it needed cleaning up, He cleaned it up.

By what authority did Jesus cleanse the temple?

Then answered the Jews... (vs. 18) - probably the Jewish leaders - Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees - Jewish religious leadership.

... what sign shewest thou unto us? (vs. 18) - basically they were asking for some evidence that Jesus had the authority to do what He was doing.

Destroy this temple... (vs. 19) - Some think He might have gestured toward His body at this point, but such a conjecture is not needed. Clearly they thought He meant the temple building in which they were standing. This thought and this saying of Jesus continued to be remembered throughout His ministry, and even as He hung on the cross (cf. *Mark 15:29*).

It was a BOLD AND RIDICULOUS claim, and the response of the hearers showed they thought so - *vs. 20*, AND THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HE MEANT!

When we understand that He was referring to His own body - His death and His resurrection, it is an EVEN MORE AMAZING CLAIM. He was literally saying - kill this body, and I will raise it back to life. Who has power over their own body once it is dead? Only the Son of God. HE WAS CLAIMING TO BE GOD! By what authority? I AM the authority!

You say, what does this mean to me?

The death, burial and resurrection of Christ are the ultimate sign of His authority.

- Others have done good works - only Jesus rose from the dead.
- Others have healed the sick, but only Jesus rose from the dead.
- Others have been great teachers, but only Jesus rose from the dead.
- Others have had huge followings, and started mass movements, and shaken the world with their teaching, but ONLY JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

This is the ultimate evidence - the ultimate sign that Jesus would provide of His authority. Why could he do what He did? BECAUSE HE IS GOD. What proof did He offer? He died and rose again by His own power.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. (John 10:17-18)

PARENTHETICAL - Notice an important truth in vs. 22. Jesus was teaching, but at the time nobody understood. Years later, they remembered and understood and believed. Sunday School teachers, preachers, those who just witness to friends and loved ones, can be encouraged - teach and teach and teach the truth. The Lord will bring it to remembrance at the right time.

What was the result of Jesus cleansing the temple?

Primarily it was belief - His disciples believed (eventually), and others believed as well.

But notice, there is an interesting comment at the end of this passage.

READ - vs. 23-25

UNDERSTAND THIS - There is such a thing as superficial, non-saving belief.

Here were people who "believed in Him," but not with the kind of belief that Jesus sought.

There are all kinds of ways to believe in Jesus that will not get you to heaven! Some examples:

- Some people believe in Him as a great man, but not as the Son of God.
ILLUS - I always remember a conversation I had with a man who claimed to be a Christian. We sat at my kitchen table and discussed the claims of Christ. I was pretty certain from what he was saying that this man was NOT a Christian, and so I asked him, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God?" He responded with deep conviction, "Of course not." (As if to say, how could anybody believe that.) Here was a man who thought he was a Christian, because he believed Jesus was a good man. But it is not this kind of belief that saves.
- Some people believe He was a revolutionary teacher, and we should follow His example and teachings, but do not accept His teachings that they are lost and need to be saved.

ILLUS - I have a dear friend I pray for often. We've spoken often of his need for salvation. He accepts Jesus as a great man. He claims to believe everything He taught. But he has plainly said to me "I cannot believe that I need a Savior. I do not believe Jesus is my Savior." (Even though He said He came to seek and save that which was lost... and He came to save His people from their sins)

- Some believe that there are many ways to God, and that Jesus is just one of those many ways.

And yet Jesus didn't believe that at all!

I am the way... (John 14:6)

All others who came before me were thieves and robbers... (John 10:8 NLT)

Neither is there salvation in any other... (Acts 4:12)

The belief that saves is more than just these things. It is more than just intellectual assent that Jesus existed and did great things and taught wonderful precepts.

There is a form of belief that will land you in hell.

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (James 2:19)

These people in Jerusalem "believed in Jesus," but it was superficial. It was not a life-changing belief that comes from the heart.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:22-23)

My friends, we need to *examine ourselves whether we be in the faith.* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Here is the belief that saves. It must include all these components:

1. It is a belief that GOD is holy and perfect. He created you, He loves you, and He wants to be with you forever.

GOD SO LOVED... (John 3:16)

2. It is a belief that MAN is a sinner. It started with Eve, got picked up immediately by Adam, and now flows down through inheritance to all of us. We are sinners by inherited nature, and we are also sinners by action. None of you here today can honestly say you have never committed sin.

All have sinned... (Romans 3:23)

This sin drives a wedge between God and Man. Perfect and holy God cannot be in the presence of rotten and sinful man.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die... (Ezekiel 18:20)

A lot of people believe that first point, but can't get their minds around this one. You have to believe them both. You can't be saved until you realize you are LOST.

3. It is a belief that understands CHRIST DIED TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8 NLT)

4. Finally, it is a belief that understands a RESPONSE IS REQUIRED.

A response that includes repenting of sin, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ (and Him ONLY) as the means of salvation, receiving Him as Savior, calling upon Him...

Is that your belief? Are all four components there - GOD, MAN, CHRIST, and RESPONSE? If not, you may fall into the category described here by John - SUPERFICIAL BELIEF, belief that will not save. You can fix that today.

Conclusion:

Jesus cleansed the temple, because it needed cleaned up.

He cleansed the temple, because He had the authority to do so... authority that would be demonstrated ultimately in the resurrection.

And He cleansed the temple so that you and I might believe in Him.

Do you believe? Will you believe?

Chapter 7. You Must Be Born Again

READ - *John 3:1-21*

TEXT - *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)*

THEME - The new birth is the only way to heaven.

Introduction:

A ruler once came to Jesus by night
To ask Him the way of salvation and light;
The Master made answer in words true and plain,
"Ye must be born again."

"Ye must be born again,
Ye must be born again,
I verily, verily, say unto thee,
Ye must be born again."

In our study of the gospel of John, we come now to one of the pivotal and critical chapters in all the Bible. There is so much of God and eternal truth in this passage, that I think we could spend the rest of our time on earth here and never exhaust it.

Because it is so very important, let us attack it in a couple of different ways. Let's look at it first, verse by verse. For every verse is rich with truth. We will not look in detail at every verse, but we will notice several. Then, let's look at some key words, or key emphases.

A verse-by-verse study

Vs. 1

He was a Pharisee. Who were the Pharisees?

DEFINITION - separatists (Heb. persahin, from parash, "to separate") There were 3 main parties" or "sects" during the time of Christ - Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees. Pharisees were the strictest sect, holding to a very rigid interpretation of scripture and Jewish laws. The Essenes aren't mentioned in scripture, we only know about them from external sources. The Sadducees were the intelligentsia of the day, the lawyers and professors. They didn't believe in the supernatural. One man said, "The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection... that's why they were sad you see."

Some specific problems with the Pharisees:

1. They made up their own rules and laws and demanded that everyone follow them, and they separated themselves from anybody who did not follow their rules. (Know any like that today?)
2. They put their doctrine ahead of the word of God. Where God's word and their rules and regulations differed, they put their rules and regulations first. (Know any like that today?)
3. They hated Jesus. They claimed to be followers of God, but did everything they could to destroy the work of His Son. (Know any like that today?)
4. They were almost universally condemned by Jesus. He called them vipers, whitewashed sepulchres, and pronounced woes upon them.

Many, even today, are like these Pharisees.

But there were some, even among the Pharisees who were saved. Nicodemus is one. (Paul was another)

Nicodemus was mentioned twice more - *John 7:50*, where he defended Christ before his colleagues, and *John 19:39*, where he participated in the embalming of the body of Christ after His death.

John's goal in writing is to produce belief in Jesus. Toward that end he is now showing us a ruler, a leader, who believed and did so until the end of his life. - Strong testimony.

Vs. 2

Came by night - why? Why not in broad daylight? And why was Jesus available to him at night?

cf. *Galatians 2:2*, where Paul said he had spoken privately to those who were of reputation. Some people do not respond well to public discussion, but do respond well to private discussion. Nicodemus may have been such. Those with reputation, and who prize their position in society sometimes disdain being approached in front of others. We need to learn from the Lord and from Paul to understand human nature and tailor our approach to the individuals we witness to. Jesus always did that.

And no matter the hour, no matter the level of inconvenience, Jesus always made Himself available to those who sought Him (and He will always be available to you).

"thou art a teacher" - this is the extent to which many go in accepting Christ - He was a good man - a good teacher. But it was not enough.

Vs. 3

Jesus answered... - but He didn't even respond to the statements N was making! He cut him off at the knees and answered the hidden question of His heart, which was "How can a man see the kingdom of heaven?"

And Jesus ALWAYS knows what we need. He knew what N needed even without N stating it.

... except a man... - this expression indicated that the requirement was for everyone - "every man / woman". N was a Jew, but that wasn't enough. He was a Pharisee, but that wasn't enough. He was a member of the ruling Sanhedrin, but that wasn't enough. He recognized (apparently) that Jesus was a great man, a great teacher, and possibly even the Messiah, but that wasn't enough. The requirement of the new birth was for ALL.

Jesus ALWAYS spoke the truth, no matter who the hearer - no platitudes or softening of the message because N was an important person, or a prideful person. If the truth offended, Jesus spoke it anyway.

born again = "Altogether and entirely changed in the temper and disposition of the mind." (Abbott)

- N didn't need reformed.
- He didn't need to turn over a new leaf.
- He didn't need to clean up his act, or follow the Pharisaical rules more closely.
- He needed a radical and complete and supernatural change. He needed to be born again.

again = Greek ANOTHEN = from above, again, from the beginning. Same word used in *John 3:31* translated "from above." Also:

Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. (John 19:11)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, (Luke 1:3)

The most accurate and complete translation would be "reborn from above" - a phrase that wonderfully describes our salvation!

"This change, or the beginning of this new life, is called the new birth, or regeneration. It is so called because in many respects it has a striking analogy to the natural birth. It is the beginning of spiritual life. It introduces us to the light of the gospel. It is the moment when we really begin to live to any purpose. It is the moment when God reveals himself to us as our reconciled Father, and we are adopted into his family as his sons. And as every man is a sinner, it is necessary that each one should experience this change, or he cannot be happy or saved." (Barnes)

Cannot see = no other way - no possibility of a loophole.

Vs. 4

Two interesting points come to mind:

1. N did not understand. Sometimes people reject truth because those they consider to be learned and great reject it. Yet Barnes notes, " A doctrine is not to be rejected because the rich and the great do not believe or understand it. The doctrine of regeneration was not false because Nicodemus did not comprehend it."
2. Jesus didn't give up on him. Just because people question the message we teach, or argue with us about it (as N was doing here), we don't give up - we just keep proclaiming the word, throwing the seed, preaching the gospel.

Vs. 5

Water and the Spirit - 2 main interpretations - baptism and physical birth.

Baptism seems problematic as it would then be necessary for salvation. The Bible teaches that is not the case. It seems more likely Jesus is referring to physical birth here. You need to be born twice in order to see heaven. Physical birth is not enough - you also must have spiritual birth.

Cannot enter = SECOND TIME JESUS SAID THIS - no other way - no possibility of a loophole.

Vs. 8

Jesus here teaches that just because we don't understand HOW something works, we can and should still ACCEPT that it works because of the effect it produces. He uses the wind as an example. Great thought for our day where so many require scientific evidence before they will believe.

As in this case of the wind, the effects were seen, the sound was heard, important changes were produced by it, trees and clouds were moved, yet the wind is not seen, nor do we know whence it comes, nor by what laws it is governed; so it is with the operations of the Spirit. We see the changes produced, Men just now sinful become holy; the thoughtless become serious; the licentious become pure; the vicious, moral; the moral, religious; the prayerless, prayerful; the rebellious and obstinate, meek, and mild, and gentle. When we see such changes, we ought no more to doubt that they are produced by some cause--by

some mighty agent, than when we see the trees moved, or the waters of the ocean piled on heaps, or feel the cooling effects of a summer's breeze. In those cases we attribute it to the wind, though we see it not, and though we do not understand its operations. (Barnes)

Vs. 9

How can these things be? - N. still doesn't understand and stumbles because he cannot figure out how it works. "How" is not important - the fact that it works is. If the wind flattens my house tomorrow, I won't care HOW it did it, I'll just accept that it had the ability to do it. So with salvation. If we don't understand HOW it works, we ought to just accept that it DOES work.

Vs. 10

Art thou a teacher? - a mild rebuke from the Savior. N should have understood these things. The Pharisees were teachers of the Word of God - cf. *Matthew 23:2 - The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat*. Had N been a student of the O.T. he would have understood this teaching about a changed heart, for it was taught throughout. cf. *Psalms 51:10,16,17*.

Application - Even some who are in leadership don't understand spiritual truths. Another example of why YOU AS A LOCAL CHURCH should ONLY ACCEPT THE WORD OF GOD AS YOUR AUTHORITY. Prove everything I say by going to scripture (cf. *Acts 17:11*). And the only way to do that is for YOU TO BE TRUE STUDENTS OF SCRIPTURE.

Vs. 13

Son of man... - Jesus favorite title for Himself, describing His humanity.

... is in heaven - amazing statement that while there speaking with N He was also at the same time in heaven. This verse is a wonderful verse describing the dual nature of Christ - God / man.

"No one has gone up but He that came down, even He who is at once both up and down." (JFB)

Jesus here declares that there is only One who has the authority to teach these spiritual truths. We should not listen to other human sources, but only to the One who alone is knowledgeable on the subject.

Vs. 14

As Moses... (cf. *Numbers 21:8-9*) (DESCRIBE THIS O.T. STORY)

be lifted up - Jesus here prophesies His death, and the manner of it - cf. *John 12:32*

cf. *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.* (*Isaiah 45:22*)

As one simple look at the serpent, however distant and however weak, brought an instantaneous cure, even so, real faith in the Lord Jesus, however tremulous, however distant - be it but real faith - brings certain and instant healing to the perishing soul. (JFB)

One wonders how many Israelites thought the cure too simple and too absurd, and so perished because they wouldn't "look and be healed." cf. Naaman in *2 Kings 5:12*. How many lose out on salvation because it is too simple for them to grasp?

Vs. 16

Does this mark the end of Christ's words and the beginning of some explanation by John? Style seems to indicate so, according to Abbott.

God so loved the world - remember its state at this time - ruined, under the curse, every single man and woman in rebellion and enmity against God. In THIS STATE, He loved the world.

that He gave - free gift - nothing that could be earned.

The extent of God's love for the world (for you) is seen in His gift. How many parents would prefer to die themselves rather than to give up their child? cf. *1 John 4:9*

Vs. 17

sent not to condemn (or judge) - at that time, true, but soon He will come back and this time He will judge.

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10)

First time He came to save. Second time He comes to judge.

Vs. 18

Is not condemned or is not judged - the judgement fell on Christ at the cross - to the believer there is no further judgement for sin.

There is therefore now no condemnation... (Romans 8:1)

condemned already - Those without Christ are ALREADY under judgement - sentence has ALREADY BEEN PASSED.

Three Key Thoughts

Whosoever believeth

Notice *vs. 16* again.

Whosoever - salvation is offered to absolutely everybody.

Not me, preacher. I'm too much of a sinner.

- But the maniac of Gadara, filled to the brim with demons and wickedness, was not too much of a sinner and Christ saved him.
- Mary Magdalene was another who was demon possessed - 7 devils cast out of her the Bible says, and yet she was saved.
- Saul of Tarsus, another Pharisee like N. was a murderer, and yet saved.
- King David was an adulterer and murderer, and yet saved.
- Rahab was a prostitute, and yet saved.
- Lot was completely taken in by the temptations of this world, and yet saved.

You are not too far gone to be saved.

That "hard case" loved one you pray for all the time is not too far gone to be saved.

Fanny Crosby said it so well when she wrote:

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Shall Have Everlasting Life

Consider the magnitude of this promise.

These words tell us the QUANTITY of the gift of God - it is EVERLASTING life.

ILLUS - Ponce De Leon spent his life searching for the fountain of youth. Jesus had already provided it, though. EVERLASTING LIFE!

I'm gonna live forever!
I'm gonna die, NO NEVER!

This truth teaches eternal security BTW - cf. *John 5:24* where the believer is said to have immediately passed from death unto life)

These words also tell us the QUALITY of the gift of God - it is everlasting LIFE!

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

The glorious truth of this verse is that you can have eternal life, and that eternal life is all you could imagine it to be. Life such as we do not currently know:

- Life without death.
- Life without pain.
- Life without disease.
- Life without troubles.
- Life without sin and temptation.

MUST be born again

Notice that this thought is mentioned twice in our text - *vs. 7, 14*

There was NO OTHER WAY to save the souls of mankind, than for Christ to suffer and die on the cross in our place - cf. *vs. 14*. He MUST pay the price, for nobody else could.

And there is NO OTHER WAY for you to be a part of the family of God, to secure your home in heaven, to have the eternal life that He so wants to give you.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

- There is no other way - you MUST be born again.

- There will be no defense lawyer and no loophole when you stand before God - you MUST be born again.
- A lifetime of good works will mean nothing unless you have been born again - you MUST be born again.
- These are the words of Jesus Christ - There is no other way - you MUST be born again!

Conclusion:

Have you been born again? If not, you can be today!

And Christian, are you still praying for one you love to be born again? Don't give up. It's not too late. Pray and witness and live the born again life before them, for *WHOSOEVER believeth in Him shall have everlasting life*. It's not too late for them.

Ye children of men, attend to the Word,
So solemnly uttered by Jesus the Lord;
And let not this message to you be in vain,
"Ye must be born again."

Chapter 7. You Must Be Born Again

Chapter 8. The Epitaph of John the Baptist

READ - *John 3:22-36*

TEXT - *He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30)*

THEME - It's all about Jesus, and none about me.

Introduction:

According to the dictionary, an epitaph is an inscription on a tombstone or monument in memory of the person buried there. I've read some interesting epitaphs:

In a Ruidoso, New Mexico, cemetery
Here lies
Johnny Yeast
Pardon me
For not rising.

Memory of an accident in a Uniontown, Pennsylvania cemetery
Here lies the body
of Jonathan Blake
Stepped on the gas
Instead of the brake.

A widow wrote this epitaph in a Vermont cemetery
Sacred to the memory of
my husband John Barnes
who died January 3, 1803
His comely young widow, aged 23, has
many qualifications of a good wife, and
yearns to be comforted.

A lawyer's epitaph in England
Sir John Strange
Here lies an honest lawyer,
And that is Strange.

Lester Moore was a Wells, Fargo Co. station agent for Naco, Arizona in the cowboy days
Here lies Lester Moore
Four slugs from a .44
No Les No More.

On Margaret Daniels grave at Hollywood Cemetery Richmond, Virginia
She always said her feet were killing her
but nobody believed her.

In a Thurmont, Maryland, cemetery
Here lies an Atheist
All dressed up
And no place to go.

John Dryden (1631-1700) on his wife
Here lies my wife: here let her lie!
Now she's at rest, and so am I.

In a Georgia cemetery
"I told you I was sick!"

(all the above found at <http://www.blakjak.demon.co.uk/epitfs.htm>)

When I die (and I will, for we all have that appointment), I hope nothing silly gets written on my tombstone. I hope, if anything is written there, it will be an epitaph that

accurately describes what was important to me. An epitaph ought to tell us something about the person it describes.

Of course, we don't have John the Baptist's tombstone, so we can't be certain of his epitaph. But I think this passage tells us what he would have wanted on his tombstone. He is coming to the end of his ministry now. Soon he will be in prison, and shortly thereafter he will be beheaded by Herod, and immediately thereafter he will be in heaven where he remains today.

Before we get to what I think should be his epitaph, let's set the scene a little:

1. Jesus has begun His public ministry and people are flocking to Him. He and His disciples are baptizing. *vs. 22*

John's ministry has not yet ended, and he and his disciples are therefore still baptizing. *vs. 23*

Note: One might wonder why John didn't cease operations after Jesus began His work. The answer is in *vs. 24*. God wasn't done with him yet. He served at the will of God, and would not quit serving until God stopped him. Good lesson for us all. If God gives us something to do, we should do it with all our might, and we should do it until He gives us something else to do.

2. A dispute breaks out about baptism ("purifying" in the KJV). (*vs. 25*)

No doubt with the massive numbers flocking to both preachers, and multitudes being baptized, questions arose about which baptism was the right baptism.

ILLUS - Sounds a lot like today. I had breakfast with a preacher friend recently who wanted to discuss baptism. He believes in infant baptism and wanted to debate me on the subject. Such debates are common, even today. Apparently they were happening from the beginning.

3. John's disciples, apparently concerned that he was losing influence to Jesus, bring the issue to John. (*vs. 26*)

4. John reminds his disciples of his purpose, and of the purpose of Jesus Christ. (*vss. 27-30*)

John's purpose was to point the way to Christ. He had done this and continued to do it. There was no competition between him and Jesus, as he found his ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction in Jesus' rising popularity.

Don't you wonder if John was a bit frustrated here? He had said this over and over to his disciples - "He's the one - follow him!" And yet they were not only still with him, but just didn't seem to get it at all. If *vs. 32* reflects the words of John the Baptist, it might be showing just such a frustration.

5. The difference is not just in purpose, but also in substance - John was merely a man, Jesus was God. (*vss. 31-32*)

Note: It is difficult to determine whether *vss. 31-36* are the words of John the Baptist or John the Apostle.

In John's words to His disciples, there are two phrases which are overflowing with truth - truth that his disciples plainly needed to understand, but also truth that you and I need reminded of today.

Everything comes from God.

A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (John 3:27)

The clearest application is this - MINISTRIES come from God.

John knew His ministry and its results came from God. God was the one Who started it, and God would be the one to finish it.

Such thinking does away with ambition, and replaces it with humility.

Such thinking does away with worry, and replaces it with peace.

Such thinking does away with needless planning and striving, replacing it with faith and trust.

May God help all of us who minister here to have such a mindset about the work He has called us to.

A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (John 3:27)

There are other applications. James said it like this, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17 NKJV)"*

Whatever good exists comes from God! There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman.

1. If you have financial success, it came from God.
2. If you are healthy, it came from God.
3. If you have family and friends that love you, it came from God.
4. If you live in freedom and prosperity in America, it came from God.
5. If you are a child of the king, saved forever, and bound for heaven, it came from God!

This truth from John the Baptist is profound, and if you will let it, it will change your life! If you truly get hold of the knowledge that God is the source of ALL BLESSINGS, you will have no choice but to demonstrate it in your lifestyle.

1. You won't struggle to worship Him on the Lord's day, for your heart will overflow with worship just to think of all He's done for you.
2. You won't struggle to be faithful with tithes and offerings, for you will know that it ALL came from Him in the first place.
3. Witnessing will be easier, for it will flow from gratitude and awe at the gift of God, rather than out of a sense of duty.

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15)

4. You won't find it a chore to read the Bible when you understand what an astounding gift it is from God. His Word - just for you.

The psalmist said it this way, *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits. (Psalm 68:19)*

Think, my friend, of all the good things that God blesses you with today. We could come up with list after list of the blessings of God. Here is one man's (F.E. Marsh) list of what God has blessed you and I with:

1. An acceptance that can never be questioned. *Ephesians 1:6*
2. An inheritance that can never be lost *1 Peter 1:3-5*
3. A deliverance that can never be excelled. *2 Corinthians 1:10*
4. A grace that can never be limited *2 Corinthians 12:9*

5. A hope that can never be disappointed. *Hebrews 6:18-19*
6. A bounty that can never be withdrawn. *Colossians 3:21-23*
7. A joy that need never be diminished. *John 15:11*
8. A nearness to God that can never be reversed. *Ephesians 2:13*
9. A peace that can never be disturbed. *John 14:27*
10. A righteousness that can never be tarnished. *2 Corinthians 5:21*
11. A salvation that can never be cancelled. *Hebrews 5:9*

Let the words of John change your life today: *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (John 3:27)*

I challenge you to consider the good things in your life today, and throughout this week. And as you meditate on each of these blessings, remember that *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (John 3:27)*

It's about Him, not me. (vs. 30)

I believe these may be the greatest words John the Baptist ever spoke. THIS is what I think should be on his tombstone - his epitaph.

QUOTE - Is it possible to capture in a few simple words the beauty and complexity of one's life? If it is possible, then with these words John the Baptist summarizes his own life. (Willie J. Jennings, Senior Associate Dean of Duke University)

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30 KJV)

He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. (John 3:30 NLT)

Again, the primary application is to ministry - our service for the King.

- It's not about our own glory - it's all about Jesus Christ. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*
- Every preacher should repeat this to himself daily - it's not about me, it's all about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

I covet your prayers, Brothers and Sisters. May I learn the powerful and lifechanging lesson John teaches here. May I not succumb to self, but may I remember that it's not about me, it's all about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

- Those in music ministry should repeat this to themselves daily - it's not about me, it's all about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

And as one who has spent more years in music ministry than any other aspect of ministry, let me say that this area of service is especially in need of John's wisdom. Too many singers love the spotlight. They just want to be up front. They like to PERFORM. And none of that has any place at all in the service of the King. Musicians, repeat after me - it's not about me, it's all about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Churches would be better served with fewer Frank Sinatras and more John the Baptists.

- And what of the less visible, less public ministries some of us perform? The ones that few, if any, know anything about. The ones who clean toilets, mow lawns, repair the building, change the light bulbs, print the bulletins, labor incessantly in the nursery, teach other peoples' kids in Sunday School, and countless other seemingly thankless tasks.

Such sometimes struggle with a different area of self. "Nobody appreciates what I do around here," might be one way to say it. "I'm sick and tired of being the only one who does anything around here," might be another.

No matter how you say it, though, you're really saying, "It's about me." And when you find yourself drifting into these kinds of thumb sucky attitudes about what God has called you to do... when you fall into a pattern of what Howard Hendricks calls "stinkin' thinkin'", remind yourself of John's attitude - it's not about me, it's all about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

But the application goes so far beyond ministry. This applies to every area of our lives. NOTHING is about me, EVERYTHING is about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

This is the opposite of the current worldly philosophy that says "Look out for number one," or "building self-esteem is vital." Most people today shout loudly, "It's all about ME. I MUST INCREASE... and INCREASE... and INCREASE!"

ILLUS - Have you seen the movie entitled "What About Bob?" It's a comedy about a psychiatrist (played by Richard Dreyfuss) and a nutty patient (played by Bill Murray) that just won't leave him alone. In one of my favorite scenes, Dreyfuss tells Murray to get lost, and that he cannot help him. Murray begins shouting out, "Give me, give me, give me; I need, I need, I need!"

Too many of us are like that. We need to be like John the Baptist.

ILLUS - An admirer once asked the famous orchestra conductor Leonard Bernstein what was the most difficult instrument to play. He responded with quick wit: "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm or second french horn or second flute, now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

- You need this mindset in your marriage - it's not about you. It's about HIM - PUT HIM FIRST IN YOUR MARRIAGE and see what happens.
- You need this mindset in your career. See what happens when you put God first.
- You need this mindset with respect to worship. Put God first - set aside the Lord's Day to worship Him - FAITHFULLY. See what happens.
- You need this mindset with respect to your money. God says to give Him the FIRST FRUITS. Put Him FIRST and see what happens.
- Sadly, America needs to get back to this mindset. We celebrate the anniversary of our independence this week. And yet I fear for our country, that has become so mired in self. America, that was founded as one nation under God, needs to get back to putting God first.

