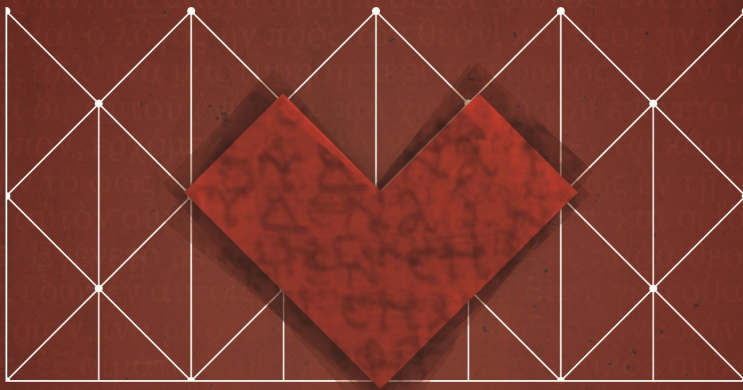


THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



BELIEVE

Studies in the book of John

PART THREE: Weeks 15-21

Group Applications

Personal Study



Preface

In the opening chapters of John, we learn that Jesus came as the light of the world. What does light do? It gives vision. It pierces with clarity. It incarnates life into a shriveled world. But it also exposes darkness.

In John 5, Jesus encounters a paralyzed man sitting by a pool. The man has been immobile for 38 years. He is an outcast, a pariah, a discarded soul in a harsh world and well acquainted with the bottom rung of the social ladder. Yet even in this broken man, Jesus encounters the twisted grip of sin, not only in his body, but in his heart as well.

“Do you want to be healed?” An odd question, perhaps even insensitive. Why would this man not want to be healed? Why is this even up for debate? But Jesus knows the heart of man. Jesus’ question carries with it a powerful reminder of our relationship to sin apart from God’s grace. We love sin, not merely as an action, but as an identity. Within the heart of this man were two warring desires clashing like cymbals. On the one hand, he desired physical healing, but on the other, he learned to identify with his brokenness. He began to love it. It became a part of him. He loved the identity of being broken more than the promise of being healed.

But is that what he really wants? For if he gains legs, he will be expected to walk. If he can walk, he will be expected to carry things. And if he is expected to carry things, he will be given responsibility. In one command, Jesus calls this man to die and to live. “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” Walk out into the world. Your excuses are gone. You have legs to serve. You have a life to give away. You have a cross to carry.

Do we want Christ to heal our marriages? Because we will have to learn to forgive. Do we want to be freed from self-pity? Because we will be called to serve others. Do we want financial provision? Because we will be called to be generous. Do we want to be near God? Because He will crush our idols. Do we want a faithful church? Because we will be told hard things. Do we really want to be healed? Because we will be called to die that we might live.

When we come to Christ, we give up our right to self-diagnoses. We give up our right to tell the surgeon where to operate. We forfeit our opinions and our preferences. God has promised to do a work in us that will be completed on the last day. He will leave no rock unturned. He will lift every

stain and cleanse every cell. He will wage war against our sin. He will go the distance, every step, all the way to the hill, to Calvary, to the cross. Why? "That those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised."

We want healing, but we don't want his word. We want healing, but we don't want to pray. We want healing, but we isolate ourselves from one another. And Jesus comes to us today to ask, "Do you want to be healed?" He will do it. He will do all of it. Do you want it?

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryan Zhang". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bryan" and last name "Zhang" clearly distinguishable.

Bryan Zhang
General Editor

Week 15

John 4:1-26 (Mission)

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice,

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying,

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Revelation 7:9–12 (ESV)

God's People Rejoice!

In Revelation 7 there is a "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages," worshipping God. They were singing, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!" Jesus must have had a scene like this in mind when He told the woman at the well that a day was coming when the place of worship would no longer be important. In fact, God is searching for people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth, but what does Jesus mean by worshipping in spirit and in truth? The answer lies in the context of Jesus's discussion with the woman.

His discussion with the woman at the well is difficult to understand without knowing at least a little bit about why the Samaritans and the Jews didn't get along, and why their temples of worship

were in different locations. The kingdom of Israel was divided by political upheaval under the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. The people in the northern kingdom, also known as the Samaritans, built a temple to Yahweh on Mount Gerizim. They argued that Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem, was the correct place for God's temple.

The disdain the Jews had for the Samaritans centered on how the two groups weathered their respective exiles. The Jews of the southern kingdom would point to Daniel as an illustration of their faithful loyalty to Yahweh through their exile. They were allowed to come back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, but the people of the northern kingdom were never officially allowed to return to Samaria en masse. They either never returned, or they were assimilated into the Mesopotamian culture that took over in the region after the Assyrians defeated them. Those who remained gave up a purely Jewish faith in lieu of a more syncretic religion that mixed the worship of Yahweh with many of the Mesopotamian gods of the peoples who settled in the region as part of the Assyrian conquest. So, by Jesus's time, those Jews in the southern kingdom were not particularly keen on their northern brothers and sisters, the Samaritans, who had given up singularly devoted worship of Yahweh during the exile.

When the woman brings up the fact that Jews tell Samaritans they're worshipping in the wrong place, she's emphasizing the racial animosity that still exists between the two groups. Jesus's response is to tell the woman to forget about race and geography. Neither of them matter. God is the creator of the whole Earth. Worshipping Him is not based on one's racial identity or proximity to a sacred site. It is based on spirit. John had previously said that Jesus baptized in spirit, and Jesus told Nicodemus the only way to be "born again" is to be born of the spirit. When the Spirit takes up residence in our soul, He drives us to worship the one true God. Worship is the act of declaring an object's worth. In worshipping God, we are declaring how much He is worth. Our words don't give Him worth, but when we acknowledge his worth and what He means to us, that is worship.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. What will it be like one day when peoples of all nationalities, races, and languages are together, praising God?

4. In what ways does worship in the Old Testament look like the ways we worship God today? In what ways is it different?

5. Take a few minutes and write down your thoughts on these questions.

Go

1. How would you explain to a non-Christian what Jesus means when he says, "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life?"

2. How can Jesus's interaction with the woman at the well help us interact with those who are affiliated with a religion but don't believe in God?

