

A Daily Devotional on the Gospel of John – Part 2

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That You May Believe

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

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." – John 11:1-16 ESV

Chapter 11 marks a major point of transition in John's gospel account. Jesus has left Jerusalem and returned to the area near the Jordan where His ministry began. His face-to-face confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders have come to an end, but not their quest to see Him put to death. And with the opening lines of chapter 11, it is clear that death will become the primary theme of the second half of the book.

Jesus has already broached the topic of death before, insisting that He was the key to victory over death and the source of eternal life.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from **death to life**."* – John 5:24 ESV

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, **he will never see death**."* – John 8:54 ESV

Back in chapter four, John recorded the occasion when Jesus healed the official's son who had been "at the point of death" (John 4:47 ESV). The young man had been restored to health – in an instant and from a distance. Whatever his illness had been, it had come close to taking the young man's life. But at the father's impassioned plea for help, Jesus had interceded and provided an instantaneous and full recovery. That story is important to consider when reading the details of all that takes place in chapter 11.

John records that Jesus received a report that His good friend, Lazarus, was sick. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, had sent word to Jesus informing them of their brother's illness. Unlike the official from Capernaum, Mary and Martha make no mention of the severity of their brother's condition. Their message to Jesus, while urgent, does not suggest that their brother was near death. Even Jesus seems unconcerned, suggesting that Lazarus' condition is not life-threatening.

"This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." – John 11:4 ESV

But there is far more to this statement than Jesus' disciples understood. Perhaps they recognized something familiar in Jesus' words. On an earlier occasion, while still in Jerusalem, they had come across a blind man and had asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2 ESV). And Jesus had responded, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3 ESV).

Here we have Jesus making a similar statement regarding the illness of Lazarus. Once again, He seems to be indicating that there is a sovereign plan unfolding right before their eyes. A divinely ordained encounter was about to take place that would reveal the glory of the Son of God like never before. While giving the gift of sight to the beggar who had been born blind had proven that Jesus was doing the works of His Father, something even more glorious was about to take place.

The next verses paint a rather strange image of Jesus. John reveals that Jesus had a great love for Lazarus and his two sisters. And yet, rather than drop everything and head to their home in Bethany, Jesus chose to delay His departure for two days. This was clearly a conscious decision on His part – a premeditated plan designed to allow the events to unfold "so that the Son may be glorified."

After the two-day delay, Jesus informed His disciples that it was time to go. But they resisted, questioning the wisdom of making the trip to Bethany, which was just two miles east of Jerusalem. With respect and a bit of poorly veiled incredulity, they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (John 11:8 ESV). Jesus' decision to return to the vicinity of Jerusalem so soon after His less-than-pleasant run-in with the religious leaders made no sense to them. It was risky at best and potentially deadly at worst.

But Jesus, in His inimitable way, answered their question with a cryptic response that must have left them staring at one another in confusion.

"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." – John 11:9-10 ESV

Jesus' disciples were clearly concerned for His safety (as well as their own). They knew that the Jewish religious leaders were out to kill Him, and they were simply trying to protect Him. But Jesus assured them that as long as He was acting in accordance with His Father's will (walking in the light of the day), He would be perfectly safe. And as long as they remained in step with Him, they would not stumble.

Jesus' words are in keeping with what He said concerning the man who had been blind since birth.

"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." – John 9:4-5 ESV

He had repeatedly told His disciples that He was the light of the world and that as long as they walked with Him, they would be safe.

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12 ESV

Jesus knew that their fear of the religious leaders was justifiable. But He also knew that His fate was securely in the hands of His Heavenly Father. The time was quickly coming when the light of the world would be extinguished, but until then, He had work to do. And the illness of Lazarus was part of God's divine plan that would jump-start the final days of Jesus' ministry and life.

The disciples were works in process. Their understanding of Jesus was incomplete and not always accurate. In their hearts, they truly believed Him to be the Messiah, but their comprehension of what that meant was clouded by their somewhat selfish preconceptions. They were expecting Jesus to be a conquering hero, a warrior-king like David had been, who would deliver the nation of Israel from the oppression of Rome and restore God's people to power and prominence. But Jesus was slowly exposing their misconceptions and preparing them to embrace the true purpose behind His mission and their calling.

Jesus, knowing exactly how His disciples would understand His words, informed them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him" (John 11:11 ESV). And they didn't disappoint Him. They responded, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover" (John 11:12 ESV). In their minds, there was no longer any reason to risk a trip to Bethany. If Lazarus was sleeping soundly, that was good sign that he was on his way to a full recovery. But, as usual, Jesus was saying far more than they realized, and John points out the gap between Jesus' meaning and the disciples' understanding.

Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.
– John 11:13 ESV

But Jesus, refusing to leave them in the dark, explained exactly what He meant.

“Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” – John 11:14-15 ESV

It is so easy to read this statement and miss the impact it must have had on Jesus’ disciples. We know how the story ends, but they did not. In their minds, Jesus’ words must have sounded callous and confusing. How in the world could He be expressing joy at the news that His friend has died? Now, rather than going to Bethany to witness the healing of a sick man, they would be attending a funeral. And one that could have easily been prevented.

But Jesus informs them that there was a purpose behind His delay and Lazarus’ death: Their belief. Jesus was preparing them for what was to come. This entire scenario was intended as a precursor for an even more significant event that would soon be taking place. What they were about to witness would establish Jesus as the Son of God in a way that would have been unimaginable and impossible.

Yet, after informing the disciples that Lazarus had died, Jesus told them, “let us go to him” (John 11:15 ESV). And Thomas, aiming his words at his fellow disciples, responded with what appears to be pessimism and sarcasm: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16 ESV). There are those who believe Thomas was expressing his expectation that Jesus was headed to His own death at the hands of the religious leaders and was declaring his willingness to die alongside Him. But it seems much more likely that Thomas was expressing his belief that, if they followed Jesus’ plan, they would all end up dead, just like Lazarus. In other words, in Thomas’ mind, this trip was a suicide mission. But his fears were unjustified because the light of the world was still shining, and as long as they walked in the light, they would remain safe and be witnesses to the glory of God.