NOTHING is about me, EVERYTHING is about Him. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Conclusion:

John's ministry was soon to come to an end. The crowds were thinning, the numbers were diminishing, and the earthly glory was fading. And yet John maintained his perspective - he remembered two vital truths - two truths that all of us need to integrate into our lives everyday.

EVERYTHING COMES FROM GOD. *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. (vs. 27)*

May we be reminded of the blessings God pours into our lives. And may we be every thankful for the good gifts He constantly provides.

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME, IT'S ALL ABOUT HIM. *He must increase, but I must decrease. (vs. 30)*

Certainly these magnificent words spoken by John the Baptist sum up his life and his ministry. But let us determine today that they will sum up our lives and our ministries. It's not about us, it's all about Jesus Christ! May He become more and

Chapter 8. The Epitaph of John the Baptist

more in our lives, and our self-interest and self-seeking become less and less. May He become greater, and may we become less - in all ways and in all things.

Chapter 9. Fifteen Minutes with Jesus

READ - *John 4:1-26*

TEXT - *whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14 KJV)*

THEME - If you will see your need, and accept the gift, you will be saved.

Introduction:

Several thoughts come to mind from this passage... several directions we might go with this sermon:

- We could talk about worship, for that is certainly discussed here. It's a big enough subject to warrant a whole other sermon.
- We could talk about the humanity of the Savior.

Nowhere is it more completely on display (except for maybe the cross) than here. He was tired, thirsty, hungry.

- We could talk about the importance of serving God over serving ourselves - tending to spiritual responsibilities before tending to physical responsibilities - cf. Seek ye first the kingdom of God... Jesus first desire was the souls of men and women - even over His own physical needs. He pushed His physical needs to the background and worked to reach a soul. The goal is the soul.
- We could talk about the providence of God - how all things work together to accomplish His purpose, which in this case was the salvation of a solitary woman.

Think of all the elements that came together so this woman would be at the well just when Jesus was there.

God is always in control of every situation, and He is able to use even the most mundane of details to accomplish His will.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28 KJV)

Let us key in, though, on the conversation between Jesus Christ and a Samaritan woman. It probably didn't last more than fifteen minutes. And yet consider what happened in Fifteen Minutes with the Savior.

Give me a drink - vss. 7-9

By Jewish time, it would be noon. By Roman time, it would be 6:00 PM. Either way, Jesus was weary from a long journey, hungry because it was time to eat, and thirsty, because it was hot.

He asked for water. And although this seems a perfectly legitimate request since He had nothing to get water with while she did, it was nonetheless shocking to this woman.

QUOTE - The woman was shocked to hear a Jewish man ask for a drink from her. The normal prejudices of the day prohibited public conversation between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans, and especially between strangers. A Jewish Rabbi would rather go thirsty than violate these proprieties. (Bible Knowledge Commentary, pg. 285)

Some say her response was flippant - "Oh, you Jews are willing to talk with us Samaritans when you need something, huh?"

Some say her response was more searching - "What in the world could be so important as to make a Jew talk with a despised Samaritan?"

Note: Don't you think it's interesting that she could tell He was a Jew? What clues do you suppose there were - his mode of dress? His hairstyle (e.g. Hassidic Jews today)? Did He have an accent? (cf. *But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."* (Mark 14:70 NKJV)

Her statement that "Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" literally means, "Jews and Samaritans don't drink out of the same bucket." And she was right - the Jews hated the Samaritans. And yet Jesus elevated Samaria in many ways:

1. By this conversation He demolished the prejudice and made it clear He came to save Samaritans and Jews alike. The Samaritans, later in this chapter, would be the first to recognize Him as "*savior of the world*" (vs. 42) (not just of the Jews)
2. When one asked Him of the greatest commandment, He responded "love God and love your neighbor," to which a followup question came, "and who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan - must have just galled the Jewish hearers. Once again He was breaking down the wall between them.
3. Before He ascended to heaven, He gave instructions - the great commission, to His disciples - *ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and IN SAMARIA, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* (Acts 1:8 KJV)
4. Samaria played a pivotal part in the following chapters of Acts, for the gospel did indeed come there in power.

And so, with that little phrase, "Give me a drink" Jesus broke down the walls of separation between these two peoples. There are no differences between peoples in the eyes of Jesus Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28 NIV)

In addition, He hooked the fish. When you want to interest somebody in the things of God, you have to hook them. Jesus was THE expert at that, and He did it here.

SONG - "I Catch 'Em, God Cleans 'Em" by the Gaithers Vocal Band - chorus says:

I catch 'em, God cleans 'em.
I bait the hook with the love of the kingdom.
I've been called to a fisher of men.
I catch 'em, God cleans 'em.
Heaven knows He saves ev'ry soulu that believes Him.
I reel 'em in and He washes away their sin.

Jesus hooked her with that simple phrase, "Give me a drink." He had her attention.

If you knew the gift - vss. 10-14

"You think this it's amazing that I would talk with you? Imagine how amazed you would be if you really knew the truth! You would be the one asking."

Jesus took a simple physical thing, like water, and began to use it to teach spiritual truth. This was a common technique He used:

ILLUS - Parable of the sower and the seed. He pointed to a simple farmer flinging seed and used it to teach spiritual truth.

And what a lesson!

- God has a gift for you.
- The gift is living water.

(There is actually a two-fold meaning here, for Jesus WAS the gift of God according to *John 3:16*. He was actually saying that God has given you a gift, Who stands before you, and Who wants to give you the gift of living water.)

- To receive the gift, all you have to do is ask!
- This gift will quench your thirst forever! This gift will give you everlasting life!

Give me this water - vs. 15

It's interesting to watch the progression of this woman's understanding. Clearly, with this statement she indicates that she is not thinking about this from a spiritual perspective yet.

"Living water" was apparently a commonly used term among the people of the day. It referred to spring water, or flowing water, as opposed to well water. Just as we think today, flowing water is good, and water from stagnant ponds and wells is not as good.

ILLUS - Some people have made lots of money selling little plastic bottles filled with spring water. We all have water flowing into our homes right from the tap, but many people will only drink spring water from those little bottles.

Her response indicates she was thinking of it in this commonly understood way.

Go call your husband - vss. 16-18

This is one of the most interesting statements in the encounter. Why did Jesus say this?

- Did He just want to meet her husband?
- Was He saying that without her husband being present, she could not receive the gift?
- Was He trying to ascertain whether she was single or not?
- Did He, as some silly people think, believe women incapable of making decisions without the help of men? (In reality, nobody in the history of the world has done more to elevate women to an equal standing with men than Jesus Christ.)
- WHY DID HE SAY THIS?

He had started with "Give me a drink" - got her attention with a simple and normal statement.

He turned it into a spiritual discussion - "You can have everlasting life if you'll just ask for it." But she didn't go for that spiritual discussion - preferring to avoid that topic if possible.

So He forced her to look at her spiritual state. He reached out and put His finger right on her need.

Jesus did not tell her to call her husband because he needed to be present for some reason. Rather, it was important for her to admit her need. We must be lost before we can be saved. Jesus kindly and gently lead down a path where she had to come face to face with her sin.

ILLUS - He had done the same with Nicodemus in *chapter 3*, remember? "You must be born again."

ILLUS - He did the same thing with the rich young ruler - "Sell what you have." - He put His finger right on the part of the man's life where he needed God the most.

By her response, "I don't have a husband," she was forced to think about and admit that she had a need.

And you won't get far in your conversation with the Lord before He will point out your need - put His finger on your sin, your hurt, your pain, your failure. He can't save you until you accept that you need saving.

Clarke's commentary has thought provoking stuff on this. She was probably not a prostitute, for adultery was a stoning offense for both Jews and Samaritans. She had influence over the people of the city, which a wicked woman probably would not have had. Perhaps she had been put away (divorced - maybe she couldn't cook eggs!) multiple times. Perhaps some of her husbands had died. She was probably old enough now that she was not living in an adulterous relationship with the man she was associated with - perhaps she was betrothed? (One man put it thus, "Thou art contracted to another, but not yet brought home: therefore he is not yet thy husband.") It seems unlikely that Jesus would have ignored the sin of adultery if she was guilty of it (cf. John 8:11)

On the other hand, maybe she was living in an adulterous relationship, and had done so before. Perhaps the Samaritans had grown tolerant of that sin.

Regardless of the interpretation, Jesus' words pointed out her need. She needed something in her life.

Like the woman at the well, I was seeking
For things that did not satisfy,
And then I heard the Savior speaking
Draw from my well that never shall run dry.

You are a prophet - vs. - 19

With this statement she begins to show some understanding. This is no ordinary man. She doesn't fully get it yet, but she's starting to think in spiritual terms.

So she asks a completely unrelated religious question. She tries to change the subject to religion in general, rather than to the uncomfortable discussion of her personal spiritual state.

And Jesus quickly answers the question and draws her right back to the issue at hand. It's not about form, it's about how you personally, worship the Lord. It must come from your heart, your spirit, and it must be done in truth.

Many avoid dealing with the personal implications of Jesus Christ - their lostness, their emptiness - by turning their attention to Christianity as a whole, rather than considering its ramifications to them, personally.

ILLUS - This weekend, my wife had some minor surgery, and I was in the waiting room during the procedure. I read a fascinating article in Newsweek magazine - a debate between Rick Warren (pastor of Saddleback Community Church and author of "A Purpose Driven Life") and an atheist (I've forgotten his name, but he is prominent and has written several books promoting his views.) I was struck by the fact that the atheists objections to Christianity were all based on the "religion as a whole" - "More wars have been fought in the name of Christianity than for any other reason" and other such arguments. Yet he steadfastly refused to consider what Christianity meant to him PERSONALLY.

Messiah is coming, He will explain it all. - vs. - 25

Her faith was slowly growing through out the discussion - first He was a Jew, then someone who could offer her something she wanted, then a prophet. Now she confesses to a belief in the Messiah (although not yet understanding it is Him).

She had an imperfect faith, but it was enough to reveal she was seeking.

She had an imperfect faith, and yet in the next verse notice how Jesus blessed such a faith - with a revelation of Himself He had shared with nobody else up to now. (She was the first to whom He so openly revealed Himself as the Messiah.)

- You don't need a lot of faith to be saved - just a little bit.
- You don't need to understand everything in the Bible. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31)* Can you accept that much? It's enough!

ILLUS - ABC's of salvation - simple plan that we publish in our bulletin and on our web site.

- Most of us are like the man in *Mark 9* who exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (NIV)

If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matthew 17:20 KJV)

Conclusion:

The result of this conversation -

- She was so affected she forgot why she came, left her waterpot, and ran to tell others.

I believe she was saved. She indicated to the others that she thought He was the Christ (cf. vs. 29). She was a changed person - forgetting old things and telling everybody what had happened to her. *If any man be in Christ, He is a new creature...*

- Many in the city were influenced by her conversion and came to see Jesus. (Another example of "come and see" evangelism - cf. *John 1*.)

May I ask you this morning, have you spent 15 minutes with the Savior?

Have you allowed Him to give you the gift of living water?

Or do you push Him away when He puts His finger on your need - your hurt - your pain - your sin?

Are you like the woman at the well?

Seeking for things that cannot satisfy?

Today, will you hear the Savior speaking -

"Draw from my well which never shall run dry."

Chapter 9. Fifteen Minutes with Jesus

Chapter 10. Lessons from a Dying Child

READ - *John 4:43-54*

TEXT - *Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. (John 4:50 KJV)*

THEME -

Introduction:

Robert Frost, in his poem *The Road Less Traveled*, said:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
and sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
and looked down one as far as I could
to where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
and having perhaps the better claim
because it was grassy and wanted wear;
though as for that, the passing there
had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
in leaves no feet had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less travelled by,
and that has made all the difference

I've always loved that poem. And I share it with you today because it describes a condition that I see in our text - two paths. As I prayed and worked through this passage this week, I could not escape the thought that there are at least two main themes in this text - both of which we could discuss fruitfully today.

If we take the one path, we can see this theme - Christ's unlimited power over disease. He could heal anything, anytime, anyplace. He could heal at a distance, with just a word. He did so with this nobleman's son. And He demonstrated the same unlimited power many other times.

- ILLUS - The man with the withered arm. *Mark 3:1-5*

He didn't need to touch him in any way - just healed with a word at a distance.

he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. (Mark 3:5)

- ILLUS - Lazarus - *John 11:1-44*

he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (John 11:43-44 KJV)

- ILLUS - His amazing power over the elements - *Mark 4:35-41*

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39 KJV)

ILLUS - Mary, when she was told she would bear the Savior, asked "How can this be, seeing I am a virgin?" And the reply was *With God nothing shall be impossible (Luke 1:37 KJV)*

What is it you need from the Savior? It's not too hard for my Jesus! His power is unlimited.

Then again, we could examine that other path, and there we would find a different thought - sometimes our faith is tested - sometimes our prayers are answered, but not the way we expect. And it's this path that I want to concentrate on for our remaining few minutes this morning.

His simple request - vs. 47

He was in Herod's employ. An important man used to getting what he asked. Yet nobody is so important that the problems of this world can be avoided. And he found himself helpless before the disease that threatened to claim his son's life.

He heard Jesus was coming to town, and he devised a plan. He set out to apprehend the Master and seek His help.

I imagine that he had an entourage and arrived with pomp and circumstance. I imagine him making a grand entrance into the Christ's presence.

He would ask Him two things - come and heal. I can imagine him practicing his speech as he hurried along to meet Jesus.

His motives questioned - vs. 48

Jesus' response to his request probably differed quite a bit from his expectations. Jesus did not appear impressed by his nobility (a reminder that all are equal at the foot of the cross).

Jesus accused him of just wanting to see miracles - to not really be seeking the truth - just wanting a thrill, entertainment.

Even today, some seem to follow Christ for a while, until the excitement wears off. When Christianity becomes routine, when the emphasis is "faithfulness" rather than "miracles," when they find themselves for a long period of time not on the mountain-top of victory, nor in the valley of trials, but on the long flat plain of everyday life, struggling to remain faithful even when it gets boring - and they quit.

Note: Faithfulness EVERY DAY is the greatest service we can render the King. *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2 KJV)*

Faithfulness EVERY DAY will result in great reward when we stand before the King. *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (Matthew 25:23 KJV)*

Jesus accused him of such a "belief," of being a thrill seeker who didn't really believe Jesus was the Messiah, just a miracle worker. Others believed in Jesus like this:

ILLUS - Herod - *And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. (Luke 23:8 KJV)*

ILLUS - In His parable of the sower and the soils, Jesus taught that such would be the case - cf. *Matthew 13:18-23*

It is good for us to question our motives and our beliefs. We should ask ourselves always, why do we do what we do? Why do we believe? True faith will not be shaken by this exercise.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. (2 Corinthians 13:5 KJV)

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28 KJV)

QUOTE - "Men, examine your motives." (Paul Vanaman to aspiring preachers)

And so Jesus arrests the man's attention by questioning his motives. It's as if Jesus was saying, "Do you believe? Or are you just a miracle seeker?"

His heart revealed - vs. 49

Although I imagine his first plea was well rehearsed, there is nothing rehearsed about his reply now. He repeats the request, but now it pours unpracticed from a broken heart. Such prayers touch the heart of God. So many times we see Him instantly respond to such heartfelt requests.

- ILLUS - Hannah, praying for a child - *1 Samuel 1*
- ILLUS - Man with imperfect belief - *the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. (Mark 9:24 KJV)*
- ILLUS - The thief on the cross - *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. (Luke 23:42 KJV)*
- ILLUS - The contrite publican - *God be merciful to me, a sinner. (Luke 18:13 KJV)*
- ILLUS - Peter sinking in the waves - *Lord save me!*

Know this, my friend - when you get to the point where you are stripped of all your pretense. When all your practiced speeches have failed. When you find yourself flat on your back, with nothing left but your broken and bleeding NEED - God will be there. God will hear. And God will answer.

... a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:17 KJV)

His answer, not what he expected - vs. 50

Jesus did, indeed, honor this plea from the heart.

But remember the original request? COME and HEAL MY SON.

Now notice the answer. GO and YOUR SON IS HEALED.

He had to abandon his expectations, and just believe. Jesus DID NOT DO WHAT HE ASKED, and challenged him to believe anyway.

God always hears, but His wisdom infinitely yours and mine, and as a result, His answers are often different than our expectations.

ILLUS - Naaman the Syrian. READ *2 Kings 5:9-14*

ILLUS - Abraham - sacrifice your son to me.

ILLUS - Paul - *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9 KJV)*

ILLUS - Joseph - God revealed in a dream that he would one day rule, but he had no idea HOW God would get him to that point - testing, trials, prison, loneliness.

God's ways are not always our ways - we must learn to trust Him whether we understand what He's doing or not.

Notice the nobleman's response - he believed, and went. He demonstrated the only kind of faith any of us can really have - he didn't understand, but he believed. He walked by faith, not by sight.

faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)

Conclusion:

Just as with every other example John has given us so far, we see from vs. 53 that he is once again giving us evidence that people believed in Jesus Christ - believed that He was the Son of God. This is consistent with his purpose in writing the book.

But let's not gloss over this verse. The man believed. He took Jesus at His word, even though he may not have understood how Jesus could heal the boy from a distance. He accepted it anyway. When he heard the boy was better he dug into the details of his recovery and the timing pushed him from tentative believe to full belief. Only God could do what this Man had done. He believed. And it didn't stop there, for it never does. Where one believes, others are bound to follow. And so with him - his family also believed.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less travelled by,
and that has made all the difference

Which path through our study this morning is the Holy Spirit prodding you about?

1. Is the unlimited power of God something you need to remember? We all need that assurance once in a while - when trials come, the problems of life, the everyday hurts of living in this world. Nothing is too hard for God. Get hold of that today and believe it with all your heart.
2. Or is it the path of believing in spite of not understanding that He is prodding you about today? Is He prompting you to believe, but you resist because you don't understand everything? Are you sitting back trying to work out every little detail before you'll trust Him?

My friend, you will never (in this life) understand everything.

Just believe! As this nobleman believed, and saw his son miraculously healed, and his entire household saved.

TEXT -*Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. (John 4:50 KJV)*

Chapter 11. Long Time Coming

READ - *John 5:1-17*

TEXT - *When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? (John 5:6 KJV)*

THEME - No matter how long you've needed healing, Jesus will give it if you want it.

Introduction:

"Of all the things in Israel, this is the one I find hardest to understand." (comment by a friend of mine in Israel - he had visited many times, and was showing me the site that is believed to be the pool of Bethesda, described in our text.) I looked into the deep hole beneath the streets of Jerusalem. I agreed with him. It was hard to picture what it must have been like.

But consider the description John gives us here in *John 5*. (DESCRIBE IT)

Some obvious questions arise:

1. Was there something medicinal about the water?

Clearly people BELIEVED it was a place of miracles and healing. The name Bethesda means "house of mercy."

2. Was an angel really involved?

(Or was it just a natural phenomenon - like a hot tub?)

A hot tub can help with arthritis, but I've never heard of one helping blindness.

Angels are very real beings, described many times in the Bible. And it is not beyond the realm of possibility that angels would help mankind. It is actually quite consistent with their role in this world. cf. *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14 NIV)*

3. Was only one cured each time? Only the first who stepped in?

Actually this is the one aspect that I personally struggle with. If it was a miraculous thing, and angels were involved, why would it be only 1? Why would they leave the ones who were racing to the edge of the pool without help? And the only answer I can come up with is that God is sovereign. He is God and can do as He pleases - a thought we should always remember. Perhaps the brevity of the miracle was a reminder of the brevity of opportunity for salvation. When the water is stirred, you better get in!! (cf. *behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2 KJV)*)

There is an interesting Old Testament prophecy that sheds some light - *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. (Zechariah 13:1)* Perhaps the entire scene was typical of the Messiah. As the impotent folk who lay about this pool waited patiently for the fountain of healing, so Israel waited patiently for the Messiah, and the fountain of healing He would bring. For the man in our story, both images were about to collide.

The Man's Condition (cf. vss. 5-6)

1. Impotent - weakened condition.

Some say blind, some lame - something that prohibited his getting to the water without help. He could apparently move about a little (cf. vs. 7), but not fast enough to beat others to the water.

2. Long time in that case - 38 years.

Note: This past Thursday I was privileged to attend one of the sessions of the "First-Century Circum-Mediterranean Culture Conference" in Akron. (Quite a mouthful, I know.) This conference was about the culture that existed during Jesus' time. One of the things I found interesting were the facts and figures they presented about life expectancy during the first century. I had always thought Jesus was a young man when He died at 33, but based on the norms of the day, He was beyond the normal life expectancy. And this man, who had been sick for 38 years (and had lived at least part of his life leading up to that time) - was also an old man by the norms of the day.

3. Alone - I have no man

This man not only suffered with physical illness of some sort, but he appears to have been totally alone in the world. A terrible picture of lost man. He was like the psalmist who cried *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.* (Psalm 142:4 KJV)

But we are never truly alone, are we? *For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.* (Psalm 72:12 KJV)

4. Stopped seeking

He thought he had found the way. I find it interesting that he was apparently unfamiliar with Jesus. By this point, Jesus was known everywhere. People were seeking Him out for healing, and He was healing people left and right. Yet this man was by the pool, fixated on a solution he knew he could never reach. (Picture of those who try to work their way to heaven.)

The Master's Concern (cf. vs. 6)

1. He went to the pool - where the needy were.

(contrast this with those today who have the "gift of healing." Jesus went to the hospitals... why don't they?)

2. He went to the man with the great need.

Interesting that Jesus sought out this man who did not appear to be seeking Him.

When we seek the Lord, He is always ready to answer - ILLUS Cornelius.

Here we learn that He seeks us, even when we are not seeking Him! What amazing grace.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

He finds us, even when we don't realize we need Him. He finds us.

3. He knew his need, and how long he had been there. (cf. vs. 6)

And He knows when we've been "a long time in that case" doesn't He?

- When we've been a long time in disbelief.
- Or a long time in testing and trials.
- Or a long time in sin and disobedience.

Notice that this man's illness was apparently a result of sin (cf. vs. 14) - and Jesus knew all about it.

- Or, like this man, a long time in sickness.

The Master's Command (cf. vss. 6-8)

1. First, a question. Wilt thou be made whole - Do you WANT it? Or would you rather stay in the state you are in?

This might seem a ridiculous question - who wouldn't want to be healed after a 38 year illness? But in the spiritual realm, it's amazing how many people hear that question, and answer "No, I don't want it."

There's even an illustration of this in the physical realm in the Old Testament - Pharaoh and the frogs - I think I'll sleep with them one more night!

Some people simply don't want to be healed. Some don't want to be saved. They would rather live with illness and sin. They are described in the Bible as they who *loved darkness rather than light* (John 3:19 KJV).

ILLUS - Young man I witnessed to at length, only to hear him say, "Not tonight... I'll come to church someday and get saved there." NOT TONIGHT, when the Holy Spirit is dealing so strongly. NOT TONIGHT, when the opportunity is knocking so loudly!

QUOTE (Matthew Henry) - In spiritual cases, people are not willing to be cured of their sins, are loth to part with them. If this point therefore were but gained, if people were willing to be made whole, the work were half done, for Christ is willing to heal, if we be but willing to be healed,

As a preacher, I used to get really upset when people didn't listen to me. After all, preachers are called by God, right? We spend hours in prayer and study for each message. We believe that we are telling people the Word of God. And very few people listen - most ignore what we say (or so it seems). I personally find that to be the most difficult part of ministry. But it's unbelievably freeing when you come to understand that it's not your fault that some people prefer darkness rather than light. It's not your fault some people don't want to be healed. Now, I just preach. If you want to listen, fine. If not, that's between you and God. My job is to faithfully preach.

This doesn't apply to just preachers. You and I will not be judged on how many people get saved due to our influence. We are not the ones who save people - God does that. We are responsible to share the gospel, faithfully and always, with our words and with the testimony of holy lives that reflect the Savior. People might be saved and they might not. We are just to keep flinging seed! (cf. the parable of the sower and the soils - *Matthew 13*)

ILLUS - Pastor friend of mine walking out on man who showed no interest.

And so, I think Jesus was determining just how badly this man wanted healing.

Note that the man did not know Who Jesus was, and therefore was not expecting to be healed by Him. He only indicated a faint hope that maybe Jesus would help Him to the water. (Similar to how the woman at the well didn't understand Who she was talking to at first, and simply thought Him somebody who knew of a superior water source!)

2. Then a command.

- A command that was NOT what the man expected. (Not - "Come on and I'll help you to the water.")

- A command that was NOT subject to any other interpretation. RISE, TAKE UP THY BED, AND WALK - clear and simple.
- A command that required a DECISION.

Think for a moment what might have happened if this man didn't pounce on this opportunity when it was presented. Jesus might have moved on, never to pass that way again.

So many, when Jesus comes to them and says, "Wilt thou be made whole," hesitate. How dangerous, and how often tragic such hesitation is. You simply don't have any guarantee that there will be another offer.

- A command that, when obeyed, brought immediate results.

And immediately the man was made whole... - when Jesus saves, it is immediate. He speaks and it done. We call and He answers. "Lord save me.... immediately He stretched forth His hand." It does not matter how long one has needed the cure, the cure comes immediately when Jesus wills it.

The Man's Conversion (cf. vss. 9,14)

So did this man get saved? Did He trust Christ? Will we see him in heaven when we get there?

Physical healing is not the same as salvation. We see him obedient to Christ's command to get up and walk, but we don't see him trusting Christ, as we know the Bible teaches we must do:

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved... (Acts 16:31 KJV)

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13 KJV)

He certainly was healed - no doubt about it, and very impressive evidence provided. (cf. vs. 10, where we see positive testimony from a hostile source - no doubt about it, he was healed.) But after being healed he still didn't even know Who Jesus was!

But in the second encounter between him and the Lord (cf. vs. 14) we see evidence of conversion - he was in the temple.

I suggest that this is good evidence of the reality of his faith. (Contrast with the 9 lepers.) Many even today neglect God even after He heals them.

QUOTE (Matthew Henry) - it is common for people, when they are sick, to promise much, when newly recovered to perform something, but after awhile to forget all

But this man seemed to recognize that God had done something in his life, and he was in church, apparently worshipping the One Who had healed him.

Conclusion:

Jesus knows your state this morning - even if you've been a long time in that case.

Jesus wants to make you whole - wilt thou be made whole?

Jesus offers you the gift of wholeness - all you have to do is obey His command to rise up and walk - just do as He says and you'll be whole! *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!*

THEME - No matter how long you've needed healing, Jesus will give it if you want it.

When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? (John 5:6 KJV)

Chapter 12. Like Father Like Son

READ - *John 5:16-30*

TEXT - *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18, KJV)*

THEME -

Introduction:

If you were a great artist, and could paint Jesus, or sculpt Jesus, how would you render Him?

I read yesterday where DaVinci's "The Last Supper" is once again being used to stir up controversy - somebody has some new and more nonsensical theory about this painting that to some non-Christians is more important than the Bible. DaVinci lived in a day when men were often painted in an effeminate way. Think of some of the Italian renditions of Christ - soft, almost feminine - is that how you would paint Christ?