Discussion Questions

1. What is one of the most daring missions you have undertaken (it could be something small like changing a diaper for the first time, or something big like serving in the military)? How did you feel when you prepared for, executed, and accomplished it?
2. Jesus was on a mission in John 4. What was it? Share some of the language used in the passage that communicates this mission was important.
3. Describe the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman—what questions did Jesus ask, how did He listen, what was his aim?
4. When sharing the gospel, we must consider the cultural context. In this event, what cultural barriers did Jesus have to overcome? How did He contextualize the gospel message to connect with his hearer?
5. We are on a gospel mission as well. What lessons can we learn from Jesus about sharing the gospel? How have you been like and not been like Jesus when pursuing the mission of God?
6. Who are particular people God has called you to reach with the gospel? Spend some time as a group praying for their hearts to be receptive and for you to be wise and bold to share the good news.

Additional Reading

from *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* by Christopher J.H. Wright¹

We should finish on a positive note, however. If the primary angle of Old Testament ethics is theological (God-centered), then the best place to conclude is with the worship of Israel. For here, as in so much else in Israel, their deepest convictions are to be found, not in systematic doctrinal or ethical formulations, but in doxology, the language of worship. Three aspects are relevant at this point.

First, Israel's worship shows the same dynamic as Israel's ethics; namely, that it is based on God's prior action. God had already acted in blessing; therefore Israel was to celebrate that in worship and praise. We may be so used to this idea that we fail to see how distinctive it actually is. In Deuteronomy there is much exhortation to the people to come before the LORD to celebrate the great annual feasts, and to do so with joy and feasting. The reason is always assumed: the LORD your God has already blessed you. Worship is presented primarily as a response, not a negotiation. That is, worship for Israel was not something they did in order to placate or cajole God into blessing them. Worship is a grateful response to the fact that He already had. This feature of Israel's festivals and worship in general was

in marked contrast to non-Israelite worship, which was conducted as a way of winning a deity's favor so that the deity would bless the worshippers. In Israel's case, worship does not instigate divine blessing; at most, worship contributes to the preservation and perpetuation of blessing by fostering an ongoing recognition of dependence on Yahweh for those blessings.

Secondly, as mentioned above, Israel's worship was to be marked by a deepened commitment to ethical response at the horizontal level. It was to be socially inclusive (the poor, the family-less, and the immigrants are specifically to be included, Deut. 16:11, 14). And also it was to have humanitarian implications. Response to God's blessings not only calls for heartfelt joy and celebration but also 'spills over into the everyday lives of the worshippers . . . In particular, they should "celebrate" their blessing by imitating the way Yahweh provides for them in the way they

¹Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 45–46.

provide for those who depend on them.’

Thirdly, even coming into the presence of the LORD at all in worship was subject to ethical criteria. At any rate, this is how it is seen in the Psalms. Psalms 15 and 24 make it clear that the worship of the LORD (summed up as dwelling in his sanctuary, living on his holy hill, or standing in his holy place), is acceptable only from those who, in the everyday conduct of their lives, mirror the ethical standards of the God they presume to worship—those, in short, with clean hands and a pure heart. By using Psalm 15, Israelites ‘identify themselves as a group of loyal worshippers of the LORD God and declare their solidarity in embracing a conscientious and socially responsible standard of conduct . . . In this responsive affirmation the community of loyal Jews declare their own individual commitment to the way of life that shows a wholehearted respect for the torah of the LORD God.’ Unfortunately, the prophets saw that many Israelite worshippers fell far short of this ideal and castigated those who imagined that religious rights could compensate or even coexist with social wrongs. (e.g., Is. 1:10–17; Amos 5:22–24).

Resources Go to fouroakschurch.com/believe for links to the following resources:

Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

Michael D. Coogan, ed. et al. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Fully Revised 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Lane T. Dennis, ed. et al. *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*.

Brian Maiers, “Samaritans,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Y. Magen, *The Temple on Mount Gerizim*, Israel Antiquities Authority. http://www.antiquities.org.il/Article_eng.aspx?sec_id=36&subj_id=286&id=472.

Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

Week 16

John 4:1-26 (Worship)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3

The Delight of Christ in the Father's Work

Familiarity often breeds apathy, and such may be the case with the famous story of the woman at the well in John 4. Yet if we are patient with the text, we find riches abounding from this intimate portrait of Jesus Christ. Over and over, Christ claimed his work was to do the will of the Father. Here, in this passage, we see the Father's will unfolding in an ordinary conversation with an unlikely participant. The Lord presses into pain and brokenness when we would back away. We are far more concerned with our own thoughts and cares—our sins are not only the evil things we do, but also the good things we neglect.

Samaria was a place the Jews avoided because the Samaritans had become second-class citizens. After Solomon's reign, Israel dissolved into a long drawn-out civil war where the nation split into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. After centuries of idolatry, the northern kingdom was invaded and conquered by the Assyrian empire. The Samaritans were descendants of Assyrians and Jews intermarrying over generations. As a result, "full-blooded" Jews looked down on the Samaritans as impure and compromised. The Samaritans were to the Jews a reminder of rank idolatry and unfaithfulness to God's covenant.

In addition to these ethnic tensions, the Samaritan woman experienced both the second-class status of being a woman in a patriarchal society and carrying the burden of a sexual past. She was an outcast of the highest order, shunned by society, abused by men, and consumed with shame. And it was the Father's will to send to her the Messiah.

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will
worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to
worship him.*

John 4:23

These are remarkable words. In one sentence, Jesus tells this woman that a new age has dawned, an age where the worship that took place in the Temple will burst forth into the world. God's unfolding story is coming to its unexpected climax—and she is a part of it. The entire world rejected this woman, but the Father has been looking for her. She has been given access to water that fills up to eternal life. She has seen the Messiah.

We are to follow Christ into peoples and places that might make us uncomfortable. We pass wells and Samaritan women constantly in our busy lives. We often justify our apathy with religious and spiritual reasons, yet John 4 grabs us with its down-to-earth, sweat-and-dust portrait of truth working itself out in love. This is what it means to imitate Christ on the ground level, surrounded by the restless, the outcast, and the condemned. This is what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves. And lest we forget, John 4 not only reminds us of our mission, but also of our own lives. The woman at the well is not an abstract figure in an old book. She is us. We are her. And the same Christ who gave her water calls us to drink.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation.