The Resurrection and the Life

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

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

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. – John 11:17-29 ESV

Jesus delayed. Lazarus died.

Those two statements sum up the first 16 verses of this chapter. After having received the news that His good friend Lazarus was ill, Jesus had chosen to delay His departure for two days. When He had finally decided to leave Bethany beyond the Jordan for Bethany near Jerusalem, it took another whole day to make the journey. So, by the time Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days.

This entire scene is intended to create an emotional disconnect in the mind of the reader. The mental picture John paints is meant to elicit feelings of pity, confusion, and even frustration. And these emotions are given voice by the two sisters who had sent word to Jesus about their brother's desperate condition. Martha was the first to become aware of Jesus' arrival, and she rushed out to meet Him, immediately expressing to Him her despair.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." – John 11:21 ESV

Martha's if-then statement reveals her firm belief that had Jesus arrived sooner, He could have healed her brother. But He was too late. There are some who read a hint of anger in her words and assume that she was berating Jesus for His late arrival. While that reaction would be understandable considering the circumstances, it seems unlikely based on the rest of Martha's statement to Jesus.

"But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." – John 11:21
ESV

She is not angry, and she has not lost faith in Jesus. In spite of what has happened, she still believes that Jesus has the ear of His Heavenly Father and is able to ask and receive whatever He requests. With this statement, Martha was not suggesting that Jesus could ask God to raise her brother from the dead. She was simply expressing her continued belief in Jesus despite her devastating disappointment. That Martha harbored no expectations of resurrection is made evident when Jesus later commanded the stone to be moved from the tomb. Martha immediately responded, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days” (John 11:39 ESV). Her brother’s resuscitation was the last thing Martha expected.

This scene is filled with contradictions and contrasts. Mary and Martha are accompanied by mourners and friends who have gathered to console them. There is an overwhelming sense of loss and sadness because of the death of Lazarus. But for the reader, there should be a sense of eager expectation because the Light of the world has just arrived on the scene. The words that Jesus had earlier shared with His disciples take on a special significance at this point in the story.

“This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” – John 11:4 ESV

But the 12 men who had accompanied Jesus to Bethany would have wrestled with the meaning behind those words. They had arrived, fully expecting to find Lazarus ill, but not dead. So, they must have been shocked to hear the devastating news: Lazarus was dead. How would God receive glory now? How did Jesus intend to be glorified through the death of His friend? It all made no sense. The entire situation seemed hopeless and maddeningly pointless.

Yet the reader has been provided with 10 chapters of information that should act as a corrective filter through which to view this unfolding scene. John had opened his gospel with the declaration that Jesus, the Word of God, had taken part in the creation of all things.

“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” – John 1:3-4 ESV

He was the original giver of life. And His incarnation had not diminished His capacity to bestow life. In fact, Jesus had told Nicodemus that He had come to earth so that He might provide eternal life.

*“...whoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life**.” – John 3:16 ESV*

*“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has **eternal life**...” – John 3:35-36 ESV*

Yes, Lazarus had died. But in spite of what Martha, Mary, their friends, and the disciples of Jesus believed, Lazarus’ death was not the **end** of the story. Yet when Jesus informed Martha, “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23 ESV), the full import of His words escaped her. From

her limited perspective, Lazarus' death had been final. Yet, she believed that she would one day see him again at the final resurrection. Her belief in the future bodily resurrection of the dead was based on several Old Testament passages.

*Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead. – Isaiah 26:19 ESV*

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. – Daniel 12:2 ESV

That Martha was thinking of this future form of resurrection is made clear by her response to Jesus.

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." – John 11:24 ESV

And rather than refute her belief in that future reality, Jesus provides her with additional information intended to clarify the nature of that future resurrection.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." – John 11:25-26 ESV

While Martha's mind was focused on a future event, Jesus was redirecting her attention to a present reality: Him. The very one who *was* life and had the power to *give* life was standing right in front of her. And He declared Himself to *be* the resurrection and the life. There was no present life or future resurrection apart from Him. His power had not been impacted by the death of Lazarus. And while physical death is an inevitable and unavoidable reality for every human being, it is not the end. The death of Lazarus was not final. It was not the end of the story. And Jesus makes it perfectly clear that, though Lazarus had died, he would live again. It was just as Jesus had told the religious leaders.

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will." – John 5:29 ESV

But the key to resurrection and eternal life was belief. Jesus drove home that point when He said, "everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:26 ESV). And when Jesus asked Martha whether she believed, she responded, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (John 11:27 ESV).

Martha responded affirmatively. She verbally confessed her belief that He was the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. He was the fulfillment of all the prophets had promised. But it seems clear that Martha had not fully comprehended all that Jesus had said to her. His declaration that He was the resurrection and the life had gone over her head. And the way she

describes Jesus to her sister seems to verify that little had changed regarding her assessment of His identity. John describes Martha as running to find Mary and telling her, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you” (John 11:28 ESV).

Martha says nothing about Jesus being the resurrection and the life. There is no hint in her words that she anticipated something supernatural was about to happen. She simply informed her sister that “the Teacher” had arrived.

But little did Martha know that Jesus was about to back up His words with action. He was going to put on a never-before-seen display of power that would not only defy their limited expectations but the laws of nature. The Teacher was about to give them a lesson they would never forget.

Free Indeed

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

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." – John 11:30-44 ESV

After confessing that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (John 11:27 ESV), Martha ran to tell her sister Mary that He had come to Bethany. And Mary, filled with emotion, ran to meet Him and fell to her knees in front of Him. Likely through tears, Mary greeted Jesus with the same words that her sister had used.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." – John 11:32 ESV

And like her sister, Mary was not expressing anger at Jesus for having arrived too late. She was simply expressing her firm belief that He could have prevented the death of their brother. Had Jesus arrived just four days sooner, Lazarus would still be alive.

Upon seeing the tears of Mary and her companions, Jesus was "deeply moved." This somewhat cryptic phrase is used two different times in this passage. The Greek verb is *embrimaomai*, and, according to the *NET Bible Study Notes*, it "indicates a strong display of emotion, somewhat difficult to translate — 'shuddered, moved with the deepest emotions.'"