I have a real burden to see men saved. One of the largest unsaved demographic group in America is adult men. I wish I could get more men to understand what Jesus was really like. I'm starting a new book entitled "Why Men Hate Going to Church." (Of course the main reason most men hate going to church is because they are lost. Church makes no sense to the lost. (need verse) But I sometimes wonder if the way we depict our Savior isn't partly to blame, too. And the wicked and nonsensical feminization of America has not helped either. Men don't want to find their "feminine side" ladies. Men are men because God made them men. And nowhere in the Bible does He teach that we should be less than men - as a matter of fact one of my favorite verses in scripture is *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. (1 Corinthians 16:13)*. In other words, "BE MEN." David's great general Joab once said before a battle, *Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God. (2 Samuel 10:12)* Men need to be men, and need to be honored for being men. If we saw more of that teaching in our churches, I believe we would see more men in our churches.

Jesus is my King, and let me tell you, He was no girly-man. In our text, we see Him go toe to toe and face to face with the authorities who could have Him stoned. He did not fear them. He did not back down from their wicked charges against Him. I can envision Him in this passage - as they leveled their puny charge of "you did that on the sabbath day" against the King of the universe - taking a step forward, staring deeply into the eyes of His accuser, and saying "You are right, I violated your understanding of the sabbath law, but I did it because it doesn't apply to me - I am the Son of God!"

He didn't say those exact words, I know, but that was the jist of it. He claims deity here - He openly and clearly and brazenly claims to be God. He says throughout the passage that what the Father is, the Son is. What the Father does, the Son does.

Notice especially what He says in *vs. 19* - "*What things soever.*" Whatever God can do, I can do. "The word is without limit--ALL that the Father does the Son likewise does. This is as high an assertion as possible of his being equal with God. If one does all that another does or can do, then there must be equality. If the Son does all that the Father does, then, like him, he must be almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, and infinite in every perfection; or, in other words, he must be God." (Barnes)

Consider four ways that the Son is like the Father:

The Father never rests, and neither does the Son. cf. vss. 16-18

The law prohibited work on the Sabbath day - this was rooted in the Ten Commandments which God gave through Moses, and was based on the fact that God created the world in 6 literal days, and then rested on the 7th day.

(Need Genesis verse and commandment)

It was a valid law, and the penalty for violation was death. (vs. 16) (Even though much hypocrisy had grown up in how the law was implemented, it was still one of the 10 commandments.) And these hypocrites wanted to stone Jesus because He healed a man on the sabbath day - something they would have done themselves for their cattle.

Jesus made two points in His "defense":

1. God, who is my Father, never rests.

Have you ever witnessed to somebody about Christ, only to have them throw out the comment that "Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God?" I have, and it is heard soundly refuted.

Jesus made Himself equal with God here - so the Jews understood it, and as Barnes says, "the Jews are the best interpreters of their language."

2. As His Son, I claim the same authority to work on the Sabbath day.

From Jesus' words here, one commentator gleaned some interesting thoughts:

QUOTE (Barnes) The answer of Jesus was fitted greatly to irritate them. He did not deny what he had done, but he added to that what he well knew would highly offend them. That he should claim the right of dispensing with the law, and affirm that, in regard to its observance, he was in the same condition with God, was eminently fitted to enrage them, and he doubtless knew that it might endanger his life. We may learn from his answer, That we are not to keep back truth because it may endanger us. 2nd. That we are not to keep back truth because it will irritate and enrage sinners. The fault is not in the truth, but in the sinner. 3rd. That when any one portion of truth enrages hypocrites, they will be enraged the more they hear."

Do you see it? Jesus boldly claimed equality with the Father here - the privileges that the Father has, I have!

As a side note, there is great encouragement in the thought that God and Jesus never rest.

cf. *Psalm 121*

When you can't sleep - pray - God is awake. When the whole world is on vacation, God is still working for you and I.

The Father gives life, and so does the Son. (cf. vss. 20-21, 24-26, 28-29)

One of my favorite salvation / eternal security verses is found here - vs. 24. Consider these amazing truths:

- Salvation is a result of hearing Christ's word.

"*He that heareth*" - not just sound falling against the ear drum. To hear, in this place, evidently denotes not the outward act of hearing, but to receive in a proper manner; to suffer it to make its proper impression on the mind; to obey. The word hear is often used in this sense.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 11:15 KJV)

And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. (Acts 3:23 KJV)

READ *John 8:47*

"My word" refers to His doctrine, His teaching - all that He taught about Himself, about God and about us. His Word referenced GOD, MAN, CHRIST, and RESPONSE - 4 key elements we must understand in order to be saved.

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17 KJV)

- Salvation is a result of believing "in Him that sent Me."

Like Father, Like Son - you can't believe in one without believing in the other!

We HEAR HIS WORD, and WE BELIEVE. This is salvation.

Consider what John said about this throughout his gospel - READ *John 1:12; 3:16; 3:18; 3:36*

- Salvation / eternal life is a present possession from the moment of belief.

"Is passed from death unto life" Greek METABAINO, "Has changed his country, or place of abode." (Clarke)

Salvation is a PRESENT POSSESSION.

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:12-13 KJV)

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. (1 John 3:14 KJV)

ILLUS - Harry Ironside stated that salvation was like Noah inviting a pagan in his day to place his trust in God's Word and come in to the ark. Some view salvation like Noah offering to put a peg on the outside of the ark. "If you just hang on through the storm, you'll be saved." Salvation is not dependent on our holding on to God, but on our being securely held by and in Christ. (So Great Salvation, Charles Ryrie, Victor Books, 1989, pp. 137ff)

Jesus is so clear here - He saves those who believe, and He KEEPS those who believe. Have you not yet started trusting Christ and Christ alone? Why not do it today and change your county today? Are you a Christian already? Then take heart and encouragement in your standing - you cannot lose what Jesus gave you. You can never lose the gift of salvation.

BUT, in addition to this glorious teaching, consider the larger picture of what Jesus is saying here -

- The Father is able to give life.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7 KJV)

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39 KJV)

BTW - This is why a Christian cannot support abortion - because it is man taking upon himself the role of God. (And when we say something like this as believers, we are not trying to be unkind to those who may have made a wrong choice in this area. God loves you, whether you've had an abortion or not.)

And this is why a Christian cannot support stem cell research that is done using human embryos - something only considered in this country because of legalized abortion.

And this is why a Christian cannot support euthanasia, or any other procedure which ignores the fact that God, and only God, is the one who controls life.

- And the Son is able to give life.

Amazingly, Jesus claimed this same prerogative for Himself.

And proved it when He raised Jairus' daughter (*Mark 5:22f*), and the widow of Nain's son (*Luke 7:11f*), and Lazarus (*John 11:1f*).

And if that wasn't enough He put an exclamation point on the claim by RAISING HIMSELF from the dead.

No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:18 KJV)

The Father is worthy of honor, and so is the Son. (cf. vs. 23)

Of those who believe in God, few would deny He is worthy of honor. The Old Testament is replete with examples of how the children of Israel sought to worship Him - to honor Him.

ILLUS- The sacrifices and offerings; the dedication of the temple; David's psalms

ILLUS - Offerings were to be brought from the first-fruits - the very best - because nothing else honored God sufficiently. They could have no blemish, no insufficiency - ONLY THE VERY BEST could be offered to God.

And Jesus said, in order to honor the Father, you have to honor the Son. He claimed the same right to our worship and honor that God claims!

Think about the implications to Randolph Christian Church in this. Do we truly honor Christ with what we do here? Do we give Him our very best?

- Do I give Him my very best in my preaching? (Or do I just slap something together at the last minute?)
- Trustees, do you honor Him by ensuring this building is the very best it can be? (Or are we ok with just doing the minimum needed to keep it standing?)
- Musicians, do you honor Him by practicing as if you were going to sing / play for the King of the universe? Or do you just throw any old thing together?

How would you practice if you were preparing for American Idol or Carnegie Hall? Is Jesus worthy of more or less honor than they?

- What of our giving? Time, Talent, Treasure? Does he get the best, or the rest? Does he get the first-fruits or the leftovers? Do we honor Him with what we give of ourselves?

Whatever we do, brothers and sisters, must be our very best! Nothing else honors the Lord, and HE IS AS WORTHY OF OUR HONOR AS GOD HIMSELF!

"for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20 NLT)

ILLUS - We are implementing a dress code for anybody who ministers in a public ministry here. I know some don't believe in that. But we're doing it anyway because we're going to do everything we can to honor the Savior in our services.

SONG - Howard B.Grose said it well in his song "Give of Your Best to the Master":

Give of your best to the Master;
Give Him first place in your heart.
Give Him first place in your service;
Consecrate every part.
Give, and to you will be given;
God His beloved Son gave.
Gratefully seeking to serve Him,
Give Him the best that you have.

Jesus said the Father is worthy of honor, and so is the Son.

The Father has the authority to judge, and so does the Son. (cf. vss. 22, 27-30

Will you go back with me to our introduction, and to a question I asked there? How do you picture Jesus Christ? How do you picture God?

In a recent website posting I pointed out that some people see God only as love. And John certainly said "God is love." But God is not ONLY love. That would make God more like my loving little Bassett hound, Chloe.

But you can't separate the attributes of God. God is also justice. The Bible is clear that He hates sin - will not tolerate sin, and will JUDGE SIN. The Bible is clear that there is a hell for those who die in sin. (This is perfect justice - the debt of sin must be paid for.) The Bible is also clear that there is a heaven for those who die believing in Christ. (This is perfect love - providing the payment for the debt, and making a way to be with us forever.) Perfect love, perfect justice. We, in our human imperfection can understand neither. Nor can we understand how they can both be present in the same being. But they are - in God.

And so He loves you infinitely, but His infinite justice requires that He must judge your sin!

And Jesus claimed that the authority of the Father to judge was also in the Son. He is the judge. He will judge you and I.

Matthew 25:31-46 describes the judgement of the nations, sometimes called the judgement of the sheep and the goats. Read this passage and you'll see some receive favorable judgement and some not favorable. *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matthew 25:46, KJV)*

READ 2 *Thessalonians 1:7-9* for another sobering reference to the judgement that the Son will perform.

QUOTE (Barnes) "This passage proves that at the day of judgment the wicked will be condemned. Let it be added that if then condemned they will be lost for ever. Thus it is said to be everlasting punishment; it is called everlasting destruction. There is no account of redemption in hell--no Saviour, no Holy Spirit, no offer of mercy there."

The warning is for all of us - our sins will be judged by the Son of God. They were already judged and paid for on the cross, but if you refuse the gift of salvation He bought for you there, your judgement is still outstanding - and unavoidable.

Conclusion:

Like Father, Like Son.

Whatsoever the Father does, the Son does. (vs. 19)

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18, KJV)

Application to you and I?

- If you want to know God, get to know the Son.
- If you would worship and honor God, worship and honor the Son!

Chapter 13. The Defense Rests

READ - *John 5:31-47*

TEXT - *But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:47 KJV)*

THEME - There is more than enough evidence to convince us of Christ's claims.

Introduction:

"What were you doing when you heard the news that President John F. Kennedy was shot?" I'm certain that everyone here who was old enough to remember, does remember.

"And what about when the second plane hit the towers on September 11th? What were you doing when that happened?" Again, most could probably remember easily.

Some things in history evoke very strong memories... having lived through them, we can never seem to forget them. How about this one - "What were you doing when you first heard the verdict of the O. J. Simpson trial?"

There have been many famous trials throughout history, from the trial of Socrates way back to 399 BC to the trial of Lizzie Borden in 1893, and the two trials of Dr. Sam Sheppard in 1954 and 1966, but none captured the imaginations of the nation like the trial of O.J. Simpson.

Courtroom dramas always capture our attention. It is fascinating watching the prosecution present its case, and the defense thunder back in rebuttal. Who didn't thrill to the brilliance of Perry Mason or Matlock?

Today let's look at one of the great courtroom dramas of all time - Jesus is defending Himself before the courtroom of all creation - and He calls 5 witnesses to the stand:

Witness # 1 - Jesus, Himself (vs. 31)

Jesus was the most credible witness the world has ever seen. They should have needed nothing further.

ILLUS - Who but Jesus could say what He said in *John 8:46* "*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?*"

Why, indeed? Why did the Pharisees and religious leaders of His day not believe Him?

Why do so many today, when presented with the truths of Jesus Christ, walk away unbelievers?

And why do so many today, who claim the name of "Christian", ignore whole areas of Christ's teaching?

Nonetheless, Jesus said that His testimony alone would not be valid, or sufficient proof. Later in His ministry, the Pharisees would make the same statement - cf. *John 8:13,17*. It was true that the law required more than one person's word to prove a thing.

QUOTE - "They had a right to expect that his statement that he came from God would be confirmed by other evidence." (Barnes)

And so He provided four additional witnesses. We'll mention the first three briefly, and spend the rest of our time today on the last witness - the key witness

Witness # 2 - John the Baptist (vss. 32-35)

John the Baptist was a credible witness, and Jesus called him to the stand now.

John had no agenda, other than pointing people to Christ.

John received no glory or personal gain - he was a man of simple lifestyle and plain living - this added to his credibility.

John was willing to give his life for the truth - he was not pushed around by men, even Herod.

All these things made John a compelling witness.

Interesting note on vs. 34 - "I receive not testimony..." We might paraphrase Christ's words as, "He (John) was someone you would listen to for a while, so I present him as a witness. I do not depend upon mere human testimony, but I refer to him merely to aid your salvation."

NOTE - Even in the face of their accusations and vilification, He was concerned about their souls. Don't think you can ever so offend Christ that He will not immediately offer you salvation if you but ask for it.

Interesting notes on vs. 35 - "He WAS...a LIGHT" - John was probably in prison at this point, making his ministry past tense. "a LIGHT" s/b a LAMP - John was the "light-bearer". Jesus was the "Light" itself.

They should have believed John, but they didn't. And so, John the Baptist steps down from the witness box, and the next witness is called:

Witness # 3 - The Miracles (vs. 36)

Jesus did some amazing things, any one of which would astound you were you to witness it occur.

ILLUS - Interestingly, His first witness - John the Baptist, came to a place where he began to doubt - READ - *Luke 7:19-23*. Jesus pointed to the miracles as all the evidence John should need of His authenticity.

And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. (Isaiah 29:18)

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. (Isaiah 35:5-6)

It had been prophesied that the Messiah would perform these miracles. Jesus fulfilled everything that was prophesied of the Messiah. How is it possible that these men, who knew the Old Testament like the back of their hand, could see these miracles - these fulfillments of prophecy, and still not believe?

Witness # 4 - God the Father (vss. 37-38)

God had spoken at His baptism.

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:17)

The implication from Christ's mention of it here, is that these Pharisees may have heard that voice. How is it possible that these men could have heard such a voice, and still not believed?

Witness # 5 - The Word of God (vss. 39-47)

This is the witness I want to concentrate on this morning. The witness of the scriptures - the Word of God.

1. Search the scriptures (vs.39)

Could be an imperative (a command), or an indicative - a statement of fact (i.e. calling attention to something they already did. Either interpretation works here.

If in the INDICATIVE, Jesus was saying, "You are students of the scriptures - how is it you don't see that they witness to me?"

If in the IMPERATIVE, Jesus was commanding, "If you will simply search the scriptures, you will see that they witness to me!"

In either case, He is not referring to a casual reading, but to going deep in the word of God.

QUOTE - "The word translated search here means to search diligently or anxiously. It is applied to miners, who search for precious metals--who look anxiously for the bed of the ore with an intensity or anxiety proportionate to their sense of the value of the metal. It is applied by Homer to a lioness robbed of her whelps, and who searches the plain to trace out the footsteps of the man who has robbed her. It is also applied by him to dogs tracing their game by searching them out by the scent of the foot. It means a diligent, faithful, anxious investigation. (Barnes)

ILLUS - The Bereans were commended for searching the Scriptures (*Acts 17:11*)

It was true then, and it is true now - if people will but search the Word of God they will come to no other conclusion than the validity of Christ's claim on their life. He is the Son of God, and the scriptures - all of them - will witness to that fact.

ILLUS - Book on my bookshelf entitled "Who Moved the Stone" - author (Frank Morrison) set out to DISPROVE the resurrection, understanding rightly that to do away with that truth would destroy Christianity - author became a Christian through his study of the scripture - first chapter title is "The book that refused to be written."

This is why a primary emphasis here at RCC is on the teaching of God's Word, and why I am so burdened to education children in a Sunday School. The Word of God is their only hope!

2. ... they testify of me. (vs. 39)

This was an astonishing statement to make. And yet Jesus made this claim all the time - the Bible is talking about Me! I am the Messiah, the Son of God, that the Old Testament talks about!

QUOTE (C.S. Lewis) - "The claim (that He is the Son of God) is so shocking... that only two views of this man are possible. Either he was a raving lunatic of an unusually abominable type, or else He was, and is, precisely what He said. There is no middle way. If the records make the first hypothesis unacceptable, you must submit to the second."

ILLUS - Imagine the stir it made in the synagogue when, early in His ministry He read from Isaiah and then claimed it was talking about Him! READ *Luke 4:16-21*

ILLUS - When walking with the 2 on the road to Emmaus, He made the same claim - the Old Testament was talking about Me! - cf. *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)*

ILLUS - He made the same claim as He prepared to leave the disciples and ascend to heaven. He gave His great commission to all of us *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. (Luke 24:44)*

JESUS IS THE THEME OF THE BIBLE FROM GENESIS 1:1 to REVELATION 22:21!

I've heard some say, "I believe the words of Jesus in the Bible, but am less willing to believe the words of the apostles or prophets, who were just men." Then consider, my friend, what Jesus taught here - ALL OF THE BIBLE IS ABOUT HIM.

ILLUS - Paul told Timothy that the scriptures (all of them) were the source of not only His salvation, but His maturity as a Christian - *And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)*

ILLUS - This is not just about the Old Testament - the New Testament is also the Word of God - Peter lumped Paul's writings and the other N.T. writings into the category of "scripture" - *As also in all his (Paul's) epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16)*

ILLUS - Peter told his readers that scriptures were not merely the product of human minds, but were the amazing result of the Holy Spirit's inspiration - *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NIV)*

Don't listen to the Devil when he tells you there are certain parts of the Bible that you can just ignore. Listen to the Savior, instead, when He tells you it's all about Him and it's all important, and it's all the Word of God.

3. *And ye will not come to me... (vs. 40)*

Entirely a matter of the will. These were men who knew what the Bible said, and yet refused to submit to it.

Many things in the Bible are easy and lovely and we submit to them willingly.

- *I will never leave you...* We love that part and accept it readily.
- *Call unto me and I will answer thee...* Oh we love to know that He hears and answers our prayers, and we cry out in expectation of it.
- *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved...* Salvation is FREE - Glory! We love to think of it and tell of it!
- *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...* How we rejoice in this truth when we fall, and we all do from time to time.

But what of the hard things? They're not so easy to submit to, are they?

ILLUS - Jesus demanded FAITHFULNESS - NEVER QUITTING - and we struggle sometimes to submit to His words - *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)*

ILLUS - Jesus demanded COMPLETE DEVOTION - NOBODY and NOTHING is to come before Him - *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)*

ILLUS - Jesus demanded OUR VERY LIVES - *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

Ye will not come... Jesus said their salvation was entirely hindered by their will.

Ye will not come... And it is just as true for you and I today - what keeps you from believing? YOUR WILL, and ONLY YOUR WILL.

QUOTE - "The only reason why sinners die is because they will not come to Christ for life and happiness: it is not because they cannot, but because they will not." (Henry)

ILLUS - Wednesday night Bible study - SUBMISSION - we MUST learn to submit in every way to God's Word!

- When God's Word clashes with our personal beliefs - we must drop our personal beliefs and submit to God's Word.
- When God's Word clashes with the culture in which we live, we must stand against our culture and submit to God's Word. (Any coward can follow the crowd, but where are the men and women who will stand against that flow and proclaim God's Word?)
- When God's Word clashes with "the way we've always done things," we must CHANGE THE WAY WE DO THINGS TO CONFORM TO GOD'S WORD.

Jesus didn't say, "Search the church constitution."

Jesus didn't say, "Search the denominational archives."

Jesus said, "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES!" They are our authority, alone.

4. *If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (vs. 47)*

In other words, "the defense rests." This is the final witness, and there will be no other. You either believe the Word of God, or not, but God will be providing no further witnesses.

This was not the only time Jesus taught this sobering truth:

ILLUS - Story of Rich man and Lazarus - READ *Luke 16:19-31*

Conclusion:

The defense rests. Jesus has called His final witness and the universe waits for the jury's verdict. Will you accept the testimony of these witnesses or not?

The interesting thing about this trial was that Jesus was not the one on trial! Those listening to His words were the ones on trial. And so today - you and I are the ones on trial - not Jesus Christ! And I can hear the Judge turning to the jury box and asking, "Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, having been presented with all this evidence, what say ye?"

Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God, the King of the Universe, the one and only savior or not?

And if you DO believe that, how can you not serve and follow Him wholeheartedly with every bit of your mind, soul, body and strength?

Chapter 14. Eat Your Bread

READ - *John 6:1-15 (to start, and then other passages as indicated below)*

TEXT - *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35 NIV)*

THEME - Jesus is bread for the hungry soul, but you must eat the bread for it to do you any good.

Introduction:

Bread - in the 70's it was the name of a soft-rock group, known for such intriguing songs as "Baby I'm-a Want You, Baby I'm-a Need You."

Bread - when Beth and I walked the streets of Jerusalem, two things were quite common - people walking with huge trays of freshly baked bread balanced on their head, and the smell of freshly baked bread wafting through the streets.

Bread - order nearly any meal in any restaurant in America, and bread will be part of what you receive.

Bread - in most fine restaurants it will be the first food brought to your table.

Bread - it is a staple - recognized by all the world as one of the most basic forms of food. Prisoners, when reduced to the bare necessities of life are said to be fed with "bread and water."

Bread - It represents all our wealth and everything we work for in life. When we work we are said to be putting "bread on the table."

Bread - it was for stealing a loaf of bread that Jean Valjean in the book "Les Miserables" was sentenced to a lifetime of prison.

Bread - every animal on earth eats bread. Check it out! We feed bread to our fish, and they love it. Toss an old bread crumb in the yard and watch the birds fight over it. Chloe, my basset hound loves bread. This past week while on vacation, there was a fat groundhog that parked underneath the balcony of our condo. We tossed him some bread, and he couldn't get enough! Bread is a staple of life - everything and everyone needs bread!

Bread - "breaking of bread" describes the communion that family and friends share together - the communion that we as believers share in the Body of Christ. (ILLUS - One of my memories of this church from my childhood is that whenever we would have fellowship dinners, Bill Brannon would always bring homemade bread - he was quite the baker. I can still smell that bread!)

Bread - when God provided it from heaven in the form of manna, He showed that an entire nation - an entire people, could be sustained by bread.

And here in John 6, we see three interesting facts relating Jesus Christ to bread. Let's notice them:

Jesus Provides Bread (vs. 1-15)

This is the only miracle recorded in all 4 gospels.

He was at the height of His popularity here - thousands were thronging to Him. cf. vs. 14-15

The Question - Where will we get bread for all these people? (cf. vs. 5)

Note: (He was testing Philip - we should not be surprised when we go through testing.)

The response of Philip, the businessman, the statistician - we don't have enough money. (*vs. 7*)

The suggestion of Andrew, the soulwinner - here is a bit of food, but what can we do with that? (*vss. 8-9*) Andrew is always seen bringing people to Jesus. He always seems to believe that no matter the situation, if you just bring people to Jesus, things happen.

These two picture much of what goes on in our churches today. We have a lot of Philips - sometimes too much, but we can't get enough Andrews - we need more.

The bread was small flat (like a pancake) pieces of barley bread - the food of the common people. The fish were dried or pickled fish that could be carried in a lunch - probably the size of sardines. This was a lunch that was barely enough for its original owner.

ILLUS - In the movie "The Pianist" which describes the horrible ordeal of a Jewish man during the Nazi holocaust, there is a scene where an entire family is in the ghetto just sitting, waiting to be shipped off somewhere. Everybody is starving, and many are crying and wailing. In the midst of this a little boy in tatters comes walking through selling candy. Nobody has any money, so the effort seems ludicrous. However, this family digs in their pockets and pools their resources - just a few coins - enough to buy one small piece of candy. The father then takes out his pocket knife and cuts little slivers off the candy and hands a sliver to each family member. Each gets just a taste.

That is what it would be like if you or I tried to spread 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fishes amongst a crowd. But had you been there, you would have seen something different.

Perhaps He held up the bread and tore off a piece and handed it to a disciple, who then gave it away, only to come back and see just as much bread in Jesus' hands as when He started!

Perhaps He placed it all in a basket and held the basket out for the disciples to take from - each time they reached in they found the same amount as the last time!

This was a miracle of creation - Jesus demonstrated He could create bread out of nothing - something only God could do.

How much bread? - enough to fill everybody up - *vs. 12*.

How much bread? - enough to astonish all who saw it. (How would you react if you saw somebody do this? It would be beyond imagination.)

Jesus Is Bread (*vss. 35-51*)

The miracle of feeding the 5000 was so spectacular, and such evidence of His deity, that the crowd responded by thinking He might be the Messiah (*vs. 14*), and by trying to make Him king by force (*vs. 15*).

Jesus avoided this and moved away from the crowd - you can read about this part on your own. The disciples jumped in a boat and headed toward Capernaum, and while enroute saw Jesus walking toward them on the water - another interesting miracle, but not one we'll discuss today. They arrived at the other side, and found the same crowd there wanting more bread.

Jesus immediately made them examine their motives. (ILLUS - Paul Vanaman's quote) He accused them of seeking Him only for what they could get out of it - physical food - material things - bread to fill their bellies. (*cf. vss. 26-29*) (Sounds like many who call themselves Christians today!)

He said He was not just a PROVIDER of bread, but that He IS BREAD! They didn't quite get this yet, for they considered Him to be a peer of Moses - *cf. vss. 30-31*.

ILLUS - So many today, when presented with the truths of Christ will accept that He was a great man... maybe even a really great man, but they stop short of accepting that He was and is GOD! It's like the Star Wars pilot who was maneuvering his X-Wing fighter toward the exhaust port on the death star - "Almost there... ALMOST THERE..." These people were almost there, but they needed to believe in Him as the Son of God (*vs. 29, 35-41*).

I am the bread of life (vs. 35). I am the provision of every need - you will never want in Me. cf. *Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd, I SHALL NOT WANT...*

I will never turn any away who come to me! *vs. 37*

It is God's will that you believe in me and be saved (*vs. 40*) - this is a truly great salvation verse, by the way!

And so in this passage Jesus strives to move them from understanding He is a great man who can PROVIDE bread, to the understanding that He is the Son of God, the very creator of bread.

Jesus Demands We Eat The Bread (vss. 53-58)

This is figurative language - Jesus is not referring to actually chewing on His flesh and sipping His blood. This was an example of His speaking in parables. If somebody "had ears to hear" they would receive additional information to explain it - the disciples were examples of this.

Jesus is saying that it's not enough that you accept my ability to create bread... it's not even enough that you accept that I AM BREAD. You have to eat the bread - you have to receive it! cf. *John 1:12*

ILLUS - Compare these words to what He said to the woman at the well - READ - *John 4:10-13*. He offered her living water, but it was of no use to her if she didn't drink it.

ILLUS - Salvation is described at various times in scripture as a gift - but what good is a gift that remains unreceived and unopened?