4. In what ways does Jesus reflect the heart of God in this passage?

5. What does this passage reveal about shame and its relation to sin?

Go

1. Who are the Samaritan women in our society today?

2. What will it look like to become more intentional in evangelism?

Discussion Questions

1. When was a time you experienced true worship of God? Share the circumstances and how you connected with Him.
2. Jesus uses the imagery of water to teach about life and worship. What lessons can we learn from this analogy?
3. Jesus says that the Father is seeking true worshipers who worship in spirit and truth. What does this mean?
4. How would you characterize your worship currently? Be honest with the Lord and your group.
5. How do you want your worship of God to grow? What changes does He want you to make in your life? Be honest about the challenges that might require, but also the rewards that will come from deeper and truer worship, and ask the group to pray for you

Additional Reading

from *Evangelism: How The Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* by J. Mack Stiles¹

How easy it is to adopt the culture of the world and regard people based on sexist, racist, or other superficial views. We tend to forget that those around us are flesh-and-blood people with real hurts, dreams, struggles, and loves. But Paul speaks of how our vision of people changes when we know Christ. We don't see them through the eyes of the world, as we once did, but through the eyes of God.

When we first moved into our neighborhood in Lexington, Kentucky, we genuinely desired to reach out to people around us. But our first encounter about spiritual things with our neighbor Tom, who lived three doors down, was less than promising. One day he saw me working in the yard and dropped by to visit. He held a mixed drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other. We were chatting about this and that, mostly about how great his yard looked, when my six-year-old son bounded up. "Smoking is dangerous—you need to quit," he blurted out with a frown on his face and hands on his hips. "Pray to Jesus, and he'll help you to stop."

I stood speechless with a smile frozen on my face. "Oh, great!" I thought. "Where did that come from? They probably already think we're moralizing religious fanatics who sit around our table and talk about the evil neighbors." In David's defense, his aunt Linda, a new believer, had committed to stop smoking, and David had been praying for her. Nevertheless, I was mortified.

But Tom ground his cigarette, dropped to eye level with my son, and smiled as he put his hand on his shoulder. "You know what, David?" he said. "You're probably right, you're probably right."

What a gracious and wonderful response from Tom! It got me thinking about my view of him. I realized I needed to repent of thinking of Tom as just some guy down the street and see him for who he was. David's intro might have been rude, but it was better than my inaction, and it actually led to a relationship with Tom that I don't know would have happened if I hadn't started to see Tom as a real person.

When Paul says that we should see people through the eyes of Christ, he means for us to have a gospel view of people. So we see people as beautiful, valuable, creatures made in the image of God. Each and every one of us carries God's mark. That is why Christians believe all people have

¹ J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: How The Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*, Crossway, Copyright 2014.

dignity, worth, and value.

At the same time we recognize that every person is fallen, sinful, and separated from God. All people have twisted the image of God into horrible shapes. That is why Christians are not enamored with people either.

But in a culture of evangelism, most of all we're mindful of what people can become: new creations in Christ, renewed and restored by the transforming power of God (2 Cor. 5:17). I long to be with Christians who remember that people are image-bearers. I long to be with Christians who remember people's separation from God. Most of all, I long for a culture that remembers what people can become through the gospel.

Week 17

John 4:27-42

... looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Caught Up in the Father's Will

I have three young children who daily clamor for breakfast at dawn's early light, but on Christmas morning, even the aroma of homemade cinnamon rolls is ignored for the greater joy of opening gifts. So engrossed in the higher call of their awaiting presents, they abandon the need for the food that sustains them. In John 4 we see Jesus so caught up in talking to the woman at the well that He foregoes food and drink. His Father's will is his food, his source of strength and sustenance. He is entirely taken up in the work of his Father.

This is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:39

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

John 17:4

In this work of bringing the message of eternal life to this woman, Jesus found fulfillment so great that "for the joy that was set before Him" He neglected to eat. "For the joy" that would later lead Him to the cross. "For the joy" of finishing his Father's work—giving eternal life to the world.

Upon the arrival of his disciples to the scene, Jesus points to the realities of sowing and reaping a harvest to illustrate a spiritual truth. "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper may rejoice together." (v. 35-36) Highlighting the miracle of the Messianic age, He proclaims that a natural four-month disparity is not necessary between this sowing and reaping of souls. Neither is the deserving sower the only one to harvest—"I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.

Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” (v. 38) He invites his disciples into a spiritual work of sowing and harvesting on the same day, and He produces a crop in front of their very eyes in a matter of hours. Seed planted in the fertile soil of this open woman's heart spreads to an entire town and brings a white-robed harvest flocking to the master reaper, the Messiah. No wonder his work so consumed Him!

Jesus acts as only God can. “Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life....” (v. 36). He is ushering in the Messianic age, revealing that the kingdom of God has begun, and He is doing it through a social outcast among social outcasts. He reaps a people group in a single day. And He does it by being caught up in a joy that surpasses human hunger and satisfies his soul. The many years of fruitless plowing are over. Jesus is here and invites his followers to join Him as He reaps eternal life not only among the Jews but in the whole world.

[illegible]

Treasure

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Grow

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 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. What two actions did Jesus say were His “food?” Consider a time when you experienced this same kind of fulfillment in your own heart.

4. Describe a few of the steps in the process the woman went through as she encountered Jesus and responded to Him. How does this relate to your own story of salvation and the change that followed?

Go

1. What would it look like for you to trust more deeply these truths Jesus taught about the harvest and the joy of reaping? How can this motivate and encourage you in your relationships with lost friends or family?

2. How can you embrace a deepening conviction for sowing the Gospel among those who are ethnically, culturally, or socio-economically different than you are?

Discussion Questions

1. Share about a time when you witnessed firsthand or heard about a movement of God. What characterized that time and the people impacted?
2. Describe the movement of God among the Samaritans in this passage.
3. Jesus likens gospel ministry to sowing, reaping, and harvesting. What lessons can we learn from this analogy?
4. In Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus speaks of the harvest as well. What other lessons can we learn, particularly as it relates to the importance of God's sovereignty, prayer, and the need for more laborers?
5. How would you describe your current labor for the gospel? How might you grow in your harvest work?
6. Take some time to share how God is currently working (where the fields are white for harvest)—both locally and globally. Then, spend some time praying—thank God for His work, ask Him for help in how you can be more involved, and request that He raise up more laborers.