John will use the very same phrase to describe Jesus' emotional state when seeing the tomb of Lazarus. But why would Jesus be indignant or angry at the tears of the weeping women or the sight of Lazarus' grave? It is because He was witnessing the devastating impact that sin and death have brought upon creation. This was not the way it was meant to be. Jesus, the Word of God, had been with His Father "in the beginning."

“All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created” (John 1:2-3 ESV). Jesus had created life. In fact, John writes that “In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind” (John 1:4 ESV).

So as Jesus, the giver of life, stood watching Mary and her friends weep, He was filled with indignation and anger at having to witness the pain and suffering caused by death. And He knew that death was the result of sin. He also knew that death brought delight to Satan, whom Jesus earlier described as “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44 ESV).

At that moment, Jesus must have been filled with a range of emotions. Of anyone, He knew that He could have prevented Lazarus’ death, but to do so would have been out of step with His Father’s will. The death of Lazarus was part of God’s plan to display His glory and “so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4 ESV). Jesus was fully aware of how this was all going to turn out, but it still grieved Him to witness the despair that sin brought upon a helpless humanity. He stood before them as the answer to their problem, but many would refuse to believe in Him. Unlike Martha, who confessed Him to be “the Christ, the Son of God,” the majority of the Jews would fail to embrace Jesus as their Messiah.

Jesus had told Nicodemus, “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18 NLT). The women who stood before Jesus, weeping with Mary over the loss of her brother, would one day face the same fate. They too would die and, Jesus knew that if they refused to believe in Him, they would be condemned by their unbelief and be destined to face an eternity separated from Him and His Father. All of this angered Jesus because He had come to offer Himself as the one and only solution to the problem.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” – John 3:16-17 NLT

Jesus was moved to tears. His anger was mixed with sorrow, empathy, and compassion. It is interesting to note that Jesus had begun His public ministry at a wedding feast, a joyous occasion marked by celebration over that start of a new chapter of life. Now, here He was, nearing the end of His ministry and attending a funeral, a somber event marked by sorrow and despair over the end of life.

And as Jesus made His way to the tomb of Lazarus, there were those who expressed their confusion as to why He had not intervened. They had heard about His other miracles and couldn’t help but wonder why, if He loved Lazarus so much, He had not healed him. Their question seems to convey speculation that, perhaps, Lazarus’ condition was somehow out of His league.

“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” – John 11:37 ESV

But their doubt was about to be replaced with utter disbelief. They were going to be eyewitnesses to an amazing display of God's glory.

Upon coming to the tomb, Jesus demanded that they roll away the stone blocking its entrance. At this point, the readers of John's gospel should be recognizing the similarities between this story and the one they had heard about Jesus Himself. The tomb, the stone, the mourners. It all had a familiar ring to it. The darkness, the despair, the overwhelming sense of hopelessness. It is all eerily similar. But they have a sense of how this is going to turn out because they know the rest of the story.

And despite Martha's protests, Jesus commands that the stone be rolled away. He gently reminds her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40 ESV). Jesus had told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26 ESV). And while Martha had boldly proclaimed her belief, she had not envisioned what was about to take place. Even though Jesus had told her, "Your brother will rise again" (John 11:23 ESV), she had not gone to the tomb expecting to see it happen.

But it did. After a brief prayer to His Father, Jesus proclaimed with a loud, triumphant shout, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43 ESV). And John, somewhat matter-of-factly and anticlimactically, writes, "The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth" (John 11:44 ESV).

Don't miss this moment. Up until this point in time, the atmosphere has been filled with doom and despair. The mood has been dark and doubtful. Both Mary and Martha had greeted Jesus with words of disappointment: "If only you had...". The crowds had expressed their speculation as to whether Jesus could have done anything to help Lazarus. The whole scene has been marked by tears, mourning, resignation, and regret. And then, suddenly, "the man who died came out." Lazarus was alive. And not only had he been restored to life, but any decay his body had experienced had also been miraculously reversed.

It is fascinating and a bit frustrating to consider that John provides no details concerning the response of Mary and Martha to this incredible event. He gives no indication as to how the crowd reacted when the heavily wrapped body of Lazarus hobbled from the tomb. John simply records the words of Jesus that broke the stunned silence of the moment.

"Unbind him, and let him go." – John 11:44 ESV

There is so much wrapped up in these words (excuse the pun). They bring to mind what Jesus had said to the religious leaders.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." – John 8:34-36 ESV

The apostle Paul would echo these words when he wrote to the believers in Rome.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. – Romans 8:32 ESV

He would write virtually the same thing to the believers in Galatia.

So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. – Galatians 5:1 NLT

Jesus had just set Lazarus free from the bonds of death. His friend emerged from the tomb, alive and well, but still wrapped in the vestiges of death. He literally hobbled out of the tomb wrapped in cumbersome grave cloths. To be truly free, Jesus demanded that Lazarus be untied and released to enjoy his newly restored life. In a sense, Jesus was communicating an aspect of the Gospel that would become a reality when He had offered His life as an atonement for the sins of mankind.

So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. – Galatians 5:1 NLT

The restoration of Lazarus to life was meant to be a precursor of something greater to come: The resurrection of Jesus Himself. And with Jesus' death and resurrection, all those who place their faith in Him would find themselves permanently freed from slavery to sin and the condemnation of death. And they would no longer have to try to live up to God's holy standards in their own strength. They would be free indeed.

Better That One Man Die

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

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

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him. – John 11:45-57 ESV

John gives what appears to be a surprisingly brief summary of the peoples' response to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. He simply states that many who had been eyewitnesses to the miracle "believed in him" (John 11:45 ESV). But what did they say? How did they react? Did anyone scream in fear as they watched Lazarus come out of the tomb? Were there tears of joy, shouts of praise, and gasps of disbelief and shock? We don't know because all John tells us is that many believed, and others went straight to the Pharisees to tell them what had happened.