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23 NIV)

God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. (Ephesians 2:8 NLT)

Jesus was demanding a decision. Don't just talk about it. Don't just mentally assent to it. The formula is seen all through scripture - repent of your (turn away from your) sin, and believe in Me. Without that decision - no salvation.

Note: BTW - I think there is some wonderful application to our celebration of the Lord's Supper. He here uses the symbolism of eating His flesh and drinking His blood to describe salvation. And as we partake of the Lord's table, and as we eat the bread and drink the juice, we are reminded of our salvation in Christ.

Conclusion:

READ *vss. 66-70*

At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus was at the height of His popularity. At the end, many turned away from Him. At the beginning of the chapter, they were following Him because He of what they received (bread). At the end of the chapter they were leaving Him because of what He demanded (wholehearted belief / allegiance).

Jesus never let people sit on the fence. He forced them to a decision point, and that's what He did here. The result is seen in *vs. 66* - many turned away from Him. So many turned away that He even asked the 12 if they were thinking of leaving, too (cf. *vs. 67*).

There come times in every person's life where Jesus demands a decision from them. The most obvious example is salvation. But it goes beyond that. He demands our allegiance and asks us to follow Him, serve Him, and do everything we do as His representatives and for His glory. When He asks this of you, will you turn away? Have you ever noticed how Jesus never begged people to follow Him? In our churches we give invitations. I'm sure you've heard times where the invitation drags on, and it almost sounds like we're begging people to accept the Lord. Jesus didn't do that - He offered, demanded a decision, and then moved on.

Are you willing to eat your bread? When Jesus demands you believe in Him wholeheartedly, receive Him as your Savior, and follow Him wholeheartedly every day of your life, are you willing to do it? He said *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23 NIV) Are you willing to eat that bread? Or will you walk away as so many did here?

Jesus provided bread. Jesus IS bread. Jesus demands that we eat the bread.

Chapter 15. The Great Divider

READ - *John 7:1-15 (to start)*

TEXT - *So there was a division among the people because of him. (John 7:43)*

THEME -

Introduction:

We come now to what some have called the "Period of Conflict" which John describes in chapters 7-11. It describes a time where Jesus' enemies were openly at war with Him - their attitudes were fixed and their rejection was clear. It also describes a time where belief in Christ continued to grow, and when His disciples and followers grew stronger and more convinced in their faith.

As I studied this passage, there were two approaches I considered taking in preaching from it.

1. Jesus, the great time manager.

3 times we read, "*My time is not yet come.*" (John 7:6,8,30)

Jesus was the master of time, and both understood and practiced time management. We could learn much about waiting on God's timing just from meditating on Jesus' use of that phrase, *My time is not yet.*

2. Jesus, the great divider.

Notice our text for this morning, *vs. 43*

Jesus, everywhere He went, and with every word He spoke, produced division among men. It is this aspect I want to explore this morning.

5 different people or people groups appear in this passage:

1. Jesus brothers - *vs. 5*

2. The common people - *vss. 10-31, 37-44*

3. The pharisees and chief priests - *vss. 32-36, 47-49, 52*

4. The temple guards - *vss. 45-46*

5. Nicodemus - *vss. 50-51*

From these 5 peoples or people groups, there are a multitude of different opinions expressed about Jesus:

1. Unbelief - *vs. 5*

2. Curiosity - *vs. 11*

3. He is a good man - *vs. 12*

4. He is a deceiver - *vs. 12*

5. Amazement - *vss. 15,46*

6. He is demon possessed - *vs. 20*

7. Is He the Christ? - *vs. 26*

8. Belief - *vs. 31*

9. He is a criminal - *vss. 32,44*

10. He is difficult to understand - *vss. 35-36*

11. He is the Christ - *vs. 40*

12. He is someone only fools follow - vs. 49

13. He is worth listening to - vs. 51

14. He is not the Christ - vs. 52

These divisions among the people are the same divisions that people have today about Christ. These different viewpoints could be taken from the latest Barna survey on what Americans believe about Jesus in 2007.

We won't touch on all of them for sake of time, but let's discuss a few of these different ways in which people viewed Jesus.

Some, like His brothers, just don't believe.

READ - vs. 5

Perhaps it was due to familiarity.

But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. (Mark 6:4)

ILLUS - Imagine what it would have been like for these boys (normal rowdy boys), growing up with the perfect child, Jesus, who never did anything wrong, never got in trouble, never got a spanking or even a scolding, for He never sinned.

It's difficult to accept a person's calling when we know them as just a common person.

ILLUS - Pastor Gary Price, a friend of mine, after surrendering to the call to ministry, preached a message entitled "My name is not Gary" to his home church.

In our local churches we have some who suffer from the unbelief of familiarity - those who have heard of Jesus all their lives and think that such familiarity alone makes them ok. But just being around Him didn't save His brothers - they were still unbelievers - vs. 5

Such are not hopeless, though!

ILLUS - James - brother of the Lord who later was saved and wrote the book of James

ILLUS - Jude - brother of the Lord who later was saved and wrote the book of Jude.

Some are curious, just as some were in this crowd.

READ - vs. 11

ILLUS - When the iron curtain fell in Russia and the other communist countries of Europe, missionaries rushed to share the good news of Christ with those who had not heard it in a generation. I have videos taken from those efforts, and they are remarkable - hordes of people thronging to hear about Jesus.

Jesus had this effect on many.

The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. (John 12:21)

And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. (Mark 1:37)

Today, these are the ones who COME TO US - visitors who enter our church out of curiosity.

ILLUS - I did a quick count - we've received approximately 30 first time visitors cards, representing over 50 people who visited us at RCC sometime in the last 8 months.

We must never let the curious down. If they come wanting to see Jesus, they must see Him here.

We may only get that one shot to reach them.

- This is why we must ALWAYS BE ON MESSAGE HERE. The goal is the soul!
- This is why we must ALWAYS BE ON TOP OF OUR GAME HERE - DOING OUR BEST.

Some today accept that He is good, just as some in this crowd did.

READ - vs. 12

Such a belief is not sufficient to save, but it does show interest. Do you believe that Jesus was a good man, but you can't get your arms around Him being the Son of God? Well, you're not there yet, you've not found saving faith, but you're on the right track.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (Romans 10:9)

You can't just believe He was GOOD. You must believe He is GOD!

There have been many good men and women throughout history. Some would point to Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, Billy Graham.

But Jesus was so much more than this.

ILLUS - Transfiguration - where the distinction between Jesus as Son of God and good men was clearly made.

This crowd needed to move from believing He was a good man, to believing everything about His claims:

I and the Father are one...

I am the light of the world...

I am the door...

I am the way...

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. (John 8:24)

Some today, even as in this crowd, believe Jesus was a liar and evil.

READ - vs. 12

ILLUS - Thomas Jefferson, who claimed to believe the "words of Jesus" but not His miracles. Wrote the Jefferson Bible which removed all miracles and supernatural phenomena from the Word. Yet Jesus said it was these miracles that testified of Him. So He must have been a liar.

There is not much to say about such a belief as this, other than to remind you that such are horribly and desperately lost.

He that hath the Son hath life, He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

He that believeth not is condemned already...

... the fearful, and UNBELIEVING... shall have their part in the lake of fire.

The good news is - SUCH ARE NOT HOPELESS. May I challenge you, if this is how you believe about Jesus - KEEP AN OPEN MIND ABOUT HIS CLAIMS. EXAMINE THEM HONESTLY AND INTELLECTUALLY. You will find that He is who he said he was.

ILLUS - Book entitled "Who Moved the Stone"

ILLUS - Madelyn Murray O'Hair who was an atheist and is probably in hell today. Her son, however, in spite of that influence, found Christ.

Some just can't make up their minds about Jesus.

So there was a division among the people because of him. (John 7:43)

Some people are fence sitters - they hear about Jesus but don't commit to Him - or can't make up their minds about Him.

The Bible warns us about being doubled minded - fence sitters.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)

I like the way the New Living Translation puts that verse - *They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do.*

Does this describe you, my friend? Would you like to believe, but you just can't get there? You are on the fence about the claims of Christ? If so, may I suggest - DON'T STOP LISTENING.

Some try Christ or His church once and that's it. But once is not enough - try Him over and over - give Him a chance.

ILLUS - Our letter to new visitors challenges them to come back several times - not base an opinion on one visit.

ILLUS - Our Publicity committee is working on an idea to incent visitors to come back several times. Excellent - for ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH IF YOU ARE ON THE FENCE.

And by the way, church, this is another reason why we must do our best in everything here - those who just can't decide need to be encouraged to come back - attracted by what they see here. They may not yet believe, but we need to ensure them that WE DO, and that we are serious about serving Jesus Christ with our minds bodies souls and spirits here at RCC!

PARENTHETICAL - May I take this opportunity to remind you, church, of another great truth along these lines? One of our brothers here at RCC recently asked me, "Do those who have supporting roles in a ministry share in the rewards when someone is saved? Even if they were not directly involved in that salvation?"

YES - "Apollos planted and I watered..." Every person exercises their gift and does their part - and all share responsibility and reward. If someone trusts Christ here, choir members, greeters, teachers, deacons, janitors, EVEN GUYS WITH WET VACS share in that reward!

The other side to that coin is that we share in the responsibility. Those who come here and just can't quite make up their minds - those who are fence sitters - those who come over and over and are not quite sure - we must NEVER LET THEM DOWN - we must consistently live Christ before them.

Conclusion:

If we had time this morning, I'd love to discuss a few other opinions that this divided crowd expressed - opinions that many have today:

- He is difficult to understand.

We can help you with that if that is your thought of Christ. Try a different translation. Listen to teaching! Come to a Bible study - Timothy Club or Ladies Fellowship Bible Coffee! Throw yourself into Sunday School!

- He is someone only fools follow.

Some think of Jesus as a crutch and believe they are being more manly or more self-sufficient if they don't rely on such a crutch.

Hogwash - The greatest men and women who have ever lived were servants of and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is not a fool who follows Jesus, but he is a fool who does not.

ILLUS - Read the closing chapters of Revelation and see how this King, this general, this warrior is going to come back to earth and wipe out His enemies in a final conflict! Amazing!

Don't be a fool - follow the King!

- He is worth listening to.

And I'll leave you with this one, the thoughts of Nicodemus. He is worth listening to. Will you listen to Him this morning?

What is the main takeaway from this study of the Great Divider?

- Some will listen and some won't.
- Some will come with preconceived ideas and closed minds, and they will be lost.
- Some will vacillate between belief and unbelief.
- Some will be hostile, and set themselves against Christ and His work.
- But there will always be some who will openly and honestly examine His claims, believe them, and be saved.

Jesus did everything He could to help people reach that last thought process - belief. May we at RCC have that same single-minded focus. Everything we do here must be to help a divided world to find the truth in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 16. The Coin Has Two Sides

READ - *John 8:1-11*

TEXT - *And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:11)*

THEME - The Christian is one who believes in Jesus Christ, and then lives for Jesus Christ.

Introduction:

There she stands - can you see her? (DESCRIBE THE SCENE)

We are onlookers, members of the crowd. We have varying reactions to what we see - some snicker and laugh at her, some are judgmental and call out for her punishment before even hearing a defense, some sneer and express disgust, some have pity and call out for mercy. Some, the quiet ones, have empathy for her plight, knowing they are just as guilty.

We watch the interaction between Jesus and this mob, and several questions come to our minds:

QUESTION # 1 - She was "taken in adultery" "in the very act." How is this possible? It's not a spectator sport and occurs in private. We begin to wonder at the motives of her accusers (and of course John makes it plain that they were not interested in her, but only in entrapping Jesus. - cf. vs. 6)

QUESTION # 2 - Where is the man? The law they were demanding He fulfill pronounced the sentence of death on BOTH the man and the woman if found guilty of adultery.

QUESTION # 3 - As we watch and ponder, we see Jesus stooping down and writing on the ground. What is He writing, we wonder? But the crowd is in the way, and we can't see what He writes.

But then something happens. The angry crowd begins dropping their stones one by one and slinking away. We watch for a few minutes more until only Jesus and this woman are there - alone.

It's just you and Him.

And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (vs. 9 KJV)

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. (vs. 9 - NIV)

There was a crowd at first, but eventually, it was just Jesus and her.

You and I have an appointment to keep.

ILLUS - Man I know who says, "I'm never going to die."

You can live like that, but it doesn't change the fact that you WILL face that appointment. (*The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. (Psalm 14:1)*)

You can refuse to believe the claims of Christ, but it doesn't change the fact that you WILL stand before Him. ILLUS - Bumper sticker - God said it, that settles it...

ILLUS - I read this past week that the Chinese government has outlawed reincarnation! Laughable... ridiculous... But the worst part of the article was the statistic citing the large percentage of American's who believe in reincarnation. They will not believe in the One who died for them, but they choose to believe that nonsense. And they, like this woman, will have an appointment anyway, regardless of what they believe.

Those who have never become a Christian will have their appointment at the Great White Throne judgement. (Revelation)

Christians will have their appointment at the judgement seat of Christ - *we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ.*

But everybody, and that means EVERYBODY has an appointment - *EVERY knee shall bow... EVERY tongue confess...*

ILLUS - Chloe trying to get away from Darlene's. But there was no escape.

Look at this woman - see her in your mind's eye. She stands naked... stripped of all defense. There is no defense attorney standing next to her.. no technicality that can get her off... it's just her and Him.

She is a picture of us all. She is a picture of me. She is a picture of you. We all have an appointment with the Creator. Are you ready?

He offers forgiveness for sin.

Neither do I condemn thee... (vs. 11 KJV)

Forgiveness is such a wonderful thought. (Wednesday study)

Jesus offers it freely, to all, with no prequalifications. You don't have to earn it - just accept it. It is a gift!

ILLUS - Unjust steward - *Matthew 18:23-33*

ILLUS - David and Nathan - "I have sinned" "God also hath put away thy sin." (2 *Samuel 12:13*) AMAZING!

ILLUS - the message of John the Baptist - *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)*

ILLUS - Jesus on the cross - Father forgive them

Few things ring forth from scripture with more clarity than this - GOD WANTS TO FORGIVE YOUR SIN!

It doesn't matter what you've done - He wants to forgive your sin.

It doesn't matter who you've hurt - He wants to forgive your sin.

It doesn't matter how long you've been enslaved to it - He wants to forgive your sin.

It doesn't matter how many times you've tried to reform it, and turn over a new leaf, and failed - He wants to forgive your sin!

It doesn't matter how wicked you think you are - He wants to forgive your sin!

All you have to do is let Him!

He demands repentance from sin.

go, and sin no more. (vs. 11 KJV)

Go now and leave your life of sin. (vs. 11 NIV)

Jesus demands repentance. Repentance is a change of heart and mind that leads to a change of attitude and action. It is something that can be SEEN. John the Baptist put it this way, *Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. (Matthew 3:8 NLT)*

This point is every bit as important as the previous one. We need to see both of these concepts IN BALANCE.

- This was the message of Jesus Christ:

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 4:17)

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:14-15)

- AND it was the message of the Apostles and early church:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.... (Acts 2:38)

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out... (Acts 3:19)

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (Acts 17:30)

- In Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation, we are reminded of it:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

The devil has influenced Christians (at least in America) to forget the balance that needs to be seen between these two concepts. We are forgiven, but we are to go and sin no more. And therefore Christians do not see the need to live any differently than the world?

QUOTE - There's little difference in ethical behavior between the church and the unchurched. There's as much pilferage and dishonesty among the church as the unchurched. And I'm afraid that applies pretty much across the board: religion, per se, is not really life changing. People cite it as important, for instance, in overcoming depression, but it doesn't have primacy in determining behavior. (George H. Gallup, "Vital Signs," Leadership, Fall 1987, p. 17)

This is why we have those who call themselves Christians living in adulterous relationships and still serving in our churches! They hear Jesus say, "Neither do I condemn thee" but IGNORE Him saying, "GO AND SIN NO MORE!"

This is why so-called Christians are indistinguishable from the lost world - they don't live any different. They don't walk away from sin. They wink at it, and seek after it, and live the same kinds of lives as the lost. They hear Jesus say, "Neither do I condemn thee" but IGNORE Him saying, "GO AND SIN NO MORE!"

And this is why so many people are right in looking at our churches and sneering their favorite charge - there are just too many hypocrites in church. They are right - there are. And it's often because we hear Jesus say, "Neither do I condemn thee" but IGNORE Him saying, "GO AND SIN NO MORE!"

This woman was forgiven in a dramatic and breath-taking way. She was ringed by a fired up murderous mob, all holding stones and intent on bashing them into her head. She was on the brink of death, and she was delivered. She was being singed by the flames of hell - and yet suddenly and miraculously SET FREE. She was without hope, forsaken by all, and yet gloriously FORGIVEN by Jesus Christ. Do you suppose she minded when He said "Go and sin no more?" Do you suppose the thought crossed her mind, "Wait a minute Lord. I like the forgiveness part, but I'm not ready to sign up for that go and sin no more part"?

I suggest that His act of love and forgiveness would have motivated her to do whatever He asked. And the same should be true of you and I. Are you sitting there this morning offended that Jesus demands you turn from your sin? Then clearly you don't understand just what He has done for you. Get a hold of THAT, and you'll follow Him anywhere.

Conclusion:

There are two sides to this coin.

We must hear both halves of Christ's words to this woman.

Chapter 16. The Coin Has Two Sides

"Neither do I condemn thee!" GLORY - have you experienced the forgiveness that is only possible in Him? It's yours if you just ask for it.

"Go and sin no more." We simply DARE NOT leave out this part of His admonition. If you are living with known sin in your life, you must put it away.

The Christian is one who repents of their sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put another way, the Christian is one who believes in Jesus Christ, and then lives for Jesus Christ. Or put yet another way, a Christian is one who believes right and, with God's help, does right.

Let's be that kind of Christian.

And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Chapter 17. The Light of the World

READ - *John 8:12-30*

TEXT - *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)*

THEME - Jesus lights the way.

Introduction:

Continuing in our study of John's gospel...

We are still working through a period in the life of Christ called by some "the period of conflict."

It is difficult to read the continuing parry and thrust that characterize this section. Christ's enemies (religious establishment - pharisees, etc.) attack, and He defends. They attack again, and He defends. Over and over and over.

The religious leaders of the day seemed to believe they were doing God's work in fighting against Christ. Looking back at it through our 21st century lenses, we see just how ridiculous that thinking was. But if we're honest, we also see the same thought processes commonly demonstrated today!

The pharisees were set against Christ - bent on doing anything they could to obstruct His new and radical teaching. And if you hang around God's people long enough, spend enough time in His churches, you'll find a sect of "believers" who think they are called to obstruct; to stop progress; to argue against anything and everything. They are the ones who sit stone-facedly in pews with their arms crossed, rejecting the preachers words before he even says them! They believe obstructing progress is a virtue. In reality, it is just plain old sin. Just like when the Pharisees did it.

But in the midst of all the conflict that is occurring in this chapter, there are some amazing verses for us to consider. Let's notice one this morning - *vs. 12*.

Jesus lights the way.

I AM the light

Clear declaration of His deity!

Note the references to "I AM" in this chapter. READ - *vss. 24,28,58*

Can you think of a clearer declaration of Christ's deity than what He said here? He called Himself "I am." ("he" is not in the original text.)

He plainly and openly declared Himself to be God. No phrase could have been more blatant to the Jewish mind than the phrase "I am." *And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. (Exodus 3:13-14)*

Note how the hearers responded - STONES - they knew what He was saying.

(Good principle of Bible interpretation seen here - How did the people of the day hear Him? Crucial to understanding. Grammatical / HISTORICAL method.)

Note also the reference to LIGHT - another messianic concept.

QUOTE - In "the treasury" where it was spoken (see on Joh 8:20) stood two colossal golden lamp-stands, on which hung a multitude of lamps, lighted after the evening sacrifice (probably every evening during the feast of tabernacles), diffusing their brilliancy, it is said, over all the city. Around these the people danced with great rejoicing. Now, as amidst the festivities of the water from Siloam Jesus cried, saying, "If

any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," so now amidst the blaze and the joyousness of this illumination, He proclaims, "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" - plainly in the most absolute sense.(JFB)

LIGHT was a word used often in reference to the Messiah -

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

(Simeon) - A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (Luke 2:32, KJV)

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19, KJV)

THEREFORE, the hearers would have no doubt understood Him to be claiming Himself the Messiah.

Jesus was plainly saying - I AM THE MESSIAH.

SHALL NOT walk in darkness

Note the expected response to light - WALK IN IT! FOLLOW IT!

There are all kinds of ways to respond to light:

1. Gaze at it - astronomers are an example of this

2. Look away from it - those not wanting to see

ILLUS - Big Eye Man - childhood trauma from the Twilight Zone? I didn't want to see it!

3. Run from it - those not wanting to be seen.

ILLUS - Cockroaches at night.

4. Run TO IT - FOLLOW IT!

ILLUS - Moths / insects to a porch light.

Jesus said the latter is the right response. ACTION!

QUOTE (Matthew Henry) - It is our duty to follow him, to submit ourselves to his guidance, and in every thing take directions from him, in the way that leads to happiness. Many follow false lights--ignes fatui, that lead them to destruction; but Christ is the true light. It is not enough to look at this light, and to gaze upon it, but we must follow it, believe in it, and walk in it, for it is a light to our feet, not our eyes only.

ILLUS - Israelites - pillar of fire - FOLLOWED IT.

ILLUS - Moses - when he saw the light of the burning bush - HAD TO GO THERE - WENT TO IT - FOLLOWED the light.

To SEE the light (popular saying as well as popular gospel song) is not enough. To rightly respond to Christ, you must FOLLOW the light.

Are you following? Or are you just gazing?

WHAT A PROMISE to those who FOLLOW - They SHALL NOT WALK IN DARKNESS.

Jesus is the light that pushes away every darkness:

- The darkness of ignorance.

ILLUS - Missionary endeavors around the world - I surrendered to the ministry listening to a missionary (Sam Caudill) tell of the superstitions of people in Mexico. He knew and we all know that Christ is the light that can push away that darkness. WE NEED TO SUPPORT MORE MISSIONARIES!!

- The darkness of sin.

ILLUS - There is a TV program out right now called "Intervention." I've never watched it, but seen the promos for it. It is about people who are enslaved to sin and addiction, and the efforts of some to help them.

There is no darkness like the darkness of sin.

QUOTE - Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you're willing to pay. (Unknown)

- The darkness of fear.

ILLUS - Many today live in fear and terror. VOM! Only the light of Christ can overcome it.

- The darkness of hatred.

ILLUS - Islam is a religion that hates. Jesus is the only hope for those blinded by that darkness. We are currently in Ramadan, and it is a good practice throughout that festival for Christians to pray that those enslaved by Islam might find the light of Christ!

- The darkness of hopelessness.

ILLUS - We support the Haven of Rest in Akron. A few of us (way too few, sadly) serve meals there once a month. The Haven is a place that shares the light of Christ to those who are down and out - those who have come to believe there is no hope. The light of Christ pushes away the darkness of hopelessness.

- The darkness of betrayal and hurt.

ILLUS - Paul - *At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me (2 Timothy 4:16-17)*

Do you walk in darkness? Any kind of darkness? LOOK AT THE PROMISE OF THE SAVIOR! Follow me and I WILL GET RID OF YOUR DARKNESS.

SHALL HAVE the light of life.

- ULTIMATELY

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

READ - Revelation 21:22-27!

- EVEN NOW

The Christian alone understands (at least in part) the deep things of life, for the Christian has the light of life.

The Christian alone has insight into who we are, why we are here, where we are going, for the Christian has the light of life.

When the rest of the world cries out "WHY," the Christian sees a bigger picture, for the Christian has the light of life.

Conclusion:

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)

Do you have the light of life, friend?

Chapter 17. The Light of the World

The whole world was lost
In the darkness of sin,
The Light of the world is Jesus!
Like sunshine at noonday,
His glory shone in.
The Light of the world is Jesus!

No darkness have we
Who in Jesus abide;
The Light of the world is Jesus!
We walk in the light
When we follow our Guide!
The Light of the world is Jesus!

Chapter 18. If You Continue

READ - *John 8:30-59*

TEXT - *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)*

THEME - If you are truly a follower of Christ, you will remain a follower of Christ to the end.

Introduction:

Last week's sermon ended with what appeared to be good news - READ *vs. 30*.

Imagine if such were the result here. Imagine if after we prayed and worked toward a goal, such as we did a couple of weeks ago with "Let's Go Sunday" or such as we did last week with the startup of our Sunday school - many people not only came, but BELIEVED! What would our reaction be?

Jesus is surrounded by enemies during this period in His ministry. You would expect this small amount of good news to be wonderful to Him. And yet notice His response - READ *vs. 31*.

Jesus was never impressed with superficial belief. Remember what we read in *John 2:25* - *(He) needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

And here, even though there were many who "believed," we quickly learn that their belief did not stand up to scrutiny.

Jesus saw two kinds of "believer."

Without getting too technical - the construction of the Greek is different in these 2 verses:

vs. 30 - many believed on him

vs. 31 - which believed him (KJV does not make this distinction, but the NKJV, NIV, and NASB all do.) Notice:

As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him (John 8:30-31 NKJV)

Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, (John 8:30-31 NIV)

As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, (John 8:30-31 NASB)

Verse 30 described a group of people who BELIEVED IN or BELIEVED ON or PUT THEIR FAITH IN Christ. Verse 31 described a group of people who BELIEVED HIM. Perhaps a simple way to explain it is that one group believed what He was saying at that particular moment, and the other group believed Him completely and wholeheartedly - then and forever - believing not only what He said but Who He was.

It is entirely possible to believe what Jesus says about a particular thing, but not fully believe He is Who He said He is. Such people believe Jesus, but don't believe IN Jesus. Such people believe Jesus, but don't put their faith in Jesus.

ILLUS - Note how quickly this group turned away. They believed what He was saying, but couldn't believe He was the "I AM." This was a common occurrence in Jesus' ministry (cf. *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (John 6:66, KJV)*)

Such a superficial belief is seen throughout scripture. Some examples:

- ILLUS - Judas Iscariot - believed in that he followed Him throughout the years of His ministry. Believed in that he went with the others on their evangelistic missions. But did not "believe to the saving of his soul" for Jesus described Him as LOST. cf. *The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born. (Mark 14:21) While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. (John 17:12 NIV)*
- ILLUS - Devils - *What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God! (Luke 4:34 NIV) You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! (James 2:19 NKJV)*

Put simply, believing IN or ON Jesus is what saves. Simply believing Him as these did does not.

How then does one know the difference?

True believers "continue."

DEFINITION - "Continue" - in reference to place it means to sojourn, tarry, not to depart. In reference to time it means to continue to be, not to perish, to last, endure (Strongs)

We don't talk about this enough today. But Jesus was pretty clear here. If you continue, you are true disciples.

Now let's be perfectly clear - as Bible believers we accept the truth that we are saved by faith and by faith alone. FAITH PLUS NUTHIN!

For by grace are ye saved through faith... (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved... (Acts 16:31)

ILLUS - Jesus cleared up the distinction between works and faith nicely, when He said, *The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent. (John 6:29 NIV)*

And so the Bible DOES NOT TEACH that you must demonstrate a certain level of commitment and continuing service to Christ IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. But the Bible DOES TEACH that you WILL demonstrate a certain level of commitment and continuing service to Christ IF YOU ARE SAVED. Do you see the distinction?