Additional Reading

From John MacArthur's *Messiah: The Living Water, Part 3: John 4:27-42*¹

The reason this entire story is here is so that the profession, the confession, and the declaration at the end of verse 42 can be made. This one is indeed the Savior of the world. It has already been declared that Jesus came to the world. John 1:9, there was “the true light which coming into the world enlightens every man.” John 1:29, the testimony of John the Baptist, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Chapter 3, verses 16 and 17: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

The declaration then of the writer, John, is that Jesus is the Savior of the world. That has come from John, the author; that has come from John the Baptist, the greatest prophet who had ever lived. And now it is a declaration made by a most surprising group of people, a group of folks from a village in Samaria called Sychar, they make this great declaration, obscure gaggle of Samaritan villagers are given the privilege of making this most monumental of all declarations that the Savior of the world has come and it is He—it is this One, Jesus Christ. This is a monumental moment in redemptive history, and they are the most unlikely collection of sinners. They are alienated from Israel. They are the product of inter-marriage between Jews and idolatrous Gentiles from centuries before, after the northern kingdom was taken into captivity.

Will He redeem Israel? Yes, but not only Israel. He is to be the Savior of the world. And so in this amazing story of the woman, we reach this marvelous, ultimate moment where these obscure Samaritan villagers make this proclamation that indeed this is the Savior of the world. This then becomes the message at the book of Acts, as the gospel is taken to the world, to the Gentile world. Peter goes to Cornelius and then Paul launches into the Mediterranean Gentile world to take the gospel and plant the church in the Gentile lands. The epistles written by the apostles and their associates declare that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

So this is a monumental declaration. Let me tell you the importance of it. You can put the emphasis in two ways on this statement, that the Savior will save people from throughout the world—from every tongue, tribe, nation, and people. That He is the Savior of the world in that He will redeem

¹MacArthur, John. "Messiah: The Living Water, Part 3." *Grace to You*. N.p., 05 May 2013. Web. 24 July 2017.

people from the world, from every part of the world. He's the propitiation for our sins, but not for ours only but the sins of the whole world. So there's the emphasis on the fact that He will save people from the whole world.

But there's another emphasis to be made and that is this: that for the whole world there is only one Savior. He will save many people from all parts of the world but there is only one Savior for the world. So when it says He's the Savior of the world, it means He's the only Savior the world has. "I am the way, the truth and the life," He said, John 14, "No man comes to the Father but by Me." The apostles preached that in Acts 4, "There's no salvation in any other name than the name of Jesus Christ." He is the only Savior in the world, which means that unless you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you will die lost in your sins. Jesus said it that way in John 8:24, "You will die in your sins because you believe not on Me. If you die in your sins, you end up at divine judgment and eternal hell." All religions of the world that do not point to salvation in Christ are Satanic—all of them.

Hymn: *Coming, Coming, Yes They Are* by J. Wakefield MacGill (1829-1902)

Coming, coming, yes they are,
Coming, coming from afar,

From the wild and scorching desert,
Africa's sons awaked from sleep;
Jesus' love has drawn and won them,
At His cross they bow and weep.

From the fields and crowded cities,
China gathers to His feet;
In His love Shem's gentle children,
Now have found a safe retreat.

From the Indus, and the Ganges,
Steady flows the living stream,
To love's ocean, to His bosom,
Calvary their wond'ring theme.

From the steppes of Russia dreary,

From Slavonia's scattered lands,
They are yielding soul and spirit
Into Jesus' loving hands.

From the frozen realms of midnight,
Over many a weary mile,
To exchange their soul's long winter
For the summer of His smile.

All to meet in plains of glory,
All to sing His praises sweet;
What a chorus, what a meeting,
With the family complete!

Resources Go to fouroakschurch.com/believe for links to the following resources:

From John MacArthur: *Messiah: The Living Water, Part 3: John 4:27-42*

John Piper: *The Food of Christ is to Give Eternal Life*

RC Sproul: Commentary St Andrew's Expositional Commentary John; *The Woman at the Well, Part 2*

Bible Study Fellowship: John, Lesson 6: *Jesus' Journey from Samaria to Galilee*

Week 18

John 4:43-54

And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

2 Kings 5:10-14

The Mire and Desire for Faith

Oftentimes our walk with Jesus can be characterized by ebbs and flows of faith rather than steadfast commitment. We experience certain seasons of life where our faith is strong regardless of circumstances, whereas other times we can barely muster any trust in God at all. Whether we deal with student loan debt, paying bills, or even life-threatening illnesses, we can trust that God will come through in powerful ways to comfort us and increase our desire for Him. We may be embarrassed to admit that we often default to saying things like, "God, did you really say you would be there?" or "God, how can I truly trust that you would do what you said you would do?" Our struggle with God's sovereignty in our lives is a part of walking with Him as fallen and weak human beings.

We need to call this what it is—unbelief. We find it easy to believe that God is big enough to secure our eternal salvation, but we struggle to trust that he can help us through each day, week, and

season of life that comes our way. We ought to be amazed at the faith of the official we find in John 4:43-54. He had no idea whether he would see or even speak to Jesus, let alone find healing for his son. He did not live in an age with quick transportation or high tech medical facilities—either Jesus would heal his son or his son would die. What is so amazing about this passage is the absolute authority of Jesus over the boy's illness. He simply speaks five words, "Go; your son will live" and at that very hour his son is healed. The official's job was to simply believe.

We find out that this miracle was a testimony to Jesus' deity. He is the incarnate Son of God and the one sent from the Father. In many ways, Jesus' ministry echoes Elisha's powerful healing ministry. In 2 Kings 5:10-14, Naaman does not want to listen to Elisha's command to wash in the Jordan to heal his disease. Yet his servants beg him to reconsider and trust that God's word is true. Naaman believes and he is healed according to Elisha's command. In the same way, Jesus, who was not only sent from the Father but who is the eternal Son himself, calls us to trust his word because it is true. Oftentimes we are like Naaman—too proud to obey. Naaman's pride was wounded because he was told to dip himself seven times in a filthy river. When God calls us to have faith in ways that are challenging, it's easy to say, "Certainly there is another way, Lord" or more damaging, "We will wait on the Lord to provide a different way."