There's little doubt that Jesus' miracle made a powerful impression on all who witnessed it. It had been a jaw-dropping display of supernatural power that was impossible to dismiss or ignore. And for many in the crowd, it had been enough to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. Who else but the Anointed One of God could have raised a dead man back to life?

But John's lack of detail regarding the peoples' reaction is because he had a different point of emphasis. In the very next chapter, John will provide a more satisfying glimpse into the peoples' emotional state as he recalls what happened when they accompanied Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. But for now, John is far more interested in the reaction of the religious leaders. It would appear that these men had Jesus under 24-hour surveillance. They wanted to know His every move and had commissioned spies to report back on everything they saw and heard. And the miracle in Bethany had sent these undercover agents scurrying back to Jerusalem, eager to tell the Pharisees what they had seen. Upon hearing the first-hand report of what had taken

place in Bethany, the Pharisees informed the high priest, who called a special meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious council.

This entire scene is strangely similar to one that would take place after Jesus' own resurrection. John gives a detailed account of it in chapter 20 of his gospel.

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed — for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. — John 20:1-9 NLT

Notice the differences. Mary found the tomb of Jesus empty and ran to tell the disciples. Shocked at the news, Peter and John rushed to the scene and discovered the burial wrappings discarded and the tomb empty. And they believed.

The men who witnessed the empty tomb in Bethany had also run to tell others. But the Pharisees made no effort to verify the facts. Upon hearing the fantastic nature of the news, they didn't bother to make the two-mile journey to Bethany to see for themselves. They simply reported what they heard to the high priest, who decided it was worthy of an emergency meeting of the council.

The news that a dead man had walked out of a grave was not enough to make these men believe. Their only response was to ask, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs" (John 11:47 ESV). In a real sense, what they were saying was, "What are we supposed to do now? Our current course of action isn't working."

They realized that the longer they delayed, the more powerful and popular Jesus seemed to become. They had tried to discredit Him. They had even threatened to stone Him. But He wouldn't go away. And now they had a real problem on their hands. He had reportedly raised a dead man back to life and the rumors were flying. Those who had witnessed the miracle were probably spreading the news that Jesus was the Messiah and the religious leaders were fearing the worst.

"If we allow him to go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and our nation." — John 11:48 NLT

They saw Jesus as a threat to their way of life. He was a trouble-making, crowd-inciting thorn in their sides who was fomenting discord and rocking the proverbial boat. Everything had been just fine until this rabble-rouser from Nazareth had shown up on the scene. Now, what were they going to do? Jesus had supposedly raised a dead man back to life. How were they supposed to discredit someone who could do the impossible? And with the celebration of Passover just days away, the crowds were gathering, and the news of His latest miracle was going to spread like wildfire.

But Caiaphas, the high priest, tried to put it all in perspective. He calmly and arrogantly responded, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is more to your advantage to have one man die for the people than for the whole nation to perish” (John 11:49 NLT). He had made up his mind. Jesus had to die. It was the only logical solution to the problem facing them. The sacrifice of one man’s life was necessary if they wanted to preserve the overall well-being of the nation.

Little did Caiaphas know that his words were divinely ordained. He was prophesying and didn’t even know it. John reveals that the high priest’s words were Spirit-inspired.

Now he did not say this on his own, but because he was high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish nation, and not for the Jewish nation only, but to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered. – John 11:51-52 NLT

It’s interesting to note that the Jewish high priest was appointed by the Romans. He served at their behest and knew his power and position were solely dependent upon their approval of his performance. If he were not careful, this “Jesus problem” could get out of hand and turn into an armed revolt, with the people trying to replace the Romans by crowning their new Messiah as King. This was all unacceptable, and if it meant that Jesus had to die, so be it. Better for one man to die than for the Sanhedrin to risk the loss of their power and the potential destruction of their temple.

The office of the high priest had originally been a God-ordained role, first held by Aaron, the brother of Moses. And as a God-appointed leader of the nation of Israel, the high priest was intended to be a spokesman for the Almighty. And even in the dark days of the 1st-Century, when the spiritual leadership of Israel was in a state of apostasy and populated by men who were self-righteous hypocrites, God still spoke through Caiaphas. And while the high priest thought he was declaring Jesus’ death as the logical means of preserving their way of life, God was announcing the death of His Son as the key to eternal life.

Caiaphas was focused on protecting and preserving Israel. But God had bigger plans in store that would include not only the Jews but the nations of the world. And while Caiaphas didn’t realize it, he was going to be used to bring about the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles by participating in the death of Jesus.

The stage is set. The conflict between darkness and light is intensifying. And the days are drawing near when Jesus will complete His God-given assignment and fulfill the will of His Heavenly Father. But for the time being, Jesus avoided the limelight by removing Himself from public view, content to await the very moment for which He had come. The celebration of Passover was drawing near, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world was preparing to make His final entrance into Jerusalem

Anointed and Appointed to Die

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

⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. — John 12:1-11 ESV

The public ministry of Jesus has come to a spectacular close, culminating with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. And while John indicates that many who witnessed this miracle ended up believing in Jesus, their conversions only intensified the hatred of the Sanhedrin for Jesus. These men had threatened any who expressed belief that Jesus was the Messiah (John 9:22) with ex-communication from the synagogue and yet, Jesus’ popularity continued to spread.

Jesus would not perform any more miracles or deliver any additional messages. His focus had shifted from demonstrating His divine power and authority to accomplishing His God-given mission. John reveals that it is only six days until the Passover celebration begins and Jesus, knowing that the day of His sacrificial death is drawing closer, has the end in mind. Luke records that as “the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51 ESV). Jesus was resolute and determined to carry out the will of His Heavenly Father. Nothing would distract or deter Him. And everything that John records in his gospel from this point forward is intended to prepare his readers for the final phase of Jesus’ life: His death, burial, and resurrection.

Just days before His own death, Jesus returned to the scene of His greatest miracle: the town of Bethany where He had restored Lazarus to life. This was a risky move on Jesus’ part because “the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him” (John 11:57 ESV). But Jesus was walking in perfect obedience to His Father’s will and there was nothing the Sanhedrin could do to prevent God’s redemptive plan from unfolding, just as He had sovereignly ordained it.