QUOTE (Lewis Sperry Chafer) - There is an important distinction to be made between enduring in order to be saved and enduring because one is saved. The Bible consistently presents the latter test.

This teaching is all through the NT:

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me (John 14:21)

To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: (Romans 2:7, KJV)

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; (Colossians 1:23)

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:38-39)

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (James 2:17, KJV)

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:5-6)

Sobering truth, this. Jesus teaches here that if we are not willing to throw ourselves at His feet COMPLETELY and FOR LIFE, then our faith is suspect. Perhaps this is why Paul later would give the sobering instruction which we repeat often at the Lord's table *but let a man examine himself... (1 Corinthians 11*. And to the Corinthians he said, *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. (2 Corinthians 13:5 NIV)*

We don't teach this enough from our pulpits.

ILLUS - Girl at KSU whose topic in speech class was "You don't have to give up anything." I marvelled at her courage, but her theology was misleading. True - you don't have to give up anything, but the fact is if your faith is real, YOUR LIFE WILL CHANGE! Remember the distinction - you don't have to continue believing IN ORDER TO BE saved, but you will continue believing IF YOU ARE SAVED.

ILLUS - Bumper sticker - "Try Jesus, if you don't like Him, the devil will take you back." TERRIBLE THEOLOGY. Jesus is not an experiment. Trying Him is not enough. True belief never stops believing! True belief CONTINUES.

The true Christian sticks with Jesus through thick and thin - never quitting - never giving up - never surrendering to the temptations of competing lords... JESUS AND JESUS ONLY - FOREVER.

ILLUS - Marriage is used in the Bible as an illustration of the Christian relationship. The church is the bride; Christ is the bridegroom. It's hard for us to understand the significance of this illustration in America today because marriage has become such a meaningless thing to many. It used to be synonymous with COMMITMENT - an everlasting covenant between two people. When my wife and I exchanged vows on this very platform we said that we would stick to it in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, until death parts us. That's a COMMITMENT. That's what marriage is supposed to be. But marriage today is more of an experiment, if it's tried at all. Some try it until it gets tough and then abandon it. Some won't even try it, deciding rather to live together outside of marriage. People are not willing to commit to another person today. And so what should be a beautiful illustration of what Jesus is teaching here is lost on many of us.

IF YOU CONTINUE. The true Christian CONTINUES... never quits on Christ - ever.

QUOTE - We don't accept applications. Only commitments. (US Marine Corp billboard)

Some of these "disciples" that Jesus was talking to immediately turned on Him when He demanded their commitment. They were committed to Judaism, but not to Christ. They were committed to their view of the Messiah (political savior) but not to Christ. When He didn't fit their preconceived thought patterns, they rejected Him.

True disciples are committed to Christ. No matter what happens. No matter the cost. No matter if they stand alone. Christ, and Christ alone is where the true Christian's allegiance lies.

Conclusion:

I hope I'm not confusing you. Remember what we said earlier - continuing in the faith is not a REQUIREMENT if you would be saved, but continuing in the faith is a RESULT of being saved.

True disciples continue until the end.

And to those who were His true disciples, Jesus promised two wonderful things:

1. You will know the truth.

Jesus spoke in parables to the crowds, and then explained the truth more fully and clearly to those who were His disciples. Why? Because the truth is reserved for the true disciples.

The lost mind cannot understand the things of God. Paul told the Corinthians *But people who aren't Christians can't understand these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means. (1 Corinthians 2:14 NLT)*

Don't wait until you understand all the truth in order to put your faith in Christ. You never will in that case. Put your faith in Christ and then He will teach you all truth. That's the order! And that's the promise.

2. The truth will make you free.

Freedom from the penalty of sin occurs the moment you trust Christ.

Freedom from the power of sin on your life is continuous - from the moment of salvation until Christ calls you home. Every day you are a "disciple indeed," and bathe in the truth of God's Word, you experience a little more freedom from sin's power.

Freedom from the very presence of sin will happen when we get to heaven - no more sin ever.

And so, which group are you in this morning? Are you one of those few who "believe ON" Jesus? Or are you one of the many who only "believes" Jesus.

Are you one who is continuing in the faith?

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

Chapter 19. Born Blind

READ - *John 9:1-41*

TEXT - *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. (John 9:1)*

THEME - "Born blind" describes the state of each of us, and just as Jesus healed this man who believed, so He will save each of us who believe.

Introduction:

This chapter is one of the most wonderful in the Bible.

Jesus' healing of a man blind from birth is a beautiful picture of how He wants to heal you and I, for we are all blinded by sin - from birth.

If you and I do not experience the touch of the Savior's hand as this man did, we will never see.

Jesus saw a man - vs. 1

People viewed this man in different ways.

- Neighbors saw a BEGGAR - vs. 8

Common site - people grew used to seeing such.

ILLUS - When in Jerusalem, I saw a man begging on the Mt. of Olives. When I returned 2 years later, he was still there. I found his picture in a book of photos I purchased while there. He was a FIXTURE there over the years.

Jesus said, *For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. (Mark 14:7)*

But their ubiquity does not mean we can grow calloused to them.

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (Galatians 2:10 NIV)

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard. (Proverbs 21:13)

ILLUS - This is why we SERVE at the Haven of Rest as well as just GIVE to the ministry. And this is why I constantly try and encourage more of our number to participate in that service (which is coming up this Saturday, BTW).

- Disciples saw a THEOLOGICAL SUBJECT - vs. 2

Theology is VITAL - we must learn and teach the truth about God as He has revealed it in the Bible.

The pastor is responsible and will give an account for that teaching! *Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God. (Hebrews 13:17a NLT)*

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1 NIV)

Note: This is why I guard the pulpit - only like-minded teaching.

I don't be judged for your response to the message - that's between you and God. But I will give an account for the teaching ministry that occurs here under my watch. AND I TAKE THAT VERY SERIOUSLY!

BUT, when dealing with "blind" people, we must not get drawn into theological debates, for "blind" people are not just points of debate. They simply need to SEE.

Note: BTW - What was their theology, anyway? Reincarnation? How could a man sin before he was born?

- Parents saw a THREAT - vs. 22

They liked things just the way they were. "Don't rock the boat, Son!"

To accept Christ (i.e. to believe their son's testimony) would cost them their standing in their "society."

Many today refuse Christ because they perceive the cost will be too high. And their is no doubt that there is a cost associated with discipleship. It is a line in the sand, and you have to choose. *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)*

- Pharisees saw a NOBODY - vs.34

May I suggest that of all the responses people had to this man, this is the most repugnant.

And may I further suggest that this response is common among "religious" people even today! These men illustrate the religious crowd who are more concerned about the trappings of their religion than the people it is supposed to help! They did what they did because they always had... it had become tradition to them and therefore inviolable. People were no longer important, only observance of their religion.

The goal is the soul - everything we do here MUST be to reach people for Christ. Nothing else matters.

QUOTE (Gary Spencer) - "The practice is the last thing to go."

- But JESUS SAW A MAN.

Jesus saw circumstances DESIGNED to GLORIFY GOD - vs. 3

How many of our circumstances (which we usually don't understand) are DESIGNED to GLORIFY GOD?

ILLUS - Joni Earickson Tada

ILLUS - Nancy Rae Litteral

ILLUS - Little Evelyn

How many people does God bring into our lives because He wants to use us in glorifying Him through their circumstances? (vss. 4-5)

Jesus was the instrument then - vs. 5

We are the instruments now - *Matthew 5:14-16*

Everyday they pass me by,
I can see it in their eye.
Empty people filled with care,
Headed who knows where?

On they go through private pain,
Living fear to fear.

Laughter hides their silent cries,
Only Jesus hears.

People need the Lord, people need the Lord.
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord.
When will we realize -- people need the Lord?

We are called to take His light
To a world where wrong seems right.
What would be too great a cost
For sharing Life with one who's lost?

Through His love our hearts can feel
All the grief they bear.
They must hear the Words of Life
Only we can share.

People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord.
When will we realize that we must give our lives,
For people need the Lord.
People need the Lord.

We can be the instrument that glorifies God by helping those in need!

This is why we are pushing missions.

And this is why we are trying new things to try and reach more people - Sunday School, Wednesday evenings, etc.

Jesus met the man where he was.

What must this man have been thinking as he listened in the dark to the conversation between Jesus and His disciples?

The man had 2 primary senses to use in communicating, and Jesus made use of both - hearing (Jesus SPOKE to him) and touch (Jesus put clay on his eyes).

Application - we must learn to tailor our presentation to the needs and personalities of the hearer.

Sunday School is an example - tailored to children and individual age groups.

Ladies Bible study and Timothy Club are also examples of tailoring the message to meet the needs of particular groups.

Jesus demonstrated Who He was.

Previously, He had declared Himself to be God - cf. *John 8:24,28,58*

Was the clay on the eyes a creative act? Demonstrating His deity? cf. *Genesis 2:7*

Jesus healed him freely and simply.

No conditions.

No hoops to jump through - no changes required to make him "healable."

Just GO and WASH.

And His call to all who are "blind in sin" is the same:

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31)

Conclusion:

The entirety of this chapter may be summed up by noticing Jesus' command "GO and WASH" and the man's testimony - "I WENT and WASHED and SAW!"

In closing, let's think a bit about the journey the blind man took in this chapter:

- First, he only understood Jesus to be a man (*vs. 11*), and he listened to Him.
He certainly didn't understand everything about Jesus at this point. But he listened and trusted what he did understand.
You don't have to understand everything in order to be saved. Just trust the man Jesus when He says, GO and WASH. BELIEVE and be SAVED.
- He then moved into thinking of Jesus as a prophet (*vs. 17*) and he told others about Him.
And as we grow in our walk with the Savior, we cannot help but tell others. Our LIVES will tell it. Our LIPS will tell it, even when they stammer. IT WILL COME OUT!
- Finally, He knew Jesus to be the Son of God (*vs. 35-38*), and he worshipped Him.
When he SAW Him, he WORSHIPPED Him.
And when you and I finally get a glimpse of Jesus, we cannot help but fall and worship.

My friend, you are this blind man. Jesus sees you and offers salvation for your soul - sight for your blinded eyes. He dabs clay on your blindness and says simply "Go and Wash."

Have you gone and washed? Do you believe on the Son of God?

If not, will you today?

Chapter 20. The Good Shepherd

READ - *John 10:1-30*

TEXT -

THEME -

NOTES and QUOTES

Re: Hirelings / false teachers - *Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:1-2)*

Re: Hirelings / false teachers - good quote in Tasker p. 128 (marked)

Verse 1 - Definitions - A thief. One who silently and secretly takes away the property of another. A robber. One who does it by violence or bloodshed. (Barnes)

Verse 11 - "Lays down" = TITHEMI - same word as used of taking off clothes - cf. *John 13:4* - INTERESTING

QUOTE - Peterson, in his Conversations Message Bible has a good comment about the "I Am" declarations of Christ - might be good in intro or conclusion.

Introduction:

We come to yet another of Jesus' "verily, verily" statements.

QUOTE (Clarke's Commentary) "Verily, verily!-Amen, amen!-it is true, it is true!-a Hebraism for, This is a most important and interesting truth; a truth of the utmost concern to mankind."

And we come to two of Christ's great "I AM" declarations - both in this single narrative. Jesus here asserts "I am the door" and "I am the good shepherd."

The Shepherd

1. The shepherd calls his own sheep by name (*vs. 3*)

ILLUS - In the final book of the "Left Behind" series ("The Glorious Appearing"), there is a beautiful scene depicting the moment when the hero of the story meets Jesus face to face. And one of the most powerful parts of that scene for me was when Jesus called him by his name.

ILLUS - Joel Cochran is pastor of the Chapel in Marlboro. When we lived out of the area, we would attend the chapel when in town visiting the family. I met Pastor Cochran during the first of those visits and introduced myself. Some many months later we visited that church again, and Pastor Cochran met me at the door. "Bill!" he said, "How nice to see you." He remembered my name.

Jesus knows His sheep by name. They are not a number to Him. It's personal.

2. The shepherd leads them out (*vs. 3*)

QUOTE "Lead and inspire people. Don't try to manage and manipulate people. Inventories can be managed but people must be led." (Ross Perot)

3. The shepherd precedes them (*vs. 4*)

This is a similar thought to the previous one. Jesus always goes before - He leads the way.

ILLUS - O.T. - Pillar of cloud / smoke with which God led the way for the Israelites.

It is helpful, is it not, to remember that whatever Christ asks of you, He will be leading the way - going before - breaking the trail.

ILLUS - We've used the illustration of geese before, for geese are truly one of God's most marvelous creations. Consider their flying V formation - the lead goose is the one who breaks the wind, making it easier on all those who follow.

4. The shepherd is the door of the sheep (*vs. 4*)

Picture seems to be of the shepherd standing in the opening and holding the gate open so that the sheep can get through. He is at the same time the shepherd who leads them in and out, and the door which is the way in and out.

5. The shepherd sacrifices His life for the sheep (*vss. 11,18*)

This is a very important verse in the Bible. Great truth here.

Many have debated through the years of history as to "who killed Jesus." Was it the Romans, the Jews, or who?

ILLUS - I watched an interview with Mel Gibson when he was promoting his film "The Passion." The interviewer asked if Mel believed the Jews killed Jesus. Mel's response was something like "they don't get a pass - nobody does - everybody is just as guilty." And then Mel proceeded to explain that the scene in the film where a hand drives the nail into Christ's hand, was Mel's hand. So done to testify that all are just as culpable.

But Mel didn't kill Jesus. Neither did the Romans. Neither did the Jews. Neither did you or I. Nobody "killed" Him - He voluntarily gave His life for all of us.

Verse 11 - "Lays down" = TITHEMI - same word as used of taking off clothes - cf. *John 13:4* - INTERESTING

6. The shepherd "knows" the sheep (*vs. 14*)

The Sheep

1. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd (*vs. 3*)

2. They follow the shepherd (*vs. 4*)

3. They refuse to follow strangers (*vss. 5,8*)

4. Their safety and sustenance is in the fold (*vs. 9*)

True Believers

1. SENSITIVITY "*They hear my voice*"

2. FELLOWSHIP "*I know them*"

3. OBEDIENCE "*They follow me*"

4. LIFE "*I give unto them eternal life*"

5. ASSURANCE "*They shall never perish*"

6. SECURITY "*No one shall snatch them out of my hand.*"

Conclusion:

Chapter 21. The Savior's Sorrow

READ - *John 11:1-46; 53*

TEXT - *Jesus wept. (John 11:35)*

THEME - Jesus is touched by our suffering, and enraged by sin's grip in our lives.

Introduction:

We come to the final vignette in the portion of Christ's life dubbed "the period of conflict." After this, He will retire with His disciples for private conversations before He turns to the cross. This is the culmination of this "period of conflict" which can be seen by the last verse we read - *verse 53*, showing that this was the point where His enemies began plotting in earnest to kill Him.

This is one of Christ's great miracles - another of the signs that John has presented all throughout His gospel - all with the intent of demonstrating just who Christ is. We haven't mentioned it in a while, but as we come to the end of those signs, perhaps we should remind ourselves why John wrote, and why John presented the signs that he did.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:30-31)

That men and women might believe was the purpose of every one of His signs. And after this great miracle, we see that some did (cf. *vs. 45*). We also see that some didn't (cf. *vs. 46*) As we study the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, you will have the same choice today - will you believe it, or will you not?

Four "M's" this morning, for those who like to take notes:

Miracle

Jesus had raised 2 others from the dead prior to this - the widow of Nain's son (cf. *Luke 7*) and Jairus' daughter (cf. *Luke 8*) Both astonishing miracles in their own right, but each subject to skeptics charging they weren't really dead, for both had just died.

Lazarus had been dead 4 days. He was in a state of decomposition, which was apparent to all with a sense of smell.

- Jesus, upon hearing of Lazarus' illness, knew he was going to die, but remained for 2 more days - that God and He might receive glory.
- After the waiting period, He decided to go, knowing that Lazarus was now dead.
- Upon meeting the sisters, He comforted them and told them of His plan to raise Lazarus from the dead.
- Upon arriving at the tomb He demanded it be opened - to PROVE by the stench that this man was really dead?
- He wept.
- He prayed.
- He commanded. (No other machinations necessary - in this case, which was to be the ultimate demonstration of His deity; His power; His authority over death and hell - He simply spoke.)
- Lazarus lived. (We cannot say that Lazarus was resurrected, for in the Bible resurrection refers to a return from death to life, never to die again. All who believe will take part in resurrection. But Lazarus certainly died again, just as all others.)

It was an astonishing miracle, and not surprisingly to see such a thing caused many to believe. (vs. 45) What always amazes me is that in the face of such supernatural power, there were some who still rejected!

Mary and Martha

Why do you suppose that some much of scripture is devoted to these 2 women? Lazarus is mentioned here, but always Lazarus just gets a mention. Mary and Martha are the ones who we meet, learn about, and are taught by. The Holy Spirit must want us to learn from these two.

Martha is always the servant - the worker-bee, the one who is bustling about. *But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: (Luke 10:40-41)*

Mary is the opposite - never seen serving, always seen worshipping. Everytime we see her she is at the feet of Jesus. (READ *Luke 10:39; John 11:32; John 11:2 and 12:3*)

They are opposites:

- Martha is a worker.
QUOTE (colleague at work) - "There's DO'ers and there's SPEW'ers."
- Mary is a worshipper.
- Martha meets Jesus eye to eye (cf. vs. 20)
She spoke to Him as a friend, which He was. She approached Him boldly.
- Mary meets Jesus with her eyes to the ground (cf. vs. 32)
She spoke to Him as Her master, which He was. She approached Him submissively.
- BOTH had the same need! (cf. vss. 21,32)

So which was right, and which was wrong?

- In *Luke*, the narrative seems to favor Mary's approach. Jesus said, *But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. (Luke 10:42)*
- Here is *John*, Martha seems favored, both by the mention of her as the object of Christ's love (by name - vs. 5), and by the fact that she is the one He favored with the explanation and teaching in vss. 21-27.

Perhaps the lesson is that both approaches are needed.

- We need to be WORKERS for Christ - Martha.
- And we need to be WORSHIPPERS of Christ - Mary.
- We need to approach Him as our God, worshipping and submissive to His authority in our lives - Mary.
- We need to approach Him boldly as our Friend and helper, seeking His help, asking our questions, talking through the issues of life with Him.

May God help us to be BOTH Mary and Martha.

Mercy

Jesus wept. (John 11:35)

See the master standing there, surrounded by wailing mourners, some who were sincere, but most who were professionals.

See His eyes pass from the practiced wails of the pros, to the genuine heart-broken tears of Mary and Martha.

See His eyes well with tears as He empathizes with their sorrow.

Can you see Him weeping?

Jesus' felt their sorrow - their pain - their crushed spirit - their agony of heart. He felt it all.

And oh my friend, He feels your's, too. Whatever you might go through, He goes with you.

ILLUS - Frank Graeff went through some very difficult trials. The period before writing this song was one of great despondency, doubt and physical pain. When he turned to God's Word, 1 Peter 5:7 gave wonderful comfort: "He cares for you." After meditating on that truth, Graeff wrote these lyrics, with the resounding affirmation in the chorus, "O yes, He cares..."

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press, and the cares distress
And the way grows weary and long?

Does Jesus care when my way is dark
With a nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,
Does He care enough to be near?

Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief there is no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?

Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye"
To the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks,
Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

Oh yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.

As you see Him standing there, tears flowing down His divine cheeks, know my friend that He cares for you.

Madness

(I don't like this word - it doesn't exactly convey what I'm trying to say here, but it comes close, and was needed to complete the alliteration!)

For in addition to sorrow, is it possible that there was another emotion at work here? Consider *vs. 33* - "he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." (KJV) ("deeply moved in spirit, and troubled" (NIV and NASB) "When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, he was moved with indignation and was deeply troubled." (NLT)

One of the primary definitions of the Greek word "EMBRIMAOMAI" is "to be moved with anger; to be very angry, moved with indignation."

As Jesus' stood before that tomb, hearing the cacophony of weeping voices, seeing the brokenness of His dearest friends at their loss, tasting the salt of His own tears, smelling the stench of death that hung in the air - I believe that rage, righteous rage, filled His heart. THIS WAS THE BATTLE HE HAD COME TO JOIN... THIS WAS HIS PURPOSE, TO DEFEAT THIS ENEMY.

In this one moment I believe the righteous rage of the Savior rose up within Him and as He uttered those words "Lazarus come forth," He was dealing a blow to the sin which has so enslaved you and I... and the death that results from it. The final blow would come at the cross, and then the empty tomb.

QUOTE - "There would seem to be indignation and even anger in this sorrow. The presence of the grief-stricken sisters, to whose faith bereavement is presenting its sharpest challenge, brings vividly home to Him the iron grip in which mankind is held by what Paul calls 'the last enemy that shall be destroyed'. To bring about this destruction was the chief purpose for which the Son of God had entered the human arena. It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage: and he advances to the tomb as a champion who prepares for conflict. The raising of Lazarus thus becomes, not an isolated marvel, but... a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus' conquest of death and hell... Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites on our behalf. He has not only saved us from the evils which oppress us; he has felt for and with us in our oppression, and under the impulse of these feelings has wrought out our redemption." (R.V.G. Tasker, Commentary on John, pg. 140)

Conclusion:

We can learn from the miracle, itself.

And we can learn from the characters involved, principally Mary and Martha.

But the greatest lesson of John 11 is in the tears of the savior - for in them we see His heart and His soul - we see a physical demonstration of how much He cares for you and I, and we see a physical demonstration of the rage and indignation that prompted Him to come to our aid when we could not help ourselves.

For you and I are Lazarus. We were dead. We were lost. We were undone. And He stepped up and called us to life.

Have you heard His call? Have you answered? Are you like those who when they saw this great thing, BELIEVED? I pray that you will believe today, for the Savior has fought on your behalf. He did all the heavy lifting, and all you need do is believe in Him.

Chapter 22. The Turning Point

READ - *John 12:19-33*

TEXT - *And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. (John 12:23)*

THEME - The cross was the turning point, the crisis point, around which all eternity revolves.

Introduction:

We are skipping a couple of things in our study:

1. The story of Mary anointing Christ's feet with perfume as an act of worship.

We won't discuss it in today's study, but I encourage you to read it on your own. Learn from Mary about what it means to worship Christ:

- She was extravagant and public in her worship.
- Her worship cost her something - it was expensive.
- Her worship marked her in the eyes of others - left her open to ridicule.
- Her sincere worship contrasted with the hypocrisy of others who only played church - (cf. *vss. 4-6*).

We need to learn to worship like Mary.

2. The story of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday). John doesn't give much space to this account, which is developed more fully in the other 3 gospels.

I want us to zero in on one little phrase that Jesus spoke in this passage, for I believe it marks a turning point in His ministry. Notice our text, *vs. 23, "The hour is come."*

Up to this point, we've seen Jesus saying just the opposite - slipping away from this ultimate confrontation, for it was not time. (READ - *John 2:4, 7:6,8:20*)

And so we come to the TURNING POINT, or the CRISIS POINT in Christ's ministry. THE HOUR HAS COME.

The world needed saving.

Up to this point He had concentrated on the Jewish people, but they were rejecting Him. cf. *vs. 19*

But John tells us that the Gentile world was now seeking Him, too. (cf. *vss. 20-22*)

The time had come to reach the world, not just the Jews.

A couple of thoughts come to mind:

1. God's offer of salvation is for all.

John 3:16 - "WHOSOEVER believeth in Him..."

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:17)

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

2. God's offer has an expiration date!

Good news for the Gentile world was accompanied by somber news to the Jewish world. They were coming to the end of His patience.

God offers, but we must accept, for we never know how long He will continue to offer!

God calls us, and we sometimes say no. The danger is that He will eventually accept that answer! Some seem to think they have all the time in the world - they can live a worldly life and enjoy the "pleasures of life" (as the Bible calls them), and they'll worry about the things of God and their need of salvation later. But we're not guaranteed "later." And we're not guaranteed that God's offer will still be there for us when we do live many years!

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44) (And a clear principal in scripture is that God may not always keep drawing you. If you feel the pull of God in your life, you better respond!)

There was only one way to save it.

- The Savior must die.

cf. vs. 24-25

No doubt the disciples rejoiced to hear Jesus say, finally, that "the hour is come." Remember that most of them expected a ruling messiah who would free Israel from the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom. (They were still asking about this at the ascension!) But that part was still future - Jesus was referring to the hour of His death, which was the necessary next step, and He explains that necessity now.

QUOTE (Barnes) We cannot but admire the wisdom by which he introduces the subject of his death. They had seen his triumph. They supposed that he was about to establish his kingdom. He told them that the time had come in which he was to be glorified, but not in the manner in which they expected. It was to be by his death. But as they would not at once see how this could be, as it would appear to dash their hopes, he takes occasion to illustrate it by a beautiful comparison. All the beauty and richness of the harvest results from the fact that the grain had died. If it had not died it would never have germinated or produced the glory of the yellow harvest. So with him. By this he still keeps before them the truth that he was to be glorified, but he delicately and beautifully introduces the idea still that he must die.

QUOTE (JFB) This statement enforces a great truth. The grain of wheat may remain in the granary for a thousand years and be preserved, but it is useless there. It neither reproduces, nor is food. It is when it falls into the ground and undergoes dissolution, that it brings forth fruit. It is fruitful by "giving itself up". So, too, Christ must give himself up. His death was needful in order that he might impart life to the nation.

Jesus had to die - there was no other way. (SONG - "Our sins demanded hell, on Him the judgement fell.")

The exaltation would come later, AFTER His death, and AS A RESULT OF His death.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:(Philippians 2:8-9 KJV)

- The Savior's death would be on the cross.

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. (John 12:32)

"Lifted up" referred to death on the cross. (cf. vs. 33)

But Christ's "lifting" didn't end at the cross! He was "lifted" to the cross. He was "lifted" from the grave, and He was "lifted" to heaven in the ascension.

SONG (Lord I Lift Your Name on High

Lord, I lift Your name on high.
Lord, I love to sing Your praises.
I'm so glad You're in my life.
I'm so glad You came to save us.
You came from Heaven to earth to show the way,
From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay;
From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky;
Lord, I lift Your name on high.

- This is the CRISIS point of all eternity.

cf. vs. 31

Definition - "judgement" = Greek KRISIS, from which our word "crisis" is derived.

We could paraphrase Christ's words thus - "Now is approaching the decisive scene, the eventful period--the crisis--when it shall be determined who shall rule this world. There has been a long conflict between the powers of light and darkness--between God and the devil. Satan has so effectually ruled that he may be said to be the prince of this world; but my approaching death will destroy his kingdom, will break down his power, and will be the means of setting up the kingdom of God over man." (Barnes)

ILLUS - There is good reason for our calendar to be entirely based on the life of Christ, for His life was the turning point - the pivot point. EVERYTHING about EVERYTHING revolves around what happened on that cross in Jerusalem. (It matters not whether people consider this politically correct, or religiously insensitive - IT REMAINS THE TRUTH whether people accept it or not - all history revolve around this crisis point, this turning point.)

And when you come to know the Christ who was lifted upon the cross, it is a crisis point, a turning point in your life, as well.