The good news that comes from both the story of the official and the story of Naaman is that when we allow the Spirit to break through our self-imposed limits of faith, we have the opportunity to have our faith tested and grown so that it bears fruit in our lives.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation.

4. Why does Jesus say, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe?" (John 4:48)

5. What does this passage tell us about Jesus' mission?

Go

1. What are people skeptical about regarding miracle stories?

2. What would you say to someone who does not believe in the supernatural?

Discussion Questions

1. Share about a time when you or someone close to you was really sick. What were the circumstances? How did it impact your faith and the faith of those around you?
2. In this passage, an official asks for Jesus to come and heal his son. In response, Jesus confronts the official about his faith and makes a distinction between those seeking signs and those seeking the Savior. What is the difference? Why is this important?
3. The official once again asks for Jesus to heal his son and Jesus heals him. What does this show us about the character and worth of Jesus?
4. Even though Jesus would not go with the official to heal his son, the official believed Jesus at his word that his son would be healed. How does this reflect on the official's faith? How might this passage stir up our faith in Jesus?
5. Later, when it's confirmed that the son is healed at the exact time Jesus declared it, the official's faith is reaffirmed and his household believes. As parents and family members, how might this passage encourage us as we face hardships and bring them to the Lord?
6. While Jesus sometimes heals (as He does in this passage), He always wants us to seek Him more than the sign. How might this fact relate to you? Are there certain areas where you're seeking the sign more than the Savior? Confess this to the group and ask your group to pray for you in this area.

Additional Reading

From *An Hour with George Mueller: The Man of Faith to Whom God Gave Millions*¹

"You have always found the Lord faithful to His promise, Mr. Muller?"

"Always! He has never failed me! For nearly seventy years every need in connection with this work has been supplied. The orphans, from the first until now have numbered nine thousand five hundred; but they have never wanted a meal. Hundreds of times we have commenced the day without a penny; but our Heavenly Father has sent supplies the moment they were actually required. There never was a time when we had no wholesome meal. During all these years I have been enabled to trust in the living God alone. Seven million five hundred thousand dollars have been sent to me in answer to prayer. We have needed as much as two hundred thousand dollars in one year, and it has all come when needed. No man can ever say I asked him for a penny. We have no committees, no collectors, no voting, and no endowment. All has come in answer to believing prayer. God has many ways of moving the hearts of men to help us, all over the world. While I am praying, He speaks to one and another on this continent and on that to send us help. Only the other evening, while I was preaching, a gentleman wrote a check for a large amount and handed it to me when the service was over."

"I have read your life, Mr. Muller, and noted how greatly your faith has been tried at times. Is it so now?"

"My faith is tried, as much as ever, and my difficulties are greater than ever. Besides our financial responsibilities, suitable helpers have to be found constantly, and suitable places provided for hundreds of orphans constantly leaving the homes. Then often our funds run very low; only the other week we had come nearly to the end of our supplies. I called my beloved helpers together, and said to them, 'Pray, brethren, pray!' Immediately five hundred dollars was sent us, then a thousand, and in a few days seven thousand five hundred came in. But we have always to be praying, always believing. Oh, it is good to trust in the living God, for He hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee' (Heb. 13:5). Expect great things from God, and great things you will have. There is no limit to what He is able to do. Praises for ever to His glorious name! Praise Him for everything! I have praised Him many times when He sent me ten cents, and I have praised Him when He has sent me sixty thousand dollars."

¹Parsons, Charles R. "An Hour With George Müller - Books on Google Play." *Google*. Ed. A. Sims. Google, 29 Aug. 2014. Web.

Week 19

John 5:1-18

"I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:6-8

Jesus: Healer of Man and of the Sabbath

We often think of the questions that we might ask our Savior. "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" Or, "How long, oh Lord?" But one of the beautiful things we find in the Gospels are questions which Jesus asks us. Because we know that He knows all things, we do well to pay attention when He asks a question, because He is doing so not to gain knowledge, but to teach us something about Himself.

We see that Jesus knows everything about this paralytic, already. Verse 6 tells us Jesus "knew that he had already been there a long time." This is the same kind of "knowing," as when Jesus knew that the Samaritan woman had many husbands. It is a divine knowing.

Yet, in spite of knowing the needs of this disabled man, Jesus still asks the question, "Do you want to be healed?" Pause and consider how ridiculous this question seems on the surface. Of course he wants to be healed! He's been suffering for 38 years! But Jesus asks anyway. He is not just asking, but teaching.

Jesus knows that there is a need for healing that goes deeper than mere physical pain. It goes down to the broken nature of the soul. Not just the soul of this paralytic, but the souls of the Pharisees as well, the ones who would prevent Jesus from offering healing because of their carefully established rules and systems for the Sabbath.

Jesus wants to heal this man so that he can walk. But more than that, Jesus wants to heal him so that he will walk with God. It's not just "take up your bed, and walk," but "sin no more." Jesus comes to heal the broken bond between the Father and his people.

Interestingly enough, it is exactly this healing that will transform the Sabbath. No more is the day of rest about checking boxes and rote obedience as the Pharisees taught it. Now it is about a day to rest in and out of the goodness of a loving, saving God. A reminder that He cares for our every need, even when we lay down our work and trust Him to work for us.

The Sabbath itself brings a type of healing, in that we give our bodies and minds the space to heal, as God intended us to do from the beginning. The Sabbath was not first a commandment given to Moses, but an established good of creation. A day to rest. A day to heal.

Jesus asks all of us the question He asked the paralytic. "Do you want to be healed?" He ultimately offers Himself to us as the answer to the question, for "by his stripes we are healed."

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
 - Slowly think through each word of the verse.
 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation.

4. Where do you desire healing in your life? If Jesus were to ask you, "Do you want to be healed?", how would you answer Him?

5. Do you struggle to take a day of rest and restoration? Is your Sabbath day about leisure or spiritual renewal? What are some ways you could change your Sabbath practices?

Go

1. In a southern, church-going culture, how might the difference between Jesus' Sabbath and the Pharisee's Sabbath enable you to talk about true belief with a non-believer?

2. Where can you offer physical healing (i.e., caring for the poor and needy), and thus make an opportunity to introduce spiritual healing?