According to Matthew’s gospel, Jesus was invited to be the guest of honor at a dinner hosted by a man named, Simon, whom John describes as a leper. The *New Living Translation* describes Simon as “a man who had previously had leprosy” because it would have been unlikely that any

guests would have shown up for a party in his home if his disease was still active. He would have been considered ceremonially unclean and unapproachable. We know nothing about this man, but it seems likely that, at some point, Jesus must have healed him from his leprosy and the party was his way of expressing his gratitude.

Among the guests are Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. By this time, Lazarus had become somewhat of a celebrity. The news of his death-to-life transformation had spread quickly and it's likely that his home and former tomb had become local attractions. No doubt, some enterprising entrepreneur had begun giving guided tours of the very spot where Lazarus had walked out of the tomb – alive.

It's no coincidence that Lazarus, the man who was once dead but now alive, was reclining at the same table with Jesus, the man who was alive but would soon be dead. The very one who had restored Lazarus to life was preparing to experience death so that others might live.

The entire tone of this party, hosted by Simon as an expression of gratitude to Jesus and intended as a time of celebration, was about to change. As Jesus and the other guests reclined at Simon's table, Mary, one of the sisters of Lazarus, took the opportunity to express her sincere gratitude to Jesus for what He had done for her brother. In a premeditated display of humble and costly devotion to Jesus, Mary "took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair" (John 12:3 ESV).

John, having been an eyewitness to this event, recalls how the smell of the nard immediately permeated the room. As soon as Mary opened the jar containing the aromatic oil and began pouring it on Jesus' head and feet, everyone's attention was riveted on this unexpected and somewhat unorthodox scene. And when Mary began to dry Jesus' feet with her own hair, the other guests would have been shocked and filled with indignation. In fact, in his gospel account, Matthew records that even Jesus' disciples were surprised by Mary's actions.

...when the disciples saw it, they were indignant. – Matthew 26:8 ESV

Matthew even indicates that the disciples were appalled by what they considered to be Mary's overly extravagant and wasteful use of expensive perfume to anoint Jesus.

"Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." – Matthew 26:8-9 ESV

But John reveals the true source of this seemingly frugal-minded outburst from the disciples. It had been Judas who expressed righteous indignation at Mary's wastefulness.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" – John 12:4-5
ESV

And with this insight, John sets the stage for all that is to come. Judas is going to play a major role in the unfolding drama surrounding Jesus' last days on this earth. And his comments provide a stark contrast to the selfless and sacrificial actions of Mary. Judas had no real love for Jesus. He had entered into his relationship with Him solely based on what he could get out of it. It was not that Judas was totally unbelieving. He likely considered Jesus to be the Messiah, but his expectations were self-motivated. He probably harbored strong hopes that Jesus would prove to be the next King of Israel and, as one of His disciples, he would stand to benefit. Judas was an opportunist. And, as John makes clear, Judas had taken advantage of his role as treasurer to line his own pockets.

...he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. – John 12:6 ESV

Judas had no sense of what was really going on. All he saw was a missed opportunity to make a profit without any cost to himself. But Mary had sacrificed greatly, having spent what was the equivalent of an entire year's wages to purchase the aromatic spice that she poured on the head and feet of Jesus. But to her, it had all been worth it. What price could she put on the life of her brother? He had been dead but was now alive. She had lost him but, thanks to Jesus, had received him back.

And Jesus reveals that there was more to Mary's actions than even she was able to grasp. Her anointing had a far greater significance than she had originally intended. Matthew provides us with Jesus' response to His indignant and ignorant disciples.

*“Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.” – Matthew 26:10-12
ESV*

Unbeknownst to Mary, she had actually prepared the body of Jesus for His coming burial. And Jesus warns the disciples to allow her to keep whatever nard remained so that she might keep it for the day of His death. But all of this escaped their understanding. He was headed to Jerusalem in order to sacrifice His life on their behalf, but they had been distracted by the smell of the perfume and the apparent waste of resources. Little did they know that their Master was about to pour out His life for them. In just a matter of days, His costly blood would pour from the wounds on His back, brow, hands, feet, and side. Later on, in the upper room, Jesus would use a cup of wine as a symbol, stating “my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you” (Luke 22:20 NLT).

Jesus was headed to the cross. But the disciples' minds were elsewhere. And years later, as John penned the words of his gospel, he must have wondered how they could have been so blind. It all made sense on this side of the crucifixion, but at the time, he and his companions had been oblivious to all the signs that pointed to Jesus' pending death.

And John brings the sobering reality of the circumstances back into focus as he reveals the crowds gathering outside Simon's home, anxious for a glimpse of Jesus and Lazarus. These same people will play a vital role in all that happens in the days ahead. But there is another group of individuals who will play an even more significant and sinister part in Jesus' last days: The religious leaders of Israel. When they discover that Lazarus' so-called resurrection has made him a virtual calling card for Jesus, they decide to put him to death as well. While Caiaphas had originally said that "it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish" (John 11:50 ESV), he was now willing to up the ante. If both Jesus and Lazarus had to die to save the nation of Israel, so be it.

Behold the King

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

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

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." – John 12:12-19 ESV

The last week of Jesus' earthly life is marked by contrasts. He is the light of the world, but as each day passes, the darkness of sin and evil seems to be growing greater. He is the one who gives life, and yet He is on a God-ordained mission that will end in His own death. The one who offered the Samaritan woman "living water" will soon be hanging on a cross, expressing the words, "I thirst" (John 19:28). And as we will see in this passage, Jesus will find Himself surrounded by crowds, yet increasingly more alone. His entrance into Jerusalem will be accompanied by great fanfare and a seeming surge in His popularity, but by the end of the week, His only companions will be the two criminals with whom He is crucified.