It affects EVERYTHING. Every subsequent moment / action / thought / word in your life revolves around that crisis point.

- It changes how you live.

For me to live is Christ... (Philippians 1:21)

SONG "When I think of the cross, it moves me now."

My whole life changed on May 3, 1970. It was a turning point. I was going to be an astronaut! (Or a doctor, or something like that.) But when I came to that crisis point where I met Christ at the cross, it changed everything. Serving Him became more important than anything else.

And if Christ and the cross are the crisis point / turning point / center of your life, then it affects everything you do. It changes every aspect of your life. Nothing else is more important.

Oh I'm not saying family is unimportant, or education, or vocation. But don't let Satan use that nonsense on you, for God never gives us conflicting priorities. Put God first in your life and those other things will fall into line. But ignore that central focus - that crisis point - that turning point, and watch all the other aspects of your life get out of whack, too!

ILLUS - I had a pastor once who used to say that we should "not be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good." That always bothered me, though, for how can you be TOO heavenly minded? If He is the center of your life, then everything revolves around Him.

Has meeting Christ at the cross changed how you live, my friend? Is that crisis point something that your life now revolves around? Or are you one of those

Christian cliches that attend church once in a while, but to the outside observer live no differently every other day of the week?

- And it changes how you die.

... and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

It is only Christ and the cross that offers an answer to the horror of death and dying. The Christian, and the Christian alone need not fear death, but can actually look forward to it.

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:22-24 NIV)

Paul didn't fear death, because he knew it would be FAR BETTER. He actually, at times, longed for that home-going.

Precious in the sight of the LORD [is] the death of his saints. (Psalm 116:15)

I cannot help but wonder when I see a person kicking and screaming their way to heaven! When what should be their finest moment, their greatest hour, their time of triumph and victory, and their greatest opportunity to witness to the reality of Christ becomes just the opposite - it always makes me wonder about the reality of their faith.

You don't hear much about near death experiences anymore, because our society has advanced medically to the point where we usually have people sedated and drugged at the end of their life. But you used to hear about them.

ILLUS - Tom Malone, my pastor when I was in Bible college at Midwestern Baptist College, often told of a person he went to visit with on their death bed. Moments before this person died, they asked Pastor Malone to open a window that was at the foot of the bed. The person gazed out that window for a few minutes and then suddenly sat up, pointed out the window and said in amazement, "There He is!" and then fell back on the bed, dead.

When you come to the crisis point, the turning point of the cross, it should affect the way you die!

ILLUS - Beth's family is worried about their mom, who is suffering with congestive heart failure and breathing problems that go with it. But Beth's mom is a believer and is ready to go. She says so. She looks forward to it. She's come to that turning point and it affected her outlook on death.

Live well, Christian. And look forward to dying well. Tell the world about Christ with every breath, and especially with your last breath.

Conclusion:

Jesus is at the turning point now - the crisis point. Everything now revolves around the cross, and the necessity of His death. It was the only way.

And believing is the only way for you and I to take advantage of it and be saved.

The cross was the solution - on it Jesus paid the price for your sin. In being "lifted up" on the cross, Jesus draws you and I to Him and offers us eternal salvation.

But you must believe.

As Jesus uttered these dark words to His disciples, and to the Greeks who had come to seek Him, some believed (vs. 42). Some did not. (vs. 37)

ILLUS - Nearly every morning, I listen to Dr. David Jeremiah on WCRF radio as I drive to work. The program is entitled Turning Point, and it always begins with the musical phrase "This could be your turning point. This could be your turning point!" Have you had a turning point?

Chapter 23. I Have Given You an Example

READ - *John 13:1-20*

TEXT - *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (John 13:15)*

THEME - As Christians, we are to humbly serve one another, no matter how menial the required service may be.

Introduction:

Consider the context of this event:

- It is passion week, and Jesus and the disciples are now in the upper room.
We didn't discuss it, but the entry into Jerusalem, which we remember every Palm Sunday, was written about in *John 12*.
And *vs. 1* tells us the supper is over.
NOTE that John didn't teach about the institution of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps because the other 3 gospels were already in circulation? That was a known and commonly practiced teaching, so perhaps he felt the washing of the disciples feet was something he needed to bring out instead?
 - Jesus does what He does here with full knowledge of who He is - *vs. 5*
His lesson is on SERVICE, and He served in spite of position (which was infinite) and power (also infinite). He knew He was GOD and yet stooped to wash dirty feet.
His lesson is on HUMILITY, and he humbled Himself in spite of who He was.
 - Jesus does what He does here with full knowledge of who was in the room. cf. *vss. 2,21,26*
He served and humbled himself before friends and enemies.
- If all we had were the context... the setting of this wonderful scene, it would be a powerful lesson. But let's consider the specific example Jesus used - the washing of the disciples feet, and see what we can learn from it.

Foot washing was a custom

Usually done by a slave.

Sign of respect and honor to guests. If a house had no slave or servant available to perform this function, it was still expected that it be done - the host would have been expected to make other arrangements, or even do it himself.

ILLUS - Abraham did it - *Genesis 18:4*

ILLUS - Lot did it - *Genesis 19:2*

ILLUS - Jesus had reproved Simon, the Pharisee, for neglecting this very task. cf. *Luke 7:44* "*And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for me feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.*"

When Jesus rose to do this, I wonder if there was a murmur of embarrassment. It was after supper, long after this task would normally have been performed. Perhaps the initial interpretation of His action was that He was trying to embarrass the host for failing to do his duty? That wasn't His intent, but it might have been initially perceived that way.

NOTE - word used in vs. 4 (laid aside) is same as used in 10:17-18 describing how Jesus laid down His life.

Foot washing was an example.

Jesus was showing His disciples how He wanted them to behave toward each other. Some thoughts:

- It demonstrated ABSOLUTE HUMILITY.

DEFINITION - Humility is not thinking poorly of myself, rather it is thinking more highly of others than myself.

Nobody is exempt from serving others. Nobody is too important or elevated in position to serve others.

As Jesus stooped to pick up the towel He was saying "It's not about me... it's about others."

It is the role of every person in this church to serve every other person. If you're here for your own glory or selfish ends, you need to spend some time thinking about Jesus' example of humility here.

ILLUS - Paul at Melita - gathered sticks for a fire. (This after he had achieved extremely elevated status in the eyes of all concerned.)

I thank God for the humble people that have been a part of RCC through the years. It has warmed my heart, and I'm sure the Savior's heart as well, to see people give up their Saturday mornings to serve at the Haven of Rest, or to mow lawns and clean the church, or to work painting and remodeling the basement, or to take on the task of teaching Sunday School when it is just a step of faith that anybody will even be there!

When we SERVE OTHERS we are following the example Jesus set here.

- Jesus performed MENIAL SERVICE.

There's something important to remember about feet. FEET STINK. Washing somebody's feet is a truly menial task. And Jesus demonstrated that when we say we're willing to serve, that means we must be willing to do the stinky stuff.

ILLUS - Gift of helps - I believe some of the greatest reward will go to such! May their tribe increase!

ILLUS - Mike - sump pumps, slogging through water, fixing toilets, mowing the lawn endlessly, repairing the lawn mower this summer - always tirelessly, quietly, and without complaint. That's foot washing.

ILLUS - Susie - setting up upstairs for Sunday School because she noticed that the basement was torn up. Carried tables up two flights of steps by herself and with no recognition. That's foot washing.

ILLUS - Debbie Christy - started attending again after a period of absence, and immediately volunteered to help as a deaconess. We had an election of officers in her absence, and she didn't realize her term as a deaconess had expired. But she helped anyway! Every Sunday! That's foot washing.

Churches need people to do menial work. Thank God for such.

Jesus demonstrated that we need to get our hands dirty - all of us. None of us are above cleaning toilets, running a wet vac, or washing a brother or sister's dirty feet.

Let us be servants.

Foot washing was not meant to be an ordinance.

(At least I don't think so - I can't be too adamant about things that are not clear in scripture. There is good evidence, though, that Jesus did not mean to institute this as an ordinance. For example:)

1. The practice is never repeated in the epistles or Acts.

(Paul does make reference to it in *1 Timothy 5:10*, but not as an ordinance for the church - as a demonstration of a servant heart in a widow before admitting her to the widow's roll.)

2. The practice was not common in the early church or the early church writings.

In contrast, the two ordinances we recognize in Bible believing churches (baptism and the Lord's Supper), ARE repeated in the epistles and Acts, as well as the early church.

In other words, all Christians participate in the ordinance of baptism, as an illustration of our salvation and public identification with Christ. It is an expectation of the believer. There are no examples in the Bible of people ignoring baptism - "they that gladly received his word were baptized." We do it because He did it, and said "it's the right thing to do." We do it because of what it means - it says to the world "I AM A CHRISTIAN!" We do it because the Bible teaches we are supposed to do it. We need no other reason than that.

I need no other argument
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died
And that He died for me.

If the One who died for me wants me to be baptised, then I want to be in the water!

ILLUS - I was baptized as an infant in an Episcopal church. Twelve years later I trusted Christ here in this church. My pastor at the time taught me that baptism is meant as an illustration of salvation and must occur after baptism, and so I was baptized again, this time scripturally, at the Christian Church in Ravenna (this church didn't have a pool at the time).

BTW - We will be having a baptism service at the end of November (tentative).

AND, we participate every Lord's Day in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper because it is a remembrance of what Christ did for us, and a celebration of our fellowship - all one in Christ.

Ordinances are important. I've been reading a lot lately about what constitutes a church. And across denominational lines, there seems to be pretty good consensus on the fact that one of the distinguishing marks of a Biblical church is the practice of the ordinances Christ instituted.

It would seem that those closest to Jesus and those participating in this event did NOT view what happened here as Jesus instituting a third ordinance.

Now I don't think there's anything wrong with a footwashing service. Many churches have them.

But the LESSON here, the EXAMPLE Christ gave, was not to teach us to LITERALLY wash each others feet, but rather to humbly serve each other in whatever menial ways are needed.

If you never attend a literal foot washing service, but emulate the service and humility Christ showed, then you are following the example. If you attend foot washing services regularly, but humility and menial tasks are not part of your lifestyle, then you are missing the point.

Conclusion:

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (John 13:15)

Are you a foot washing Christian?

Are we a foot washing church?

Chapter 24. Last Minute Dos and Don'ts

READ - *John 14:1-14*

TEXT - *Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1)*

THEME - The Christian has no cause for concern, for we know what Jesus did and is doing.

Introduction:

Our brother Bill sits in his home, struggling to stay warm...

And brother Bob and his dear wife Evie wait patiently for the Lord to do something in their lives - wait patiently as they lie bedridden at Longmeadow Nursing Home.

My grandmother sits in her chair, pondering 94 years of life, and trying to maintain her faith in spite of the pain that wracks her body. And my Aunt struggles to care for her, and hurts along with her in her pain.

Our sister Grace, one of our newest members, lies in poor condition in the CCU at Summa. Our sister Jill, her friend, deals with the pain of watching Grace suffer, at the same time dealing with the loss of two loved ones in the past few days.

Mike and Susie Boyle, who are such faithful workers here at RCC, deal with a similar situation, as they not only toil at work, at home, and at church, but they also care for Susie's mother, who is in ill health at Kent Ridge.

My wife Beth, who recently took over as chairman of the board here, and is nearly working herself into a coma trying to do a good job at that role, also carries the burden of her mother, who suffers from congestive heart failure, also at Kent Ridge.

Some of you struggle with sin. We all do, of course, but some struggle more than others, falling again and again... enslaved to choices that are displeasing to God... and suffering the conviction from the Holy Spirit that comes with such choices.

Some of you suffer financial strife and trials. Some seek jobs. Some need better jobs. Some hate their jobs.

Some of you are lonely... alone... or in difficult relationships...

Some are depressed, and in spite of knowing the Lord, you struggle daily with dark thoughts, pain, disappointments, disillusionments, and despair.

Trouble comes to all - *Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.*" (Job 14:1)

TO ALL OF YOU, Jesus says, *"Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me."*

Let's repeat that to ourselves this morning (read it together, several times, aloud.)

Notice just a few thoughts about Jesus' words here:

Don't be troubled.

Let not your heart be troubled... (vs. 1)

- In spite of how things look.

Remember where they are - the setting - passion week, the upper room, washing of feet and institution of the Lord's Supper is over, Judas has been identified as the traitor and has left the room - just the 11 remain with Christ.

Consider all that Jesus had just dumped on them, right before He said, "Don't be troubled:"

1. "One of you is going to betray me." (vs. 13:31)
2. "I'm going away, and you can't come with me." (vs. 13:33)
3. "Peter, you will deny me 3 times." (vs. 13:38)

These men had sacrificed everything for Jesus. *Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. (Luke 18:28)*

Now, it LOOKED like it had been all for nought - that they had thrown their lives away on a mistake.

"Let not your hearts be troubled," Jesus said, "IN SPITE OF HOW THINGS LOOK."

And in spite of how things look in your life, His words "don't be troubled" apply to you, too.

Jesus gave a few reasons WHY they need not be troubled:

- Because I am just as trustworthy as God.

That's what He said, you know! Put another way, "Trusting me is the same as trusting God. Or yet another variant would be, You know you can rely on God no matter what, and you can rely on Me to that same extent.

To know me is to know God - vs. 7

To see me is to see God - vs. 9

- Because what I'm doing, I'm doing for you.

I have to go away, FOR YOU. (cf. 13:33)

While I'm away, I'm preparing a place, FOR YOU. He was speaking of heaven, the great hope of the believer.

You know, heaven is the very real future home for every believer.

- Think of the happiest you have ever been, and know that such a state would be abject misery in comparison to how you'll feel in heaven.
- Think of the most breathtaking beauty you've ever seen, and know that such is hopelessly ugly in comparison to what you'll see in heaven.
- Think of the healthiest you've ever been - and then consider the perfect health you'll enjoy in heaven.
- Think of the wealthiest person you can imagine. Who comes to mind - Bill Gates? Donald Trump? Some oil sheik in Saudi Arabia? The vastness of their wealth is NOTHING compared to what God has for you in heaven.
- ILLUS - Friday night, several of us travelled to hear the Gaither Vocal Band and Signature Sound in concert. I love that kind of music, and as I listened to it the thought crossed my mind - if music can sound this good on earth, and lift my soul to such great heights here, what will it be like in heaven? Imagine the MUSIC!!!

Note: Some who are used to the KJV use of "mansions" are bothered by other translations. But how could a dwelling place in the house of God be anything but a mansion? I'll gladly take a room in His house!

- Because you know the way. (cf. vs. 4)

Consider what this thought meant to the disciples - Jesus had prepared them and given them what they needed to get through this trial. He taught them everything they needed to know.

Consider what it means to you and I today - we also KNOW THE WAY!

The disciples had His physical presence, which we don't have. But we have the Word of God - the Bible, which gives us everything we need to know the way.

ILLUS - Peter, who was in this room, and who had the advantage of having been in the presence of Jesus Christ, said that the evidence of the Bible was BETTER, and MORE SURE testimony than hearing God speak directly. cf. *2 Peter 1:16-21*

You can trust your Bible!

You can regulate your life by the Bible!

And when you are troubled in this life, few things can comfort and calm you like picking up your Bible and letting the Lord speak to you through His word.

Don't be distracted.

... *ye believe in God, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME. (vs. 1)*

It is vital to understand that the way Jesus spoke of was not merely a lifestyle (although that was part of it).

1. It was and is primarily a RELATIONSHIP.

Christians do not primarily follow a list of rules and regulations - we follow a man - Jesus Christ.

- Now, we DO obey commandments. Notice how He put it in *vss. 15, 21, 24*. Clearly Jesus wants us to obey His commandments.

But this obedience is not the MEANS of salvation... it is the RESULT of salvation. Not the CAUSE but the EFFECT.

We obey because we love.

- Jesus put His thoughts on this even more strongly when He turned it around into a negative - *vs. 24* - those who DO NOT OBEY HIS COMMANDMENTS betray a lack of love for Christ.

Whether stated positively or negatively, the believer obeys the Savior - not because he / she HAS to, but because they want to please the One they love. We obey because we love!

ILLUS - I love my wife. She sometimes asks me to do things I don't necessarily agree with. Usually (not always, I'm still working on that), I do them anyway, because I love her and want to make her happy. No other reason is needed. (e.g. yesterday, I wanted to hunt... this is prime hunting time... but she is working so hard on this Christmas Bazaar, and needed help getting the church ready...)

2. It was and is an EXCLUSIVE relationship. (cf. *vs. 6*)

Jesus did not teach that all religions are the same. ONLY ONE WAY, He said.

Jesus did not teach tolerance for all belief systems. He loved all PEOPLE, but did not tolerate all BELIEF SYSTEMS. ONLY ONE WAY, He said.

This is not PC, I know. But are we supposed to be politically correct in our pulpits, or Biblically correct? Paul said, *I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. (1 Corinthians 10:15 NIV)*

Conclusion:

There are a few "do's" that Jesus shared in this chapter as well, but we'll leave those for your personal study. He said:

1. Do pray like never before. (*vss. 13-14*)

Chapter 24. Last Minute Dos and Don'ts

2. Do walk in the Spirit. (*vss. 16-17,26*)

3. And Do rest in His peace. (*vs. 27*)

You can study those on your own... but as we leave today, may we remember the two don'ts - don't be troubled... and don't be distracted. Jesus spoke these words to 11 men who were about to undergo the worst few days in their lives... an experience that would break most of us to pieces. Don't be troubled... and don't be distracted.

And Jesus says the same thing to you today, even if you feel like your life is falling apart.

Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1)

Chapter 25. Getting Along

READ - *John 15*

TEXT - *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

THEME - All our relationships are determined by our relationship with Christ.

Introduction:

Notice the last sentence of the previous chapter - *Arise, let us go hence*. Supper is over, Judas is identified, Jesus is about to be betrayed. They are either gathering their things to leave while Jesus continues speaking, or they have left the upper room and are travelling step by step to the cross, which is now only hours away.

In these last minutes, Jesus says to His 11 disciples - I need to tell you guys some things about how to get along. I won't be here to keep peace among you when your wildly differing personalities clash - so let me tell you how to do it - how to get along.

Getting along with me. (vss. 1-11)

Jesus used imagery that would have been very meaningful to His hearers. The vine was a national symbol of Israel, just as the eagle is a symbol of our country today. And just as the eagle conjures up certain imagery to us, so did the vine to these 11 men.

He used this imagery to convey several thoughts:

1. You need to be attached to the right root!

I am the vine... (vs. 1)

ye are the branches (vs. 5)

Consider the picture Jesus paints here of our relationship to Him.

Everything begins with salvation - being IN CHRIST. Think of all the ways Jesus has said this throughout the gospel of John. He has repeated it over and over - you need to come to God through me - there is no other way. We almost glossed over it in last week's message, but perhaps the strongest "my way or the highway" declaration from Christ was in *John 14:6*.

In other words, Jesus was saying, nothing else that I can tell you about relationships matters until you get this down - I AM THE VINE - if you're trusting in anything or anybody but me, you are lost. If you, the BRANCH are not attached to the true vine, you are lost.

And if you don't have this relationship right - no other relationships will matter. If you don't get along with me, you can never hope to get along with each other. (ILLUS - Cross illustration regarding relationships - horizontal relationships depend on the vertical.)

What good is a branch if it is not attached to the root?

2. You need to expect God to work on you!

My Father is the husbandmen.

When these Jews heard the term "husbandman" they knew what it meant - the husbandman was the one who worked on the vine and its branches... who did what was necessary to make that plant produce its maximum crop.

Two things you can expect God to do (*vs. 2*):

(Actually, neither sounds very pleasant if you're the branch!)

a. Remove the dead wood.

Dead wood harbors disease, rot, insect infestations - it must go.

b. Prune the good wood.

Pruning increases yield.

ILLUS - A grower of Christmas trees told me recently that with White Pines, if you cut one branch, you'll get five in return.

3. ABOVE ALL ELSE, you need to stay attached to the vine! (*vs. 4*)

NOTE - Jesus is not teaching here that you can lose your salvation. (He even says that He is talking to SAVED MEN (*vs. 3*) The Bible is clear that once a person trusts Christ he / she can never be lost. Remember His words in *John 5:24 (NIV) I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*

Jesus IS teaching that we can wither as believers - disassociate ourselves from Him in our daily lives and behaviors - TRY TO GO IT ALONE - stop drawing everything we need from Him.

And the result is fruitlessness - uselessness - a wasted life - *vss. 4-6*

ILLUS - We had a maple tree in our front yard. One night last winter an inebriated individual maneuvered his pickup truck at a high rate of speed into the middle of our yard, removing every inch of bark from the trunk of that maple tree. Once the wreckage was cleared, I perused the tree, and I was certain it could not survive such devastating injuries. Imagine my amazement when the following spring it leafed out in a magnificent canopy. It looked as full and beautiful as it ever had. But then one day a high wind came along and snapped it right off. That tree was dead. It retained a little semblance of life in its branches, but the attachment to the root was gone - dead.

Similarly, I read in one of my commentaries that a branch severed from a vine might continue to bear leaves for a short while (i.e. give the appearance of life), but it will never bear fruit.

How do we abide in Christ? What practical steps can we take to ensure we are staying close to Him?

Let me suggest a few. And some will say I'm being too simplistic. But it really is this simple.

- Stay attached to Christ by staying attached to His Word.
- Stay attached to Christ by staying on your knees.
- Stay attached to Christ by staying attached to His people.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a Christian who doesn't attend church.

ILLUS - movie "The March of the Penguins" - scene showing penguin that got separated from the flock and is stumbling alone across the tundra. Voice of the narrator - "A lone penguin has little chance of survival."

And then the fruit comes - fruit (*vs. 2*), MORE fruit (*vs. 2*), and then MUCH fruit (*vs. 5*).

FRUIT that is primarily OTHER CHRISTIANS. (e.g. dogs beget dogs, frogs beget frogs, people beget people, and CHRISTIANS beget CHRISTIANS. That is our PRIMARY fruit.

But Jesus mentions some other pretty cool fruit that comes when we abide in Him:

- Prayer that brings answers - *vs. 7*
- Obedience - *vs. 10*

- Joy - vs. 11
- Love toward one another - vs. 10,17

May God help us to abide in Him! Everything else - every other relationship - depends on this relationship - if we're not abiding in Him, every other aspect of our life will be affected.

Getting along with each other. (vss. 12-17)

You can imagine Jesus looking at the 11 and saying, "Now, that we've got that foundational truth out of the way, let's talk about how you 11 are going to get along with each other. Because you haven't exactly been good at it while I've been with you. Soon I won't be here to intervene in your squabbles!"

1. His expectation - love each other.

vss. 12-17

2. His standard - as I have loved you!

vs. 12

Same standard later applied to husbands - cf. *Ephesians 5:25*

3. The evidence

- SACRIFICE (*vs. 13*)

Christ DIED for His friends.

Christ DIED for His ENEMIES!

And that describes the level of sacrifice expected of us in loving one another!

ILLUS - Change is hard. Our church is going through change. Some people get really selfish at such times, and forget that we are to sacrifice, as Christ sacrificed. We are to love as Christ loved. It's NEVER about us. It's ALWAYS about others.

Don't be selfish... Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. (Philippians 2:3-8 NLT)

What are you willing to sacrifice for Christ? For your brothers and sisters whom Christ says you are to love? For this little church for which He died?

I find it more convicting to turn that question around - what am I NOT willing to sacrifice? What piddly little preference in my life am I unwilling to give up for the cause of Christ, or for the progress of this local church, or for one of my brothers and sisters?

- INTIMACY (*vss. 14-15*)

Jesus demonstrated His love for His disciples by bringing them into His inner circle - demonstrating that He wanted to be with them.

If we love one another, brothers and sisters, we will want to be together. Some don't want to be around their brothers and sisters. Why?

Getting along in this world. (vss. 18-27)

Can you see Jesus turning a somber eye to the 11 and saying, "Let me tell you why you better learn to get along with each other - because you're all you've got. From this day on, you are hated men - the world will hate you."

1. Because you're different (vs. 19)

(Of course many Christians solve this little problem by playing down their differences - trying to look like and live like the world. Sad.)

2. Because of association (vs. 21)

They hate me, and that hatred will rub off on you.

3. Because I expose their sin and need vss. 22-24

And can you see one of the 11 speaking up in a timid voice and saying, "Master, how can we get along in a world that hates us so?"

1. The Holy Spirit will witness for me - vs. 26

(The power of God in our lives.)

2. And you will witness for me - vs. 27

(The power of a changed life.)

In other words, just keep telling them about me - keep witnessing - keep living for me - that's the way to get along in this world.

But that can only happen if:

- You are getting along with me, and
- You are getting along with each other.

Then and only then will you have the resources to deal with a world that hates you.

Conclusion:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)

Are you abiding in Christ? Are you bearing much fruit? Are you getting along with the Savior? With each other?

Chapter 26. The Comforter Has Come

READ - *John 16:1-15*

TEXT - *He shall glorify me... (John 16:14)*

THEME - The Holy Spirit convicts people via God's Word in order to glorify Jesus Christ.

Introduction:

We are nearing the end of our study in John. In the next couple of weeks we will be reminded of the price Christ paid for your sins and mine, and the victory He won by overcoming the cross and the grave.

In chapter 16, we are still in the "Period of Intimacy" (as some call it), with Christ talking very privately with the 11 as He works His way through the last night of His life on this earth, and leads them toward the cross. He will finish this discussion with them in this chapter, and then pray for them in chapter 17, and then head for Gethsemane.

Jesus shares some truth here about the Holy Spirit. In doing so, He uses two primary names for the Spirit - comforter and spirit of truth. Let's consider those 2 names for a minute:

The Comforter

Comforter (KJV), other translations use "helper" or "counsellor."

What does the comforter / counsellor do?

DEFINITION - The word PARACLETOS signifies not only a comforter, but also an advocate, a defender of a cause, a counsellor, patron, mediator.

QUOTE - The word "comforter" is frequently used by Greek writers to denote an advocate in a court; one who intercedes; a monitor, a teacher, an assistant, a helper. It is somewhat difficult, therefore, to fix the precise meaning of the word. It may be translated either advocate, monitor, teacher, or helper. (Barnes)

If we went no further in our study, we would see that in the word PARACLETOS alone, we have wonderful truth about this Person. Consider a couple:

1. Comforts us in our distress. PARACLETOS is often summed up as "one who is called alongside to help." And we picture the Holy Spirit helping us, comforting us, standing alongside us as a friend.

ILLUS - Ever been going through a trial, and suddenly out of nowhere you are reminded of a particular verse of scripture - and comforted by it?

ILLUS - Ever struggled with feelings of loneliness, when inexplicably you were reminded that you are not alone.

He comforts us.

2. Acts as Christ's advocate - just as a lawyer pleads our cause in an earthly courtroom, so the Holy Spirit pleads Christ's case to the world.

Note that the same word is used of Christ in *1 John 2:1*, *if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous....* When used of Christ, the idea is that He pleads our case before the Father. When used of the Holy Spirit, the idea is that the Holy Spirit pleads God's case before mankind!

Picture the Father on the throne, and the Savior before Him with arms outstretched, pleading your case to the Father. The Father is not passive, but is actively listening to every word from our advocate - our counsellor, as He pleads our case. Picture also the third member of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, working actively throughout the world pleading Christ's case to all who will listen. That's the comforter - the counsellor.