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been in a situation where things were so desperate that you lost hope? Share your story.
2. In this passage, there was a multitude of invalids in desperate need of help who had possibly lost hope. How do you think they were feeling? Why do you think they were at the pool of Bethesda?
3. Jesus pursues a particular man who had been sick for 38 years and heals him. What does this show us about Jesus' knowledge (He knew the man had been there a long time), compassion, and power? How might this encourage us?
4. In this passage, the legalism of the Pharisees keeps them blinded to the grace and power of Jesus. How does this take place?
5. How might you be blind to certain things God is doing because of your legalism or your focus on how God is not working according to your plans?
6. Jesus tells us that He and his Father are working. How might this encourage us and give us hope in the midst of what we're facing?

Additional Reading

from *The Message of the Cross* by Bruce Milne¹

What is particularly notable about the man is that his need was a long-standing one. He had been paralyzed, or generally unable to walk, for no less than thirty-eight years. While we need not think of him as having necessarily spent the entire period in that one spot, the picture is nonetheless a sobering one. Here we confront another category of problem, the long, lingering need which reaches back across many years and may even cast a malignant shadow over the entire landscape of our past. The reality of such need is more regularly identified today through the insights of psychology and analysis in relation to personality traits. In a quite basic sense we all suffer to some degree from the hurts and errors of yesterday. In some people's experience, however, the shadow is particularly dark and overwhelming. Like this man by the pool they lie emotionally and relationally paralyzed. From this perspective, Jesus' question, Do you want to get well? is a penetrating one. 'An eastern beggar often loses a good living by being cured' (Finlay). Cure has its implications, particularly when the need is so long-standing that a whole way of life has been built up around it. Jesus' question needs to be faced by all who would be delivered. Are we ready for the implications, including possibly repenting of sin and expressing a new loyalty to Christ?

The man's reply to Jesus (v. 7) is not particularly encouraging, being in essence a complaint about lacking someone to get him into the pool at the requisite moment. He is still locked up inside his own need and thinking of a 'cure' by the popular means. Nonetheless Jesus extends his healing power to this unattractive character - Get up!...and walk (v. 8). The verb for get up (egeire) will be used again in the following dialogue for the life-bringing effect of Jesus' call at the last day (v. 28-29); the miracle exemplifies it. But in relation to the nature of the need identified above, the message is clear and gloriously relevant. Jesus can relate to long-standing need.

Jesus' command to take his bed home in witness to the reality of his cure brings conflict with the authorities. The day of the healing was the Sabbath and carrying one's bed was a breach of the law of Sabbath observance. Strictly, there was no contravention of the written commandment (cf. Ex. 20:8-11), which was generally interpreted as a prohibition of performing one's daily occupation on the Sabbath. Since the man was not a furniture remover, he could not be accused of 'working' in that sense.

¹Milne, Bruce. (1993). *The Message of John*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, pp. 95-96.

The oral traditions, however, which the Pharisees cherished, amplified the written law into an elaborate jurisprudence which significantly extended its range. With respect to the Sabbath, thirty-nine categories of work were identified which breached the Sabbath law. These included carrying anything, except in cases of compassion... In practice the letter of the law had come to dominate its spirit. Outward conformity replaced heart commitment. They lost sight of the ultimate purpose of the law, its modeling a life which pleased God and witnessed his gracious choice of Israel. The law became an end in itself. It is notable that when the Jews confront the man (v. 10), they do not show any interest in the wonder of his recovery with all its implications for his future lifestyle. Nor do they appear in the least open to the significance of his healing as a pointer to who Jesus was.

The man's personal limitations are reflected in his unawareness of who has healed him. In his ignorance he represents the great mass of our race who do not acknowledge or worship God and yet daily receive his benefits of health and strength, the providential ordering of the universe, the protection afforded by the 'order' of human society, as well as the daily restraining of the full potential of evil in the world and its full effects of the fall in personal life, to say nothing of the patience with which God delays the day of his just judgements (2 Pet. 3:1f.). When Jesus meets the man again, possibly at some time removed from the healing, he warns him of his sin, lest he face a worse fate. This something worse is most probably a reference to the coming last judgment (cf. Lk. 12:4f.; 13:1-5). The link between sickness and sin was clearly established in the popular mind, as it commonly is today. Jesus confronts it again in chapter 9, which records his encounter with the man blind from birth, and where he disavows any universal law of cause and effect. Sickness in individual cases is not invariably linked to sin, though it may be the cause of it, and in this case it was.

Whether the man retained any degree of gratitude to Jesus is impossible to assess. He certainly wastes no time in informing the authorities of the identity of his mysterious benefactor, the instigator of his Sabbath breaking. The man does not appear in a good light in this story, either before or after his healing, a timely reminder that physical healing in itself is no guarantee of spiritual healing. Being freed from our affliction may not lead to a godlier or better life. It is a further indicator that God's gifts are finally grace gifts, i.e., they are shared with the unworthy. This man does nothing to 'earn' his cure, but God does not require such, particularly in the dispensing of his supreme gift of eternal life. Precisely this is the glory of his gift; it is for sinners, not saints; it is for us all.

Week 20

John 5:19-29

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you." **Luke 10:17-19**

The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:8

What is the Incarnation?

After Jesus healed the paralytic, some Jewish leaders objected that, because healing someone is a kind of "work" and working was prohibited on the Sabbath, Jesus had violated the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8). Jesus' response to their accusation made them so appalled and furious that they "were seeking all the more to kill him" (v.18) because He was making himself equal with God.

Even though the implications of what Jesus said made the Jews want to kill Him, Mormons, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses often quote this passage as evidence that Jesus is not God. For example, Jesus said that He can do "nothing of his own accord," and that he only does "what he sees the Father doing" (v.19), He encouraged his listeners to believe in "him who sent me" (v.24), and He acknowledged that his authority (v.27), right to judge (v.22), and life (v.26) have all been given to Him by the Father. How, then, do we understand these passages in light of Jesus' deity?