Beginning in verse nine and through the next 11 verses, John repeatedly and purposefully mentions "the large crowd." This nondescript and unnamed group makes their first appearance in Bethany, where they had gathered outside Simon's house in order to get a glimpse of Jesus and Lazarus. The news had gotten out regarding Jesus' miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead. In no time, both men had become celebrities with a growing and enthusiastic fan base. The fact that Lazarus had become a kind of walking billboard for Jesus' power and authority had left the Sanhedrin with no other alternative but to eliminate him as well. John explains that "it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus." (John 12:11 NLT).

John also indicates that it was this very same group of enthusiastic and energized people who got wind that Jesus was going to make the two-mile journey from Bethany to Jerusalem for the Passover. So, they planned a greeting fit for a king. It seems clear from their actions that they believed Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. But the things they said and did provide evidence that their expectations of Him were not in keeping with God's assignment for Him. They greeted Jesus as a conquering hero, complete with a parade, and shouts of adulation. Removing branches from nearby palm trees, the people waved them in the air and threw them

on the ground in front of Jesus. Matthew and Mark both describe the people throwing their outer garments in the path before Jesus as a sign of homage.

And just so there's no doubt as to what the crowd was thinking, John records what they were shouting as Jesus entered into the city.

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” – John 12:13 ESV

The term, “hosanna” was a transliteration of the Hebrew *yasha`na`*. This was a phrase found in the Hallel, a collection of psalms that were sung during the feasts of Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover. They were essentially quoting from Psalm 118.

*Save us, we pray, O Lord!
O Lord, we pray, give us success!*

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! – Psalms 118:25-26 ESV

This was a clear reference to the Messiah. And the Jews who accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem had concluded that Jesus was not only their Messiah but the new King of Israel. He was the descendant of David who had come to reclaim the throne and re-establish Israel's former glory. Luke provides further evidence of the nationalistic fervor that drove the crowd.

...the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” – Luke 19:37-38 ESV

Their enthusiastic declarations were not inaccurate but only mistimed. Everything they claimed about Jesus was true, but they had failed to understand His role as the suffering servant. In their minds, the Messiah would be a conquering king and a political savior who would free them from their subjugation to Rome. He would be a deliverer who would raise up an army and overthrow their enemies. And Luke records that the Pharisees demanded that Jesus rebuke the crowd for declaring Him to be king. They knew that if the Romans caught wind of what was going on in the streets of Jerusalem, the response would be swift and deadly. But Jesus simply responded, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40 ESV).

Jesus did not refute the claims of the people. In fact, during His trial before Pilate, the Roman governor would ask Him, “So you are a king?” And Jesus would reply, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37 ESV).

Jesus was the King of Israel. But, as He made clear to Pilate, His kingdom was not of this world.

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” – John 18:36 ESV

So, the crowd was right, but they failed to understand the true nature of Jesus’ reign and the extent of His rule. He was not simply the King of Israel, He was the King of kings and Lord of lords, the sovereign over all the heavens and the earth. But before His reign could begin, He would have to suffer and die. His crucifixion would have to precede His glorification. It would only be after He wore a crown of thorns that He could be crowned with glory and honor by His Heavenly Father.

...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:8-11 ESV

Everything that Jesus did was in fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan for mankind. His every step was orchestrated by God. Even His decision to procure the foal of a donkey on which to ride was part of God’s divine plan. It fulfilled the words of the prophet, Zechariah.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. – Zechariah 9:9 ESV*

Jesus took no shortcuts. Refusing to leave out any aspect of the divine plan, He faithfully fulfilled each and every prophecy and prediction, in unwavering obedience to His Father’s will.

But all of this escaped the disciples of Jesus. They were oblivious to the much deeper meaning behind all that was going on around them. Buoyed by the unbridled enthusiasm of the crowd, they were caught up in the thrill of the moment and beginning to wonder if Jesus was finally going to reveal Himself as who they believed Him to be: the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

Their hopes were high. Things seemed to be taking a dramatic turn for the better. They had the crowds on their side. The tide seemed to be turning. But John indicates that they were missing the point because they lacked the ability to comprehend what was really going on. It would not be until after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension that they would grasp the true significance of those days.

...when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. – John 12:16 ESV

It would not be until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon them, that the disciples would understand all that had taken place in those days before Jesus' death.

As the story unfolds, John makes it clear that every event has been carefully timed and orchestrated by God to create the perfect environment in which to display His final act of divine love for sinful mankind. From the self-centered crowd driven by desires for physical freedom to the self-righteous religious leaders driven by jealousy and revenge, John exposes a world marked by darkness and a people whose spiritual sight was distorted and confused.

The people expressed hope because they took the raising of Lazarus as a sign. But the very same sign caused the Pharisees to express despair because they were losing the battle with Jesus. His popularity continued to pick up as their options for eliminating Him seemed to be running out.

"There's nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!" – John 12:19 ESV

But despite their sense of defeat and resignation, they were far from done. Their anger would intensify yet again and their plan for putting Jesus to death would gather steam.

For This Purpose, I Have Come

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

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.” – John 12:20-27 ESV

Back in chapter 10, John records Jesus’ revelation of Himself as the “Good Shepherd.” In doing so, He presented Himself as the model leader, one who selflessly cares for those under His care, even to the point of laying down His life for them.

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” – John 10:14-16 ESV

As part of this discourse, He made a surprising pronouncement that, as the Good Shepherd, His flock would contain sheep from outside the fold of Israel. Even to His disciples, all of whom were Jews, this would have been a shocking disclosure. And although they had been eyewitnesses to His ministry among the Samaritans, they would have had a difficult time accepting the fact that their long-awaited Messiah would actually include Gentiles in His Kingdom.

But as Jesus makes His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, John records a brief and seemingly unimportant scene involving “some Greeks.” These were likely Gentiles who were recognized as being Greek because of their appearance or accents. John indicates that they were there to worship at the feast, so, they were likely proselytes to Judaism who had come to participate in the celebration of Passover. But upon seeing all the commotion surrounding Jesus’ entry into the city, they approached Philip, one of Jesus’ disciples, and said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (John 12:21 ESV). And then they mysteriously disappear from John’s record, never to be seen or heard from again.