How does the Comforter / Counsellor accomplish this?

Vss. 8-11 sum up His methodology. Basically, the Holy Spirit "reproves" or "convinces" or "convicts."

ILLUS - Perhaps you've heard someone talk about coming "under conviction?" Perhaps you've sat through an invitation in a church where the preacher prayed for people to be "convicted?" All describe this work of the Holy Spirit - He convicts, or convinces.

1. He convicts the world of sin.

Note: Now the Spirit also convicts the saved of sin. Any believer who has ever fallen away will testify of this truth! But Jesus here speaks about the Spirit convicting "the world" - and that designates lost mankind.

cf. vs. 9

Vs. 9 - "because they believe not" - the pre-eminent sin of which man is guilty and of which the Holy Spirit convicts sinners is unbelief in Christ. We make lists containing many things, but this is the sin that sends men to hell. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:16) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36)*

QUESTION - How do you convince a lost person that they are lost?

ANSWER - You don't - that's what the Holy Spirit does.

Imagine the fear that gripped the hearts of the 11 as Jesus taught that He was leaving them, and they were to carry on His mission! Then imagine the peace that came from this revelation that the Holy Spirit would be the one doing the convincing.

The important truth for you if you are not saved is, when you feel that prompting from within - nameless, inexplicable, and yet REAL, you had BETTER LISTEN.

QUESTION - How do we Christians win our world to Christ?

ANSWER - That it not our job! It's the Holy Spirit's job!

You and I have a job to do - share the gospel. It is not our job to save people. It is not our job to convince. It is not our job to "get results." That is the Holy Spirit's job.

ILLUS - Parable of the Sower and the Soils - our job - throw seed.

ILLUS - Recent Christmas Bazaar - our job - hand out the Word.

The important truth for you and I is that we have a job to do, and we must be faithful to do it. But we should leave the results to the Holy Spirit.

2. He convicts the world of righteousness.

cf. vs. 10

A couple of possible interpretations of this verse:

- Jesus was perhaps pointing out that the only example of righteousness available to them (Himself) was about to be removed, but the Holy Spirit would fill that gap. They would still have an example of righteousness after He was gone.

In other words, He will convince the world that there is such a thing as righteousness. There is a RIGHT.

- Another possible interpretation is that Jesus was saying the H.S. would vindicate Him and convince the world of His righteousness. And this has, indeed, happened, for Christ is now thought of even by His detractors as a righteous man, whereas before His death and resurrection He was considered an imposter, a liar, demon possessed, etc.

In other words, He will convince the world that Jesus was righteous.

Both thoughts are probably included here. For the fact is the world does consider Jesus Christ to have been a righteous person. And the world DOES know the difference between right and wrong.

One of the great questions for those who believe the theory of evolution - why do we have this innate sense of right and wrong? ANSWER - It didn't evolve. We were created in the image of God and have an innate sense of the reality of God. The Holy Spirit stirs that up, and CONVINCES us of what is RIGHT.

3. He convicts the world of judgement.

cf. vs. 11

Perhaps the thought is that God's judgement of Satan (he was defeated by the empty tomb) is a reminder / evidence of His future judgement of all sinners. H.S. brings this to the sinner's mind.

Hell / punishment for sin - is a hard concept to explain to people - yet most people know it to be a true concept.

There is a judgement coming - for both the lost and the saved. Listen to the Holy Spirit when He bears witness to this - and BE READY.

And so CONVICTION is the job of the Holy Spirit. I can't convict you of sin, but He can. I can't convince you of what is right, but He can. And I can't convince you that there is a coming judgement and you will stand all by yourself before God, but the Spirit can - and does.

The Spirit of Truth

cf. vss. 13-15

QUESTION - What is the main TOOL used by the Holy Spirit? ANSWER - the TRUTH.

Note: Of course this presupposes the idea that there is such a thing as truth. At no other time in history has this presupposition been challenged as it is today. But contrary to the "everything is relative" mantra heard today (which is false teaching from the devil), there is such a thing as truth - absolute truth.

Next week, we may study *John 17* - the prayer of our Savior for His disciples, and for you and I. Notice one verse today - vs. 17, for it tells what is truth - the Word of God.

We can BELIEVE every word of this Bible, because it is TRUTH.

We can REGULATE OUR LIVES BY every word of this Bible, because it is TRUTH.

We can REJECT THE CULTURE where it rejects the Bible, because the Bible is TRUTH. (*John 14:16f* develops this more fully:

Jesus taught that the Spirit of Truth would guide the disciples into all truth. Consider:

1. *He will help you remember. (John 14:16)*

QUESTION - How could Matthew, Mark, Luke and John remember everything that had happened in Jesus' life, and so write the 4 gospels? How could Matthew remember the sermon on the mount, word for word? The world comes up with all kinds of theories. But Jesus plainly says here that the Holy Spirit will "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (*John 14:16*)

2. *He will teach you all things - (John 14:16)*

QUESTION - How could Paul claim to be writing the very word of God when he penned the epistles? How could Luke claim to be speaking with knowledge "from above" cf. (*Luke 1:3*) when he penned Luke and Acts? How could John write about things that had not even happened yet in the Revelation, and claim that he was writing the words of God?

ANSWER - The Holy Spirit will teach you all things. And the Holy Spirit will "show you things to come" (*John 16:13*)

In these 2 phrases ("remember" and "teach") Jesus put His stamp of approval on the entire New Testament, and explained the process of inspiration!

Some say, I will believe the words of Jesus, but the rest of the Bible is just the words of men. But Jesus taught in *vs. 13 - He shall not speak of himself*. In other words, he will not make a new and independent revelation, diverse from what the Savior had taught. Jesus is saying that you can trust the words that would be inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by the apostles just as much as the words spoken by Christ himself!

Jesus plainly taught here that you can trust the Bible - the truth taught by the Spirit and put down by the apostles. We err greatly when we reject any part of scripture - for it is all of God. We err greatly when we elevate the teachings of our world above the truths of the Holy Spirit, seen in our Bibles.

Conclusion:

Perhaps all this teaching about the Holy Spirit is summed up when Jesus said, *He will glorify me. (John 16:14)*

EVERYTHING about the ministry of the Holy Spirit is designed to direct people to Jesus Christ.

He CONVICTS so that people might turn to Christ.

He INSPIRED TRUTH so that people might hear it; read it, and turn to Christ.

James Packer, in his book, "Your Father Loves You" tells of a time he was preparing to preach on this very topic. He says:

I remember walking to church one winter evening to preach on the words, "He will glorify me" (*John 16:14*), seeing the building floodlit as I turned a corner, and realizing that this was exactly the illustration my message needed. When floodlighting is well done, the floodlights are placed so that you do not see them; in fact, you are not supposed to see where the light is coming from; what you are meant to see is just the building on which the floodlights are trained. The intended effect is to make it visible when otherwise it would not be seen for the darkness, and to maximize its dignity by throwing all its details into relief so that you can see it properly. This perfectly

illustrated the Spirit's new covenant role. He is, so to speak, the hidden floodlight shining on the Savior.

(James Packer, "Your Father Loves You")

We can sum up, then, the ministry of the Holy Spirit - He convicts people via God's Word in order to shine the floodlights on Jesus Christ.

Where are you in this grand process today?

Is the Holy Spirit convicting you, today, of your need to become a Christian? You know if He is doing that... you're experiencing it right now - that conviction of your sin. Listen to Him! He is pointing you to Jesus Christ! Call upon the name of the Lord today and be saved! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Or are you, Christian, in need of a reminder of the resource Christ has left you? You are not alone in your Christian walk. The Holy Spirit - the comforter - is there for you. He's your PARACLETOS - a friend, called alongside you to help you and comfort you in all your need. Listen to Him today, and thank the Lord for the gift of the comforter.

Chapter 26. The Comforter Has Come

Chapter 27. Our Lord's Prayer

READ - *John 17*

TEXT - *I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. (John 17:9)*

THEME - In Jesus' prayer we see what most concerned Him as His earthly ministry concluded.

Introduction:

ILLUS - Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a great preacher a couple hundred years ago in England. He was known to have a dislike for long-winded prayers from the pulpit. One man told of visiting Spurgeon's church. A guest preacher was praying and was extremely vociferous and long. After several minutes of this, the man watched in fascination as Spurgeon stood up and proclaimed, "Let us all sing a hymn while our brother finishes his prayer!"

Albert Barnes in his commentary points out that this prayer is the longest in the New Testament. I have not counted the words to verify that, and so can't vouch for his statement.

But whether it's the longest prayer or not, one thing is certain - it is one of the most important prayers ever prayed - and even Spurgeon would agree that there is not a meaningless or extraneous word in it. Every phrase is filled with truth.

Here we have Jesus' prayer for His disciples and for you. Here is what He wanted for us. Here is what He asked God for you and for me.

In Jesus' prayer we see what most concerned Him as His earthly ministry concluded.

Primarily, He prayed for the 11 men who were listening to Him pray.

He prayed EXCLUSIVELY for His own - NOT for the world. Interesting that this thought is included. He pointed out that they (NOT the world) belong to God - *vs. 9*.

And He made 3 specific requests for these 11 men:

He prayed that they might be one - UNITY - *vs. 10*

Imagine the impact on the world if the church would be of "one mind" as the Bible says we should be.

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Romans 12:5)

Note: It's always important to point out that when the Bible speaks of such unity, it is discussing the church, and unity amongst itself. The Bible makes it plain that we are NOT to be of one mind with those who are not of the church - those who are not saved:

- Jesus said it here - "I pray not for the world..."
- *Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14 NLT)*

And so let's not be confused with what we read here - Jesus prayed that His church would be of one heart and one mind. And then He told that church to go out into the world and win them to Him - *Go ye...*

But church - we in this local assembly ARE to be of one heart and one mind. We ARE to show forth the kind of unity that Christ prayed for here. Forget ecumenicalism and

all that - let's concentrate on the little group that meets in these 4 walls - CAN WE LIVE UP TO CHRIST'S PRAYER?

QUOTE (People's New Testament Notes) - "The Lord all through this discourse has shown the intimate union between the Father and himself. The Father is in him and he in the Father, all that is the Father's is his, and his is the Father's. They have no separate will, kingdom, or interests. Such a union is demanded among the disciples of Christ."

QUOTE (People's New testament Notes) - "There is no other source of skepticism so fruitful as church quarrels and sectarian divisions."

He prayed that they might be kept from the evil one - vs. 15

Here it's just as instructive to see what He did NOT pray for (removal from the world.) He wants us in the world, living for Him - testifying to His reality - witnessing and proclaiming His gospel. And He prayed for our PROTECTION while we do that in this lost world.

ILLUS - Mike Adams - so many trials with his wife Renee, and yet when I saw him at the hospital yesterday, he was smiling. I pointed this out to him and heard him say for the umpteenth time, "God is good. We have to go through some things sometimes, but God is still good." What an example of how we are not taken out of this world, but protected and carried as we go through it.

ILLUS - In the year 1403, one of the wealthiest men in Paris died, leaving his entire estate to his teenage daughter Agnes. She was a beautiful and virtuous young woman, and many men wanted to marry her. But Agnes decided to give up her fortune and become a recluse. To isolate herself from society, she asked to be sealed into a cell within the wall of a church. The entrance was plastered shut except for one small hole through which food could be passed. She was confined in that small area at 18 years of age and remained there until she died at age 98. (Source unknown)

He had provided this protection while He was with them, and now asked that it continue in His absence.

ILLUS - And Paul would later testify to how it had been true in His life - He had gone through many things in this world, but He had known the protection of God every step of the way. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;* (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

He asked that they might be sanctified by the Word of God - vs. 17

DEFINITION - Sanctify = set apart for God's use. There is a negative aspect (separated from sin) and a positive aspect (consecrated for God). We are to be set apart from sin and set apart for God.

HOW is this done? Jesus' request says it is by God's Word - the source of truth.

There was an interesting illustration of this truth printed in Our Daily Bread, June 8, 1992:

The water spider is an amazing little creature. Called the frogman of the spider world, it lives in rivers and streams. How does this fascinating species survive in its watery environment? It spins a tough basket-like web of silk, a kind of diving bell, and anchors it under water to plants or other objects. Then it captures a surface air bubble, which it pulls down and ejects into its underwater house, filling it with air. This combination of web building and bubble trapping allows the water spider to live in an environment that normally would destroy it.

As Christians, we too live in an environment that could destroy us. The world's values, attitudes, and practices threaten to drown us unless we are able to protect ourselves from them. How are we to survive spiritually in this hostile worldly environment? We must build a "bubble" of protection around ourselves by studying the Scriptures, praying, fellowshiping with believers, communing with the Holy Spirit, trusting God, and obeying His Word. These activities will insulate our minds and help to keep us safe and secure.

As the water spider lives in the water but is not of the water, so we must live in but not be of the world.

Conclusion:

Did you notice *vs. 20*? I love this part - for it says that when Jesus was praying here, you and I were on His mind. Get hold of that truth. It's amazing! As He was praying for His disciples, He was also praying for you, and for me!

Jesus could have prayed anything He wanted here.

- He could have prayed for them to have earthly wealth.
- Or for them to have great success in their preaching - huge crowds.
- Or for them to never be sick... never suffer privation or despair... never be hungry or in need... never suffer the persecution of the enemies of God.

He could have prayed for anything, but in these last few moments of His earthly ministry, He chose these 3 things to pray for His disciples.

Consider, then, just how important these 3 things are to the heart of the Savior.

- When we are tempted to demand our own way - may we remember how much Jesus wants His church to be UNITED.
- When we are tempted to sin... just a little sin... nothing really bad in the world's mind... maybe just a little white lie - MAY WE REMEMBER the reality of Satan - the evil one - against whom Jesus asked for our protection. And may we flee his temptations.
- When we hear the world say that everything is relative - may we be reminded that Jesus said God's Word is TRUTH.

When the wisdom of the lost world calls this book old fashioned - out of touch - politically incorrect - or foolish - MAY WE REMEMBER that Jesus prayed we would see it as truth, and be sanctified (set apart from sin and for God) by living the truth of His Word.

May we see how He revered God's Word, and may we revere it as much.

Do you hear Him praying?

Do you hear Him praying for you?

Chapter 28. Unto You Is Born A Savior

READ - Luke 2:8-12

TEXT -*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11)*

THEME - Jesus had to die for our sins, in order to be called our Savior.

Introduction:

We are continuing our series on John today (please turn to *chapter 28*), but since it is the third Sunday in advent, we are going to look at it a little differently. In our advent celebration a moment ago, we talked of the shepherds, and of their waiting (along with everybody else) for the coming Savior and King.

Everything they had ever heard from the prophets of God gave them reason to hope for the coming of the Messiah. And now they were privileged with this angelic vision telling them He was born. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11)* Imagine their excitement as they ran to see this savior.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11) Imagine the questions that ran through their minds as they peered into the manger at this baby - a baby that looked like any other. Perhaps they looked at each other and asked, "What's so special about this child? He looks like any other babe to me." Or "How can this little baby be called our 'savior?'" OR "What will this child do that will save us?"

It's important during the Christmas season to remember that the story doesn't end in the manger. To many people, this is all they know of Jesus - He was born in a manger, and we celebrate His birth on Christmas day. But in our study of the gospel of John, we have spent months studying what happened after the manger. This little baby grew up, lived a perfect life, spent 3 years teaching the truths of God to a band of 12 men, one of whom eventually deserted Him and betrayed Him. But did that make Him a "savior?" *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11)*

There have been many good men and women throughout history. They taught good things, but that didn't qualify them to be called our "savior." They lived good and elevated lives, but that didn't qualify them to be called our "savior." Some even went so far as to sacrifice their life for others, but still, that didn't qualify them to be called our "savior."

What would this little baby do that qualified Him to be called "savior?"

We come now to *John 18-19*, where John answers that question for us. He can be our savior because of what He did in these 2 chapters.

In *chapter 17* we left Jesus praying. Praying for His disciples... praying for you and I. In *chapter 18*, He crossed the brook Kidron and entered Gethsemane. The final act was about to begin. The act that would earn Him the title, "savior."

Jesus in Gethsemane - (*John 18:1-11*)

John doesn't share all the details of the time in the garden, like the other 3 gospel writers do. No word here of Christ's prayer, or the great drops of blood that poured from Him as He prayed in these last hours. But John does tell us some interesting things:

- He shows us Jesus was unafraid. (*vs. 2*)
Jesus didn't hide, alter His routine, or in any way make it difficult for His enemies to find Him. He went where He always went - where Judas knew He would go.
- He shows us Jesus was proactive. (*vs. 4*)
They didn't have to find Him. He came to meet them.

BOTH of these points show us how Jesus VOLUNTARILY did these things. I'm reminded of His words in *John 10:17-18* "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

- He shows us Jesus was not thinking of Himself, but of His disciples. (vss. 8-9)

How could we not call this One "Savior" when we see such sacrifice, such voluntary effort on our behalf, and such continuous protection and love shown toward His own?

And yet, did that make Him Savior? If the story ended in Gethsemane, would we call Him Savior?

Jesus on Trial - (*John 18:12-19:6*)

No greater injustice has been perpetrated in the history of mankind, than that which we see here. The trial was illegal, unethical, and immoral, by any measure. It was held in the dark of night. It involved the Jewish High Priest and other Jewish leadership. It involved the Roman governor. Both JEW and GENTILE are implicated in this heinous breach of justice.

During the trial:

- Jesus was bound - (vs. 12)
- He was beaten - (vs. 22)

John describes the beating with an open hand (slap), but other gospels say He was beaten with fists and rods, too.

- He was rejected by His people - (vss. 18:40; 19:15)
cf. *John 1* - He came unto His own...
- He was scourged within an inch of life - (vs. 19:1)

ILLUS - Mel Gibson's portrayal of scourging in his movie, *The Passion* - probably fairly accurate portrayal, although probably didn't go far enough.

- And He was condemned as guilty, even though there was "no fault in Him." - (vss. 18:38; 19:6,16)

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11) Did the shepherds foresee this day, when they looked into the eyes of that baby? Did they imagine for an instant that this would be the price for Him being called "savior?"

And if the story ended here, with Jesus on trial - would we call Him Savior?

Jesus on the Cross - (*John 19:17-37*)

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11) Here, finally, in *John 18-19* we see how He could be called "savior."

READ - *John 19:17-18*

We could spend much time this morning talking about the mechanics of crucifixion. But John didn't. He left many of those details to the other gospel writers. He simply said, "they crucified Him." (vs. 18)

And we could spend a lot of time on all the things that transpired while He hung on that cross. But John didn't. He left out details like Jesus' wonderful words, "Father forgive them..." and the conversation between Christ and the repentant thief. He left those details to the other gospel writers.

John seemed to zero in on the crux of the matter - the death of Christ on the cross was the final act - the finishing act. READ - *John 19:30*.

- IT IS FINISHED - nothing else needed to be done to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies. (cf. *vs. 28*)
- IT IS FINISHED - nothing else needed to be done to pay the price for your sins and mine.

Jesus paid it ALL,
All to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

I need no other argument,
I need no other plea.
IT IS ENOUGH THAT JESUS DIED
And that He died for me.

- IT IS FINISHED - the way to heaven was open for all who would believe.
- IT IS FINISHED - He had completed His work on this earth, and could now rightly be called "SAVIOR."

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior... (Luke 2:11) Perhaps one or more of those shepherds watched this horrible scene. Perhaps they looked into those eyes - eyes into which they had gazed 30 some years prior - eyes now matted with tears and blood - eyes closing in death. Perhaps finally they understood how He could be called Savior.

For now... and ONLY NOW... could He truly be called Savior. It was and is His shed blood that saves.

My sins demanded hell,
On Him the judgement fell!

Conclusion:

All for you.

All for me.

Peter told this same story on the day of Pentecost, and when he had finished it, some cried out, "What should we do?"

What should you and I do as a result of this great Savior?

- Admit that you need Him.
- Believe that He died for you. It was all for you.
- Call upon Him - ask for the salvation that He is holding out as a gift for you this morning.

Ernie Haase and Signature Sound say it so well in their song, "Oh What A Savior":

Oh what a Savior, Oh Hallelujah,
His heart was broken on Calvary,
His hands were nail scarred, His side was riven,
He gave His life's blood for even me.

Chapter 28. Unto You Is Born A Savior

This Christmas season, see the baby in the manger. See the shepherds crowded round. Imagine the hope that swelled in their hearts as they thought on the words of the angels, *For unto you is born this day... a Savior... (Luke 2:11)*

But Oh Church, don't forget what all went into that word "savior." In the bustle of Christmas, don't forget why that baby came.

Chapter 29. Wise Men Seek Still

READ - *John 20:1-8; Matthew 2:1-2*

TEXT - *we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (Matthew 2:2)*

THEME - From the beginning of Christ's history, to the end, the wise people were the ones who believed.

Introduction:

Don't be confused! We are still in our series on John. As a matter of fact, please turn to *chapter 20*. But as with last week's message, I'd like to tie it into the Christmas season. Today is our 4th Sunday in Advent, when we consider the wise men. As I considered the wise men, and as I considered our text in *John*, I began to see some very interesting similarities.

Of course the story of the wise men occurs at the very beginning of the story of Jesus. And we are at the very end of Jesus' life on earth in *John 20*. He has already been to the cross, and we learn in this passage of His amazing resurrection from the dead.

Consider the parallels:

1. Fulfilled prophecy
2. Focused on small group of men
3. A woman named Mary

Note: A lot of nonsense has been written recently about Mary Magdalene - rubbish. Believe the Bible.

4. Wrapped in cloths
5. Angels
6. Unbelievers

Herod - *When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:3)*

Jewish leaders - cf. *Matthew 28:11f*

7. Believers

Wise men - *there came wise men from the east (Matthew 2:1)*

Disciples - *Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. (John 20:8) And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. (John 20:28-29)*

8. Worship

The parallels between the beginning of Christ's life and the end of it are somewhat striking, wouldn't you say?

But there is one parallel that I want to hammer home this morning - at His birth, and at empty tomb, there were WISE MEN (WISE PEOPLE), and they were the ones who believed!

Consider for just a moment the wise men at His birth, and the Disciples at His empty tomb.

Wise Men

1. What we don't know about them.

How many were there?

SONG - "We Three Kings" is not Biblically correct, for we don't know how many there were. All we can prove from the Bible is that there was more than 1 (wise MEN, plural).

2. What we know about them:

Who were they?

DEFINITION - "wise men" = "MAGI" - "The term magi was used as the name for priests and wise men among the Medes, Persians, and Babylonians."

Some believe they were descendents of Abraham by Keturah. (Abe was from Ur of the Chaldees - Persia.) From such a connection they may have known of the promised Messiah, and been seeking Him.

These were learned men, students, scholars, philosophers, scientists. They were of the same group, probably, in which Daniel served in Babylon. Thus they would have known his writings, including the 70 weeks of Daniel prophecy which foretold to the year when Messiah would be born!

3. We can learn from them!

- They studied God's Word, and BELIEVED IT!

We have spent the better part of a year in our study of John. This is our 29th message in the series. Next week we will finish with number 30. The book is all about evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the ONLY WAY to God, and that we MUST BELIEVE in Him or spend forever in hell. We've seen this over and over and over and over:

BIBLE STUDY - *John 3:14-15,18,36; 5:28-29; 6:47; 14:6; 17:3*

The very purpose for which John wrote is seen in today's passage - THAT WE MIGHT BELIEVE - READ - *John 20:31*

When the wise men came to BELIEVE, it changed them - they ACTED ON IT - WENT AND DID according to their belief. Has our study in John so changed us? Do we BELIEVE? And if we BELIEVE, is it changing the way we live our lives? After all, that's the true measure of our belief, isn't it?

- They knew the time was at hand, and they were watching for it!

The prophecies which so precisely told them of the coming Messiah, tell us of His soon return. Are we living in expectation of that return? Ready to meet Him?

Disciples

In the beginning of Christ's presence on earth - at His birth, we see that the WISE MEN were the ones who believed. When we stand before His empty tomb, in *John 20*, we see the same truth - the wise ones were the ones who believed!

Like the wise men, the disciples were asked to believe something amazing. But they were asked to take it to a whole 'nuther level!

- The king had, indeed come (as the wise men believed), but He had died! (and the disciples had watched that event in horror)

- The king had come (as the wise men believed), but then He died, was buried, and ROSE AGAIN! (and the disciples now stood before His empty tomb presented with the evidence of His resurrection.

And as wise men - they believed.

Note: BTW - We spoke of similarities in our introduction, but it is here that the similarities end. Consider one huge difference in the two stories - the cloths. They were wrapped around a baby in the beginning. In the end, the cloths were empty, and the Lord had risen from the dead. The wise men saw a child, the disciples saw an empty tomb.

Those grave clothes, and the description that John gives of them, are some of the most powerful evidence for the resurrection!

Long strips of cloth were soaked in spices (100 lbs. - cf. *John 19:39*) and wrapped around the body (like a mummy). The head was wrapped in a separate piece of cloth. When the disciples arrived the cloth was there in the same shape it had been in when Jesus was within it, but He was not within it! It was like a cocoon that had deflated.

QUESTION - If the body had been stolen (as the excuse came to be), why would the thieves remove these cloths. It would have been a massive job. AND why would they rearrange them to look like Jesus had just disappeared from within them?

ANSWER - Because they didn't steal the body. Jesus rose from the dead. Those grave clothes were ASTONISHING evidence. It was seeing THAT that convinced John - cf. *John 20:8*

The disciples were asked to believe something UNBELIEVABLE! Jesus was alive. And they were given ample evidence of that fact. And they believed.

And they were WISE to believe, for only in such belief is there salvation.

- It's not enough to believe He lived.
- It's not enough to believe He was good.
- It's not enough to believe He died for your sins.
- You must believe the GOSPEL - that Jesus was and is the Son of God; that He died for you; that He was buried for 3 days; that He rose from the dead. You cannot leave any of it out. Consider how Paul put it:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved... Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

... if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Wise men... wise women... BELIEVE!

Conclusion:

And so, whether you look at the beginning or the end of the story, the same truth shines forth - WISE PEOPLE BELIEVED.

We have only one more message left in our study of John. The evidence has been presented. Do you believe it?

And if you believe it, are you, like the wise men, acting on that belief? Is it changing your life? During this Christmas season, may God help us to live what we believe - to be changed by what we believe - as wise men and women.

Chapter 29. Wise Men Seek Still

And may we, as wise men and women, be watching for His soon return. For He is coming again, just as He said.

Saw you never, in the twilight,
When the sun had left the skies,
Up in Heav'n the clear stars shining
Through the gloom, like silver eyes?
So of old the wise men, watching,
Saw a little stranger star,
And they knew the King was given,
And they followed it from afar.

Heard you never of the story
How they crossed the desert wild,
Journeyed on by plain and mountain,
Till they found the holy Child?
How they opened all their treasure,
Kneeling to that infant King;
Gave the gold and fragrant incense,
Gave the myrrh in offering?

Know ye not that lowly Baby
Was the bright and morning Star?
He Who came to light the Gentiles,
And the darkened isles afar?
And we, too, may seek His cradle;
There our hearts' best treasures bring;
Love, and faith, and true devotion
For our Savior, God and King.
("Saw You Never, in the Twilight," by Cecil F. Alexander

Chapter 30. Fishing and Eating

READ - *John 21:1-15*

TEXT - *Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. (John 21:6)*

THEME - Because we believe, we are to be busy about 2 things - we fish for Him, and we dine with Him.