We need to remember what the doctrine of the Incarnation actually teaches. Philippians 2:5-8 teaches us that the Son of God, who is the second person of the Trinity, eternally God from all ages, and co-equal with the Father, willingly humbled himself by taking on flesh. As we read in John 1:14, “The Word [the Son of God] became flesh and dwelt among us.” Part of this becoming flesh—this In-carnation—is the submission and humbling of the Son to the Father. In becoming man, the Son of God really did become like us in all aspects except in living sinfully. That includes becoming like us in our being less than God. Christian thinkers throughout the centuries have referred to this as the doctrine of Subordination. Just as we are subordinate to God the Father, the Son of God became subordinate to the Father when He became one of us.

Does this undermine Jesus’ deity? Certainly not! The Bible is clear as daylight on the fact that Jesus is God. Even in this passage Jesus says, “the Son gives life to whom he will” (John 5:21), that all will honor the Son “just as they honor the Father” (v.23), and that He is the “Son of God” through whose mere words the dead will be made alive (v.25)!

This is the beauty of the Incarnation. The Son of God did not merely inhabit a human husk in the same way that a hand inhabits a puppet, but in some mysterious way He literally became a man in possession of a complete human nature, yet without losing his divine nature. Jesus—the God-man—united his divine nature to a human nature in order to save us. This is what we celebrate, cherish, and give our lives to. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is Lord.

This is why we sing:

How deep the Father’s love for us

How vast beyond all measure

That He should give His only Son

To make a wretch His treasure.

No truth exists that is more profound, compelling, or worthy of our lives and deaths, that God’s great love for us saw fit the death of heaven’s beloved Son for our sake.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.
2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:
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 - Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
 - How would you write the verse in your own words?
 - Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation.

4. Did Jesus really break the fourth commandment by healing the paralytic on the Sabbath?

5. What does this text tell us about the Trinity and Jesus' relationship to the Father, in particular?

Go

4. The Gospels are full of passages that highlight Jesus' humanity and subordination to the Father. How would you respond to someone who thinks that Jesus' weeping or praying shows that He cannot be God?

4. How can the truth of the Incarnation provide us with resources to evangelize, console, and provide power and encouragement as we try to live faithfully?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you've been united in mind and heart with someone or a group of people. What were the circumstances and how did that feel?
2. In this passage, Jesus tells us about his relationship with His Father. What are some things that stick out to you about this relationship?
3. Specifically, Jesus says that the Father loves the Son. How is this truth central to our faith as Christians?
4. Jesus claims to be one with his Father in the work of resurrection and judgment. Why is this significant (see v. 18)? Is it possible to be saved but not believe in the divinity of Jesus?
5. Jesus states there will be a resurrection and judgment of all people. How might this fact impact your present?

Additional Reading

from *Letters of C.S. Lewis*¹

Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, the true Sun of Justice, so shone upon the earth as not to leave the heavens, remaining there eternally, but coming here for a time; there determining the everlasting day, here enduring the day of humanity; there living perpetually without the passage of time, here dying in time without the inroads of sin; there remaining in life without end, here freeing our life from the destruction of death. There He enkindles the minds of angels with the fiery splendor of His majesty; here He determines the lives and characters of men. There light is received which no one extinguishes by sin; here Man is born who clearly defines all sin. There God is with God; here He is God and Man. There He is Light of Light; here, the Light which enlightens every man. There by a word He spreads out the heavens; here He shows a way of reaching the heavens. There with His Father He confirmed the mystery of His nativity; here He formed His human members in His Mother. There sitting at the right hand of the Father, here lying in a manger; there feeding the angels, here on earth a hungry Child; there unfailing Bread with perfect powers, here, along with speechless children, needing the nourishment of milk; there doing good, here suffering evil; there never dying, here rising after death and bestowing eternal life on mortals. God became man so that man might become God. The Lord took the form of a servant so that man might be turned to God. The Founder and Inhabitant of heaven dwelt upon earth so that man might rise from earth to heaven.

The Word of the Father, by whom all time was created, was made flesh and was born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one day [set aside] for His human birth. In the bosom of His Father, He existed before all the cycles of ages; born of an earthly Mother, He entered upon the course of the years on this day. The Maker of man became Man that He, Ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast; that He, the Bread, might be hungry; that He, the Fountain, might thirst; that He, the Light, might sleep; that He, the Way, might be wearied by the journey; that He, the Truth, might be accused by false witnesses; that He, the Judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge; that He, Justice, might be condemned by the unjust; that He, Discipline, might be scourged with whips; that He, the Vine, might be crowned with thorns; that He, the Foundation, might be suspended upon a cross; that Courage might be weakened; that Security might be wounded; that Life might die. To

¹Lewis, C. S., W. H. Lewis, and Walter Hooper. *Letters of C.S. Lewis*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993. Print.

endure these and similar indignities for us, to free us, unworthy creatures, He who existed as the Son of God before all ages, without a beginning, condescended to become the Son of Man in these recent years. He did this although He who submitted to such great evils for our sake had done no evil and although we, who were the recipients of so much good at His hands, had done nothing to merit these benefits. Begotten by the Father, He was not made by the Father; He was made Man in the Mother whom He Himself had made, so that He might exist here for a while, sprung from her who could never and nowhere have existed except through His power.

-Augustine of Hippo. Christmas Homilies. Number 191

God could, had He pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves, the Stoic sort who lets no sigh escape him. Of His great humility He chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane. Otherwise we should have missed the great lesson that it is by his will alone that a man is good or bad, and that feelings are not, in themselves, of any im-portance. We should also have missed the all-important help of knowing that He has faced all that the weakest of us face, has shared not only the strength of our nature but every weakness of it except sin. If He had been incarnate in a man of immense natural courage, that would have been for many of us almost the same as His not being incarnate at all.

Resources Go to fouroakschurch.com for links to the following resources:

Athanasius of Alexandria. *On the Incarnation of the Word*.

David Mathis. *What Is the Incarnation?* Desiring God Incarnation Series.

Thomas Torrance. *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: The Auburn Lectures* 1938/39.

Week 21

John 5:30-47

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 37:1-6

Missing the Point

We are told in John 20 that the point of John's gospel is belief, but throughout his account of Jesus' life and ministry, we find the Lord encountering lots of unbelief. What makes John 5:30-47 so interesting is not the presence of unbelief, but the source. The people who are skeptical of Jesus are not rabid atheists or secular humanists, but conservative and religious Pharisees. In this account, Jesus testifies to his equality with the Father and identity as the Messiah; two facts the Pharisees aren't too happy about. Jesus takes the position of a man on trial as he brings three witnesses to the stage—John the Baptist, his works, and the Father's own testimony. Yet despite all this, the Pharisees continue in their unbelief.