Yet, their simple request speaks volumes and sets up a short, but significant announcement from Jesus concerning His pending death.

“Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.” – John 12:23-24 NLT

These unidentified Greeks expressed their desire to see Jesus. And while John never reveals whether they got their wish or not, their request indicates that they had been drawn to Jesus. Even as Gentiles, they found themselves mysteriously attracted to this Jewish Rabbi from Nazareth. And when Jesus was told that the Greeks wished to see Him, He disclosed it as further proof that His hour had come.

It was time. His death was fast approaching, and it would usher in a remarkable paradigm shift that would forever alter the spiritual landscape of the world. He had told the Samaritan woman, “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 ESV). Jesus had come to offer His life as a ransom for many, preparing the way for both Jews and Gentiles to be restored to a right relationship with God the Father through faith in Him.

And when the Greeks expressed their desire to see Jesus, He saw it as a simple sign of a significant change in the status quo. His death would turn the religious world on its ear. No longer would Gentiles have to seek the God of Israel through the practice of Judaism. They would find access to Him through Jesus, His Son. The sacrificial death of Jesus would level the playing field, making salvation available to all, regardless of their ethnicity, religious background, gender, or economic status. The apostle Paul would rejoice in the homogeneous nature of God’s redemptive plan made possible through Jesus’ sacrificial death.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:28 ESV

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. – Romans 3:29-30 ESV

It is interesting to note how Jesus described what was awaiting Him. He saw His pending death as the pathway to glorification.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” – John 12:23 ESV

Jesus was not just referring to His resurrection and ascension, because those two events would be impossible without His death. The cross was the means by which His future glorification would take place. The cross was intended to be the focal point of the redemptive plan of God. It was only by willingly sacrificing His sinless life on behalf of sinful mankind that Jesus could experience glorification. Paul put it this way:

He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross! As a result God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:8-11 NLT

The death of Jesus would be the greatest expression of God’s love for mankind. It would be on the cross that Jesus revealed God the Father with the greatest clarity. Jesus would glorify the Father by expressing His love in the starkest of terms. And John would later write of this remarkable manifestation of God’s love in his first letter.

By this the love of God is revealed in us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. – 1 John 4:9-10 NLT

And Jesus explains the seeming incongruity of His death as an expression of God’s love.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” – John 12:24 ESV

Even within the natural realm, death plays an essential role in the creation of life. And so, His own death would serve a vital and necessary role in producing new life among the spiritually dead. Jesus was expressing His willingness to sacrifice His life so that others might live. He was fully confident that His death would be efficacious, resulting in abundant fruit – the transformed lives of countless individuals.

But Jesus was also using His death as a model for those who would enjoy the fruit of His labors. It would be His willing obedience to give up His earthly life that would result in eternal life for others. Even His future glorification and return to His Father’s side was dependent upon His willing sacrifice of His earthly life. So, He tells His disciples that they too will be expected to follow His example of divine prioritization.

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” – John 12:25 ESV

The Greek word translated as “life” is *psyche*, rather than the more common word *zoe*. It refers to far more than just physical life. It encompasses the entire nature of man and was often used to describe the soul or heart, including the feelings, desires, and affections. Jesus was letting His disciples know that there would be a sacrifice required for all those who chose to follow Him. There is no place in the life of a Christ-follower for love of self. Had Jesus modeled self-love, He would never have gone to the cross. But rather than focusing on self-preservation, Jesus committed Himself to selfless oblation, the sacrifice of Himself for the good of others. And He expected His followers to do the same. A point He made perfectly clear.

“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” – John 12:26 ESV

As usual, this disclosure went over the heads of His disciples. They were not yet able to grasp the meaning or significance of His words. But in time, they would. Most of the disciples would eventually follow Him by offering their own lives for the cause. It is believed that most of the disciples ended up as martyrs for the faith. They too became grains of wheat that fell to the earth and died, resulting in much fruit. And, in death, they followed Jesus in glorification, being honored by God for their faithful service and enjoying fellowship with He and the Son for eternity.

But the knowledge of how His death would result in fruitfulness did not prevent Jesus from wrestling with the reality of the suffering He was about to face. With His next statement, Jesus reveals the human side of His nature, providing us with a glimpse into the battle going on between His desire to obey His Father and the natural desire to avoid the pain and suffering that awaited Him.

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.” – John 12:27 ESV

His humanity was expressing its natural desire to preserve self. But Jesus’ divinity would not allow Him to give in to the temptation. It would have been the height of rebellion for Jesus to attempt to escape what God the Father had planned. And Jesus knew that the entire purpose behind His incarnation had been for Him to go to the cross with all the suffering and pain it entailed. It was for this reason He had come. And it was for this reason He would overcome His fear with faithful obedience to His Father’s will. Because He understood all that His death would accomplish

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. – Isaiah 53:5-6 ESV*

Father, Glorify Your Name

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

In four simple words, Jesus provides a succinct yet accurate summary of the attitude behind His entire earthly ministry. All He said or did was driven by His unwavering desire to bring glory to His Heavenly Father. And John has provided ample evidence of Jesus’ commitment to glorify God through His life.

*“The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; **but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true**, and in him there is no falsehood.”* – John 7:18 ESV

*“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, **for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.**”* – John 8:28-29 ESV

*“**Yet I do not seek my own glory**; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.”* – John 8:50 ESV

Matthew records the impassioned words of Jesus that He prayed to His Father in the garden on the night He was betrayed.

*“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, **not as I will, but as you will.**”* – Matthew 26:39 ESV

Earlier, in one of His confrontations with the religious leaders, Jesus had boldly proclaimed His unity with the Father when He stated, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 ESV). Jesus was claiming equality with God. He had been at His Father’s side at the creation of the world and, as John wrote, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3 ESV).

And yet, though Jesus was the Son of God, the Co-Creator of the universe, and shared the same divine attributes of His Father, He was not out to make a name for Himself. In fact, Paul reminds

us that Jesus “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” (Philippians 2:6-7 ESV). And it was in His human state that Jesus desired to glorify God. Adam and Eve were created by the Holy Trinity and placed in the garden so that they might serve as stewards over the rest of creation. They were created in the image of God and given a divine mandate to care for every other living thing on the earth.