NOTES / QUOTES

Verse 4 - First light - may explain why they *knew not that it was Jesus*.

Verse 10 - He had supplied fish, and they had supplied fish. Is there meaning in this dual supply? Christ is ultimately the one who builds the church. (cf. "I will build my church"). We will be used to catch some, and He will bring some in without our efforts? But ALL are the result of His drawing them. (until they cast the net per His leading, nothing was caught).

Verse 12 - lit. "have breakfast"

Verse 13 - Doesn't specifically say He ate with them, although it is certainly implied. Another indication of His physical resurrection, just as in *Luke 24:38-42*.

Verse 14 - QUOTE (Clarke) Verse 14. This is now the third time] That is, this was the third time he appeared unto the apostles, when all or most of them were together. He appeared to ten of them, Joh 20:19; again to eleven of them, Joh 20:26; and at this time to seven of them, Joh 21:2. But, when the other evangelists are collated, we shall find that this was the seventh time in which he had manifested himself after he arose from the dead. 1st. He appeared to Mary of Magdala, Mr 16:9; Joh 20:15, 16. 2ndly, To the holy women who came from the tomb. Mt 28:9. 3dly, To the two disciples who went to Emmaus, Lu 24:13, alone, Lu 24:34. 5thly, To the ten, in the absence of Thomas, Joh 20:19. 6thly, Eight days after to the eleven, Thomas being present; Joh 20:26. 7thly, To the seven, mentioned in Joh 21:2; which was between the eighth and fortieth day after his resurrection. Besides these seven appearances, he showed himself, 8thly, To the disciples on a certain mountain in Galilee, Mt 28:16. If the appearance mentioned by St. Paul, 1Co 15:6, to upwards of 500 brethren at once-if this be not the same with his appearance on a mountain in Galilee, it must be considered the ninth. According to the same apostle, he was seen of James, 1Co 15:7, which may have been the tenth appearance. And, after this, to all the apostles, when, at Bethany, he ascended to heaven in their presence. See Mr 16:19, 20; Lu 24:50-53; Ac 1:3-12; 1Co 15:7. This appears to have been the eleventh time in which he distinctly manifested himself after his resurrection.

Verse 15 - "lovest thou me" = agapao (highest form of love), "I love thee" = phileo - brotherly love - lesser form of love. (Peter had been too humbled to claim any kind of superior love - he now knew all too well his limitations and weakness, having only been exceeded by Judas in betrayal of the Savior.) "more than these" = 2 interpretations: 1.) More than your old life (these fish, this way of making a living). 2.) More than these other disciples. Barnes leans to the latter, indicating Christ is pointing to Peter's earlier statements in *Matthew 26:33; John 13:37*. It is not the one who loudly proclaims his devotion, but rather then one who knows his own weakness and sin, who humbly acknowledges his unworthiness and waywardness, that is useable for God. Perhaps Christ was pointing this out to Peter. "Have you learned the truth about yourself, now?"

Verse 15 - Clarke notes that Jesus progresses from "feeding" the sheep to "shepherding" them (study 2 Greek words). Peter's ministry was not to just feed, but to shepherd - protect, guard, etc. His understanding of this is seen in his later words in *1 Peter 5:2-3*.

Verse 15 - Simon - no longer Peter - the rock. Perhaps in his present broken state, he was not worthy of that title? QUOTE (PNT) - So frail a disciple could only be called Simon. But also consider Barnes - It is worthy of remark that the admonition

was effectual. Henceforward Peter was one of the most firm and unwavering of all the apostles, and thus fully justified the appellation of a rock, which the Saviour by anticipation had given him.

Verse 16 - feed my lambs, tend my sheep - indicate a different requirement for new (young) believers vs. established (older) believers? New Christians need primarily teaching (Sunday School, etc.) Older Christians still need to be fed, but also guarding, protecting, etc.?

Verse 17 - QUOTE (PNT) Three times Peter had denied the Master (Mt 26:70,72,74); three times the Master questions his love; three times he gives him charge concerning his work (Joh 21:15-17). The questioning was painful, Peter was grieved, but the grief was wholesome, and Peter's whole subsequent life bore proof of the discipline. His rashness was forever gone.

Verse 17 - "the third time" - QUOTE (JFB) This was the Physician's deepest incision into the wound, while yet smarting under the two former probings. Not till now would Peter discern the object of this succession of thrusts. The third time reveals it all, bringing up such a rush of dreadful recollections before his view, of his "thrice denying that he knew Him," that he feels it to the quick. It was fitting that he should; it was meant that he should. But this accomplished, the painful dialogue concludes with a delightful "Feed My sheep"; as if He should say, "Now, Simon, the last speck of the cloud which overhung thee since that night of nights is dispelled: Henceforth thou art to Me and to My work as if no such scene had ever happened."

Verse 18 - Ancient writers say that Peter was put to death about thirty-four years after this. His precise age at that time is not known. Tradition says that he was crucified.

Verse 19 - QUOTE (Barnes) The ancients say that Peter was crucified at Rome, about thirty-four years after this, with his head downward. Clemens says that he was led to the crucifixion with his wife, and sustained her in her sufferings by exhorting her to remember the example of her Lord. He also adds that he died, not as the philosophers did, but with a firm hope of heaven, and patiently endured the pangs of the cross (Strom. vii.).

Verse 19 - QUOTE (Clarke) - Ancient writers state that, about thirty-four years after this, Peter was crucified; and that he deemed it so glorious a thing to die for Christ that he begged to be crucified with his head downwards, not considering himself worthy to die in the same posture in which his Lord did. So Eusebius, Prudentius, Chrysostom, and Augustin. See Calmet.

Verse 22 - QUOTE (Barnes) It is remarkable that John was the last of the apostles; that he lived to nearly the close of the first century, and then died a peaceful death at Ephesus, being the only one, as is supposed, of the apostles who did not suffer martyrdom. The testimony of antiquity is clear on this point; and though there have been many idle conjectures about this passage and about the fate of John, yet no fact of history is better attested than that John died and was buried at Ephesus.

Verse 22 - QUOTE (Barnes) What is that to thee? From this passage we learn, 1st. That our main business is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. 2nd. That there are many for the church, and one seems to be for the individual believer.

Introduction

Well, I tried... I really did!

I had planned for today's message to be the last in John. For weeks now I've thought that we would wind this series up with the end of 2007, and start 2008 with a new series. But God doesn't seem to be tied to our calendar, does He? As I studied this week, I just couldn't get away from the fact that chapter 21 has two vital topics in it, and neither should be neglected.

1. The story of the great catch of fish. (*John 21:1-15*)

2. The story of Peter's restoration. (*John 21:15f*)

Actually, in the gospel of John, chapter 21 is a sort of epilogue. The main story concluded in chapter 20. John summed up his purpose for writing in his concluding words of that chapter. Remember why he wrote? (READ - *John 20:30-31*) Chapter 21 is more like "OK... now that we understand all that, and now that we do BELIEVE, so what?" Now that we believe, what affect should it have on our lives?

And I suggest that we see a couple of answers to that question in the two stories in chapter 21. One answer is seen in the fishing incident - and it applies to the church as a whole. The other answer is seen in the excruciating conversation with Peter around the fire, and it applies to each of us as individuals. This week, let's think as a church. Now that we believe, what should we as a church do about it?

Let's look at the fishing incident:

A similar incident had occurred early in Jesus' ministry. (cf. *Luke 5:1-11*)

Repetition is always meaningful in the Bible. When you see it, you should train your mind to notice it. Ask, "Why did the Holy Spirit repeat this?" In this case, it was not a retelling of the same event, but a repetition of the event itself. The same thing happened at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' ministry.

Consider what happened:

- The disciples were waiting in Galilee (cf. *vss. 1-2*) (in obedience to Christ's command - *Matthew 28:7, Mark 16:7*)
- While they waited, they fished. (cf. *vs. 3*)

Note: In the past I have been critical of these guys - assuming that Peter's statement "I go a fishing" was an abandonment of his faith and a return to his former life. (So say some commentators.) But as I read this more, I have changed my mind on that and think they were simply being practical in their use of time while they waited for the Lord's appearing, which He had promised.

We need to be constantly reading and constantly re-evaluating and constantly probing what the Bible says. The older I get, the more I learn, because the less adamant I become (I hope) in my understanding, and the more willing I become (I hope) to admit I don't know it all, and I have so much to learn.

- Jesus appeared on the shore, but they didn't recognize Him. (cf. *vss. 4-5*)
"morning" (*vs. 4*) = lit. "first light." It was no doubt foggy and unclear - they probably could see a figure on the shore, but not enough to distinguish Who He was.
- He told them to try again (*vs. 6*), and they did, this time successfully.
- They recognized Him and met Him on shore (*vss. 7-9*).
- They ate breakfast with Him. (*vss. 9-14*).

The repetition of the fishing story drives home its importance to our church. Now that we know the reality of Christ - NOW THAT WE BELIEVE, what should we be doing about it as a church?

- We should be fishing.

Jesus had explained this task in the first fishing miracle (cf. *Luke 5*) - He emphasized it here.

- We should be dining.

Jesus showed that He was still their source of provision. And He is still ours.

Just as the time fishing was important, the time alone with Christ, communing with Him was important.

And so He gave two wonderful thoughts for us to remember as a church. Because we believe, we are to be busy about 2 things - we fish for Him, and we dine with Him.

Cast the net... (vs. 6)

"Cast the net" - we are to be FISHING. This church should be working hard to win others to Christ - here in Randolph, in the surrounding communities, and around our world. cf. Acts 1:8.

"Cast the net" - Today marks the conclusion of our first year of serving together here at RCC. We have tried hard to "cast the net" throughout our first year:

- We have preached it (John has been an entirely evangelistic - gospel filled series.
- We have passed it out (gospels of John). I've been blessed to see how those things disappear - we need to order some more!
- We have sent out hundreds of letters to people in our community.
- We have visited in peoples homes and invited people to church. Many of you have been excellent at this.
- We have had special days where we worked hard to fill pews and reach our community - Good Friday service, Easter service, Christmas Bazaar, Christmas Eve. ALL these things drew new fish!
- We have evaluated (somewhat) our missions giving, and dropped some works that were not about "casting the net." (More to be done here)

"Cast the net" - EVERYTHING WE DO HERE must be evaluated as to whether it attracts fish or not.

ILLUS - I was fishing one time on the Delaware Bay with a member of my church in New Jersey. I was (and am) a novice fisherman. I was not catching any fish, and he was hauling them in one after another. I was chagrined by my poor performance, and said so. After a while my host noticed that I was slathering suntan oil all over myself. He quietly remarked, "That's why you're not catching any fish. That stuff stinks, gets on the bait and repels them. You shouldn't do that."

- Is it important that we give the gospel in every program here? YES, for we are to "cast the net".
- Is it important that when people walk into this little old church building, they see attractive, clean, beautiful, uncluttered - a place that people think of as God's house and treat it accordingly? YES, for we are to "cast the net".

We must always look at our building, our services, and EVERYTHING WE DO HERE, as if we were seeing it through the eyes of a lost person visiting for the first time. DOES IT ATTRACT THEM, or DOES IT REPEL THEM?

- Is it important that when we do something for God in this place we do our very best? OUR VERY BEST!!!

Our musicians practice their hearts out, for they know they are singing for God, and CASTING THE NET when they sing. They want to ATTRACT THE FISH, not REPEL THEM with their music.

Your preacher studies himself silly, because He knows He is doing it for God, and casting the net with every sermon.

The Sunday School teachers pray over their students and study their lessons because they are "casting the net"!

Those who work on our church building are never satisfied that it looks "good enough" because they consider it God's house, and they are keeping it clean enough for Him, and clean enough to ATTRACT FISH!

We have committees (too many if you ask me, but that's for another day). Nobody rides herd on them, because they know that when they agreed to serve on a committee (whether it's social, or publicity, or finance, or custodial, or WHATEVER), they agreed to serve GOD on that committee, and so they give it their very BEST! They know that every effort they make on that committee, every minute they invest in it, is part of "CASTING THE NET!"

Randolph Christian Church, I ask you today, "ARE WE CASTING THE NET? Are we ATTRACTING FISH or REPELLING THEM?" Everything we do MUST BE to CATCH FISH. Let's not REPEL THEM. Let's CATCH THEM.

NOW THAT WE BELIEVE, let's CAST THE NET!

I think we did a pretty good job at this in 2007, but let's do even better in 2008. Let's examine everything - let's make sure we cast the net, and then cast it again, and then again and then again.

Come and dine - vs. 12

Can you imagine the intimacy of this event? How precious it was for these disciples? How thrilling? How encouraging?

In a way, it foreshadows a similar event that we all have to look forward to - the wedding supper we all look forward to after the second coming!

Some wonderful lessons here, though:

Never forget that Jesus is the source of all your nourishment as a believer.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

"Cast the net" - YES - be busy about fishing for men, but also make sure you get the nourishment and feeding you need from the Lord.

- Bible reading

It cannot be stressed enough how important it is for you to have a time when you read your Bible. You - by yourself, alone with God. Tell your family to leave you alone. Turn off your cell phone. Get away someplace. Pick a Bible off your shelf, dust it off, and start reading it. Have a reading plan - read it every day. FEED on the things of God! It will revolutionize and revitalize your life. It will keep you going.

QUOTE (John Cornette) - The Bible is the only change agent we have.

We work hard here at RCC to teach the Bible. Sunday School and morning worship, ladies Bible studies, etc. You should take advantage of such things, but you must also determine to do it on your own.

- Prayer

ILLUS - Jesus spent long periods of time in prayer. (All night before choosing His disciples... at least an hour at Gethsemane...)

I wonder - has your family ever heard you pray? Your wife/husband, children, grandchildren? Would they be shocked to hear you pray, or would they see it as a normal thing?

QUOTE (Charles Spurgeon) - I cannot tell how much I owe to the prayers of my good mother...I remember her once praying, "Now Lord, if my children go on in sin it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold on Christ and claim Him as their personal Savior."

Chapter 30. Fishing and Eating

ILLUS - As a wife and mother, Susanna Wesley wove prayer through her everyday life. Nineteen children were born to her between 1690 and 1709 (only nine lived into adulthood). She was just as methodical in her prayer life as she was in her disciplined teaching and training of her children from earliest infancy. Each day before class, she set aside an hour for reading the Bible and praying, and then led her children in singing Psalms.

After her ninth child was born, Susanna decided no longer to set aside one hour for devotions and prayer. Now she set aside two! During that sacred time, she meditated on Scripture and prayed, allowing nothing to prevent her from her time with God. The example she set was one her children would not forget, and adults who knew her attributed her spiritual legacy of courage and peace to this time with God each day.

Susanna Wesley's prayers impacted not only her children, but touched future generations as well. Her son John became a powerful preacher whose sermons brought awakening both in England and the colonies, and he founded the Methodist movement which culminated in the organization of the Methodist Church. Her son Charles wrote hundreds of hymns and brought the gospel to hundreds of people.

ILLUS - It is said that when things got particularly crazy in the Wesley home, Susanna would stop what she was doing and pull her apron up over her head. Her kids knew that when they saw that, Momma was praying.

We have an opportunity to pray every Wednesday evening here... few take advantage of that, and more should. But you must determine to do it on your own, as well.

So many who used to serve God vitally and faithfully do not do so now. Burned out. Worn out. The work of God will do that to you if you don't keep things in balance. Fishing and dining - we need both. YOU need both.

Never forget that you need to spend time with Him - quiet time.

Do you have such a time? Is there a part of your day when everybody knows you are to be undisturbed? It's His time? It's "come and dine" time. Do you have such a time? Every Christian should.

When we get too busy for this, we are too busy.

When our jobs get in the way of this, we need to look for another job.

When our families get in the way of this, we need to explain to our families that Christ is first. (Consider what message we give them when we DON'T do this.)

WE NEED TIME WITH THE LORD. When we neglect it, we hurt ourselves. "COME AND DINE" is just as important to our spiritual health as "CAST THE NET." We need both in balance.

Conclusion:

Notice one last thing about this campfire meeting by the sea. Look at *vs. 10*, "bring of the fish that ye have caught."

This verse tells me that you can't see success in either of these two concepts without also seeing success in the other. When we are busy "casting the net" we have fish to bring to Jesus and it adds to the experience when we "come and dine." And the time we spend in dining with Christ gives us the strength to keep on casting that net! BOTH ARE VITAL, and neither can be left out.

Now that we believe, what? What do all these things mean to us here at Randolph Christian Church? What should we be doing about it? John tells us with this won-

derful story - Because we believe, we are to be busy about 2 things - fishing for Him, and dining with Him.

Next week, Lord willing, we will finish our study of John with a look at the conversation between Peter and the Lord. It is both a heartbreaking and a thrilling passage - one that I encourage you to read this week in preparation for that study.

Chapter 31. Do You Love Me

READ - *John 21:15-25*

TEXT -*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. (John 21:15)*

THEME - Because we believe, and because we love Him, we must follow Him, even when we fail Him.

Introduction

There is one final lesson to be learned from John's gospel, and it involves one of the greatest failures the world has ever known - Peter. Have you ever considered that we have no recorded example in scripture of a greater betrayal of the Lord than that of Peter, except for Judas Iscariot, himself? As failures go, Peter was in good company... he was pretty much without peer.

REVIEW the story of Peter's betrayal of Christ. (cf. *John 18:15-17; 25-27*)

Peter is an example, here, of a broken man... a man who has had all the best intentions of spending his life fishing for men, and communing with the Savior... but along the way suffered such a colossal upset to his plans that he now sits wounded and useless.

But Jesus taught Peter here that failure is not something that should stop us. If we fall, we get back up.

QUOTE - Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising each time we fall. - Oliver Goldsmith

As they sat around that fire, eating their breakfast of fish, there was an elephant in the room that had to be dealt with. Jesus had to bring Peter face to face with the enormity of his failure and sin. When He did so, He also brought him face to face with God's amazing forgiveness and grace.

Let's listen in on their conversation:

Lovest thou me more than these? (cf. *vss. 15f*)

Few can miss the significance of Christ asking Peter this question exactly 3 times. The significance was not lost on Peter - he understood the implication perfectly.

And certainly part of what Jesus was doing here was to bring Peter face to face with his sin - his betrayal. This is KEY - YOU CANNOT IGNORE SIN IN YOUR LIFE AND EXPECT TO HAVE ANY JOY IN YOUR CHRISTIANITY.

If I regard iniquity in mine heart, the Lord will not hear me. (Psalm 66:18)

But there is something else about this questioning that is interesting.

"Do you love me?" - First 2 times Jesus used Greek AGAPE - highest form of love - self-sacrificing love - Godly love.

"I love you." - Peter always responded with Greek PHILEO - brotherly love - a fondness and friendship type of love.

"Do you love me?" - Third time, Jesus used PHILEO, and Peter was grieved.

Perhaps we could paraphrase the conversation like this:

"Simon, do you love me supremely?"
"Yes Lord, you know I'm fond of you."

"Simon, do you love me SUPREME?"
"Yes Lord, you KNOW I'm fond of you."

"Simon, are you even my friend?"

"Lord, you know my heart - you know I'm your friend."

How could Peter be so weak in his devotion to Christ? Certainly no man has loved Christ to a greater extent than he! He eventually died for the Lord. Yet here he could not bring himself to admit to that level of devotion.

Perhaps the answer lies in the second part of Jesus' question - "Do you love me MORE THAN THESE?"

A couple of possible interpretations to that phrase:

1. Do you love me more than your old life... more than these fish and fishing?
2. Do you love me more than these other disciples?

I believe the context favors the latter interpretation. For Peter had before proclaimed just such a superior devotion:

READ his proud words in *Matthew 26:31-33; John 13:37-38*

Paraphrasing again - "Well, Peter, what do you think now... do you love me more than these other disciples, as you said?" Jesus made Peter see how deficient he really was - he needed knocked off his high horse. And when Jesus brought him face to face with his own sinfulness, that's exactly what happened.

Peter was a broken man.

And oftentimes we need to be broken before the Lord can use us.

- A proud man or woman is USELESS to God.

These 6 things doth the Lord hate - a proud look...(Proverbs 6:17-19)

Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. (Proverbs 16:5)

- Peter was a braggart - a loud mouth - a LOOK AT ME kind of believer. But then he found out how weak he really was, and it broke him.

QUOTE - It is not the one who loudly proclaims his devotion, but rather the one who knows his own weakness and sin, who humbly acknowledges his unworthiness and waywardness, that is useable for God.

ILLUS - I recall a deacon at one of the churches I used to attend. He often was asked to pray in service, and always began his prayers with the phrase, "Lord, I confess that there is no good thing in me." I was always touched by that phrase, for it revealed a humble heart.

- And after he was broken, he became a mighty instrument in God's hands.

QUOTE (Peoples New Testament Notes) Three times Peter had denied the Master; three times the Master questions his love; three times he gives him charge concerning his work. The questioning was painful, Peter was grieved, but the grief was wholesome, and Peter's whole subsequent life bore proof of the discipline. His rashness was forever gone.

ILLUS - 3000 were saved as a result of his first message! (cf. *Acts 2:41*) Thousands more were added to the kingdom throughout his ministry. He was mightily used by the Holy Spirit in writing parts of the Bible - Mark, 1 & 2 Peter.

And if you read Acts and 1 and 2 Peter, you will never see the proud braggart that he had been. He was forever changed.

Feed My Lambs (vss. 15f)

With this simple instruction, repeated 3 times, Jesus did 2 important things:

- Jesus reinstated Peter as leader.

What an illustration of the amazing grace of God! What an illustration of His unlimited forgiveness.

NEVER FORGET, Christian, that no matter what you've done, ABSOLUTE AND TOTAL FORGIVENESS is available to you if you'll just confess and repent of your sin.

If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Return unto me, and I will return unto you (Malachi 3:7)

I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:34)

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

ILLUS - "We would like you to serve as deacon." Words of the head deacon at my church, when I had just gotten back into church after a period of rebellion and sin against God. That "reinstatement" touched my life in a way I cannot describe.

"I'm such a failure preacher, God can never use me." But the lesson of Peter is that that is simply not true. He is not done with you yet.

- He reminded him of the job ahead, and even gave some clarification of what was expected.

Interestingly, just as two different words for love are seen in this passage (AGAPE / PHILEO), there are also 2 different words used in Jesus' command to Peter.

1. Feed my lambs

Here, Jesus used the word BOSKO, which does mean FEED. And He used the word ARNION, which means little lamb.

The young ones need FOOD. A newborn lamb has but one thing on its mind - momma's milk.

"And Peter, those baby Christians that will soon be added to the flock are gonna need food. You must feed them. They are MY LAMBS."

2. Shepherd my sheep

The second time, Jesus used the word POIMAINO, which has an expanded meaning of "to feed, to tend a flock, to keep sheep, as well as the word PROBATION, which simply means sheep, and implies an adult animal."

Older ones learn to feed themselves (if they are the slightest bit healthy). The shepherds responsibility to them is broader. Hence the word SHEPHERD, TEND, rather than FEED.

But feeding is still part of the shepherd's job, even with the older ones. The third time, Jesus combined the two thoughts and told Peter to feed (BOSKO) my sheep (PROBATION).

This is a good passage for pastors to learn from, for it neatly describes the job. Peter would, later in his ministry, describe the role of pastor, and he had clearly learned what Jesus meant here.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Follow Me (vss. 18-19; 22)

"Peter, I want you to get up from your failure and sin, and follow me. Oh, and by the way, Peter, in the not-too-distant future, you will be led away and killed for your belief in Me." (vss. 18-19)

QUOTE (Barnes) The ancients say that Peter was crucified at Rome, about thirty-four years after this, with his head downward. Clemens says that he was led to the crucifixion with his wife, and sustained her in her sufferings by exhorting her to remember the example of her Lord. He also adds that he died, not as the philosophers did, but with a firm hope of heaven, and patiently endured the pangs of the cross (Strom. vii.).

The Lord summed it all up for us here in one neat little phrase - FOLLOW ME.

"But what about this guy, Lord?" Peter could have had a couple of different motives for this question, but Jesus' response is instructive - "YOU... follow me, regardless of what happens with other people." "YOU... follow me."

If we love Him, we will get up when we fail... repent when we sin... brush ourselves off and FOLLOW HIM... no matter what.

Conclusion:

What keeps you from serving God? Are you, like Peter, one who in your past was on fire for God - zealous to serve Him with all your heart - but then smashed in the face by your own failings? Are you now on the sidelines? Are you now uncertain of your faith? Are you now one who is unwilling to declare a firm commitment to the Lord because you've seen just how easy you can mess up?

If so, may Jesus' loving forgiveness of Peter encourage you - He forgives you, too.

And may Jesus' stern expectation of Peter spur you onto further service, for He says the same thing to you that He said to Peter - "FOLLOW ME."

You ask, "What do I do, preacher, if I'm in Peter's situation?" Let me suggest 2 practical steps to take:

1. Make sure the failure is past tense!

Implicit in this entire story is the fact that Peter's betrayal was something in the past. He had done it and repented of it. It was not something he was actively engaged in now.

You must repent of your sin - confess it to God and turn your back on it. With His help, and with all your effort you must walk away from it. Don't keep living in your sin and then wonder why God doesn't restore your joy and usefulness. It doesn't work that way.

2. Then just get up and get going.

Jesus didn't give Peter any other interim steps. Once He was restored to fellowship with Christ, he was to get busy feeding and shepherding. His role in Christ's kingdom had not changed - it was still there waiting for him.

So is yours... if you will just get up and start doing it.

So many people have come face to face with their own failure as a Christian. In some cases, they have remained on the sidelines the rest of their lives - useless and fruitless for Christ. But in other cases, they have risen from that failure and gone on to ever greater heights for Jesus:

ILLUS - Moses murdered a man, and fled into the wilderness for 40 years as a result. But God was not done with him.

ILLUS - Samson was one of the greatest failures the world has ever seen. Nobody had greater gifts and abilities than he, and nobody squandered them away as he did. And yet even Samson was used of God when he turned back to Him.

ILLUS - David, the man after God's own heart, sinned. Then he repented and got up and was used of God still.

I ask you, my friend, as we conclude our series on the gospel of John. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God - your Savior who died for you - your King who demands your allegiance and Who will soon come to judge the living and the dead... if you believe these things, and if you love Him - ARE YOU FOLLOWING HIM?

No matter what has happened in your life, and no matter what has happened in the lives of those around you, it all comes down to you and Him - "YOU, follow me."

ILLUS - Haddon W. Robinson told this story:

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running 65 yards in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, outdistanced him and downed him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory.

That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the floor, all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands, and cried like a baby.

If you have played football, you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during half time. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. Then the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time. Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, "Men the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He did not budge. The coach looked back and called to him again; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second." Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were wet with a strong man's tears.

"Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you, I've ruined the University of California, I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life."

Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegel's shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back, and those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half.

The Lord is speaking to you and I this morning, just as He did around the breakfast fire to Peter long ago, "Do you love me?" And we answer back, "Yes Lord, we love you." And He replies, "Then, no matter what has happened... GET UP, and FOLLOW ME."