Unbelief is not a matter of evidence. Evidence can help, but if you've ever had a frustrating conversation with a non-believer you know that all the evidence in the world cannot overcome

unbelief. Unbelief, simply put, is spiritual blindness. A man who is physically blind knows that he cannot see, but a man who is spiritually blind thinks he can see, but can't. Spiritual blindness is deadly, and it is the reason people can "search the Scriptures" thinking they lead to eternal life. It is not our knowledge of the Bible that saves us, but the person the Bible testifies to—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When we read the Bible, we are looking through it, not at it, so that we see Jesus.

Jesus knows the human heart. He knows that at the heart of unbelief is not an intellectual dissatisfaction, but a love for human praise and the delusion of self-righteousness. When we are self-righteous, we do not see the beauty of Jesus. When we seek the praise of others, we find no need to seek the praise of God. Spiritual blindness prevents us from seeing what is really wrong with our own hearts and embracing the only Savior who can help. We need the Spirit himself to open up our hearts and show us what is wrong so that we come to Jesus. Jesus did not expect sinless perfection, but that those who were burdened by their sin and honest about their need for a Savior would come to him to receive eternal life.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

2. Meditate on that verse for 10-15 minutes by reading through it slowly and reflecting on its meaning and application. Here are a few ways to meditate:

- Slowly think through each word of the verse.
- Ask questions of the verse: Who is speaking? What is he or she trying to say? What truth is being revealed?
- How would you write the verse in your own words?
- Turn the verse into a prayer.

3. Record any observations or applications you gained from your meditation:

4. In what ways does Moses write about Jesus?

5. What does it mean to have the "word abiding in you?"

Go

1. How would you explain self-righteousness to a non-believer?

2. In what ways do you see unbelief in our culture today? In our churches?

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a self-centered person you know. Without getting into all the specifics, share certain aspects of their character and how those show their self-centeredness.
2. Think of a God-centered person you know. Without getting into all the specifics, share certain aspects of their character and how those show their God-centeredness.
3. In this passage, Jesus contrasts his character with that of the Pharisees. How is Jesus' God-centeredness revealed? How might we both exalt and emulate his character?
4. How is the self-centeredness of the Pharisees revealed in this passage? How does their self-centeredness keep them from seeing God?
5. To what extent are you like the Pharisees? How can you seek to repent and trust in Jesus? Ask your group to pray for you.

Additional Reading

from *John* by R. C. Sproul¹

Several years ago, I received an invitation to lecture at a college on the existence of God. The invitation came from a campus group called the Atheist Club. I went to Romans 1 and talked about how God has manifestly, clearly, and without ambiguity revealed Himself to every creature, and that this knowledge gets through to every person; as much as we fight and kick against it, we can't extinguish that light. And so we are left, according to the apostle, without excuse. Our problem is not that we don't know that God exists. Our problem is that we refuse to acknowledge the God whom we know to be true. Jesus continued, "I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (vv. 41-43). Someone once asked me, "How can you get a person who is famous and busy to make time in his schedule to come and speak for an event?" I said: "Give him an honor. Promise him an honorary degree, a great big monument, or a plaque, and invite him to come for the presentation."

Human beings love to be honored, and Jesus understood this. But Jesus refused to seek honor from men. Compared with every other human being who has ever lived or ever will live, Jesus is most deserving of honor. Yet the Jewish leaders would not give Him that honor. Finally Jesus said: "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (John 5:45-46). This is an extremely controversial text. Proponents of higher critical theories about the Bible deny that Moses wrote anything. They say that the Pentateuch was compiled over many centuries by various editors and redactors, and that Moses had nothing to do with writing it. That view, of course, provoked a crisis in biblical scholarship, not only with the credibility of Moses but with the credibility of Jesus. It requires some amazing linguistic gymnastics to get around this text, where our Lord said Moses wrote about Him. The critics have to say that Jesus was wrong in what He taught about earthly things, for He couldn't possibly have known that Moses didn't write the Pentateuch. So we have a whole generation of scholars who don't believe Jesus concerning earthly things but claim to believe Him concerning heavenly things, the very thing that Jesus Himself announced as foolishness. So Jesus here affirmed the authorship of the Pentateuch by the hand of Moses, and He turned that on His critics. He said: "You call yourselves the disciples of

¹R. C. Sproul, *John* (St. Andrew's Expository Commentary) (Kindle Location 1305-1334). Kindle Edition.

Moses. You trust in the teaching of Moses. You exalt the Torah. But you don't really believe it because Moses was writing about Me. Don't you understand that when he described the tabernacle, he was describing Me? Don't you understand that when Moses said in Deuteronomy that there would come another Prophet like him, he was referring to Me? If you don't believe Moses' teachings, how are you going to believe Mine?"

So when the question of Jesus' identity came up, four witnesses came forth: John the Baptist, the miracles of Jesus, the audible testimony of the Father, and the testimony of sacred Scripture through the authorship of Moses. If that's not enough to convince people, what is?

What's the end of this? I don't think the last of this is heard until we go to the book of Acts, to the account of Paul's address to the philosophers at Mars Hill in Athens. Paul declared, "Truly, these tinges of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Paul cited a change in historical circumstances. He said: "There was a time when God was forbearing with your pagan religion and with your ignorance. God was merciful. He was patient. He put up with this for a long time. But now He commands you to repent." How different Paul's approach was from modern techniques of evangelism. The one essential of modern evangelism is the invitation. But the apostle did not say, "But now God invites all men to repent." Why? Because you can decline an invitation with impunity, but you cannot refuse God's command to repent with impunity. Paul went on to say that God commands repentance "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Paul brought up the resurrection of Christ. Do we want more testimony or evidence than that? We're not going to get it. God said: "I've made it clear to the whole world that this is My only begotten Son, and the days of patience and forbearance are over. Now I command you all to come to Him because I'm going to judge the whole world through Him, and I have already proven Him to be the judge by raising Him from the dead." The resurrection was the final witness to Jesus' identity.

We would like to thanks our pastors and elders for their leadership,
and the following people who contributed to the content and production of this booklet:

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