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” – Genesis 1:2 ESV

But Adam and Eve failed to bring God glory because they failed to live in obedience to His commands. He had declared one tree in the garden as off-limits, prohibiting them from eating its fruit. But they willfully disobeyed Him, choosing to listen to the lie of Satan instead. Blatantly contradicting the words of God, Satan told Eve that if she ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, she would not die, but would become like God. She would experience self-glorification and have the same divine capabilities as God, knowing good and evil.

*“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.” – Genesis 3:4-5 ESV*

And Eve, enticed by the offer of glorification, ate of the fruit and shared it with her complacent and compliant husband. And the rest is history.

But Jesus, by taking on human flesh, was out to set the record straight and prove that a man could live according to the commands of God and glorify Him in the process. Jesus knew that the only way His life would bring glory to His Father would be to live in perfect obedience to His will, and that included suffering death on the cross. And Paul describes what this willful submission to the Father’s will looked like for Jesus.

[Jesus] 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 2:7-8 ESV

In his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul juxtaposes the disobedience of Adam with the obedience of Jesus. One’s attempt at self-glorification resulted in condemnation for all men, while the other’s commitment to glorify God resulted in justification and forgiveness for many.

Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous. – Romans 5:18-19 ESV

In response to Jesus' request that God be glorified through His life, His Father responded, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28 ESV). God was confirming that His Son's entire life, up to that very moment, had been glorifying to Him. The incarnation of Jesus was God-glorifying because it had made the invisible God visible (Colossians 1:15). Every one of the miracles Jesus performed glorified the Father because He did them in keeping with the will of God and by the power of the Spirit of God. And the final and greatest act of glorification was coming. God would be glorified through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Every aspect of Jesus' life brought glory to God because all that He did was in obedience to the will of God. He did nothing for His own glory. He never allowed His own human will to supersede the will of His heavenly Father. This is exactly what He meant when He prayed, "I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39 NLT).

But on this occasion, the crowd surrounding Jesus heard the voice of God but were unaware of who it was or what it meant. But Jesus clarified what His Father had meant when He had said "I will glorify it again" (John 12:28 ESV).

"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die." – John 12:31-33 ESV

God was about to implement the final phase of His redemptive plan for mankind, and it would entail the death of His Son. By being "lifted up" on the cross, Jesus would "draw all people" to Himself. The cross would become the focal point of all human history. On the cross, the righteous wrath of God would be poured out on His sinless Son. But at the same time, the gracious love of God would be poured out in abundance on all who would lift their eyes to the broken and bloodied body of the Lamb of God and accept Him as the one who takes away the sins of the world.

After the death of Jesus, the cross, long a symbol of death in the Roman world, would become a symbol of life among believers. Because Jesus would faithfully fulfill the will of His Father, accepting His divine assignment to serve as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, God would be glorified. His will would be done. And, as a result, God would glorify Jesus by raising Him from the dead, proving that His sacrifice had been acceptable and effective. The resurrection of Jesus would be followed by His ascension. The faithful Son would be glorified, returning to His rightful place at His Father's side.

But as usual, the crowd was confused by all they heard. They seem to have understood that Jesus was discussing His coming death, but this did not gel with the concept of the Messiah. They were expecting a conquering king, not a suffering servant. Their confusion is clearly evident in the questions they posed to Jesus.

"We understood from Scripture that the Messiah would live forever. How can you say the Son of Man will die? Just who is this Son of Man, anyway?" – John 12:34 NLT

But rather than answer their questions, Jesus reiterated His warning that the light of His presence would not always be with them. He was going away.

“My light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.” – John 12:35-36 NLT

Like much of what Jesus said, these words were probably aimed at the ears of a small contingent of individuals, including His 12 disciples, and others like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who were His committed followers. Jesus was letting them know that the days ahead were going to become increasingly dark. The spiritual battle that had been taking place for years was going to intensify, and the full fury of His enemies was going to fall on Him. But regardless of all that was about to happen, Jesus wanted His followers to remain faithful and to continue to walk in the light of His word, right up to the bitter end.

The Hour of Decision

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

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

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

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

⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. ⁴² Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. – John 12:36-43 ESV

Jesus has just informed the crowd that the hour has come. The time of His death was drawing closer. And when He was “lifted up” on the cross to die for the sins of mankind, it would accomplish a God-glorifying victory in the supernatural realm.

“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” – John 12:31 ESV

When His death eventually took place, the Jewish leadership would take it as victory. They had judged Jesus to be a blasphemer and His death would be the appropriate punishment. But they would not be alone in their rejoicing. Their father, the devil (John 8:44) would also celebrate the death of the Messiah. But only because he was ignorant of what Jesus’ death really meant. From a spiritual perspective, it would appear that Satan had won the day.

Yet Jesus informs His disciples and all those within His hearing that Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. Jesus projects onto Satan his ultimate defeat which will take place at the end of the age. But He also suggests that His death will destroy Satan’s power once and for all. The enemy’s vice-like grip on mankind will be broken by Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. The payment for mankind’s sin debt will be made in full. God’s just and righteous requirement of a blood sacrifice will have been satisfied by the offering of His own Son’s sinless life.

But Jesus informs His audience that His death will bring judgment upon the world. At first glance, this seems to contradict an earlier statement made by Jesus. In his nighttime encounter

with Nicodemus, Jesus had assured him that “God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17 NLT). Now He is declaring that His death will be accompanied by judgment. To better understand what Jesus means, we have to consider all that He said to Nicodemus on the matter.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.” – John 3:16-19 NLT

Jesus was letting Nicodemus know that God had sent Him into the world to bring salvation to mankind. In a sense, the judgment of mankind had already taken place. As a result of Adam and Eve’s fall from grace, all humanity stands before God as guilty and condemned, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 ESV). “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10 ESV). And because of their guilty state, all men face the same fate because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23 ESV).

But the good news Jesus tried to convey to Nicodemus was that He had come to offer an alternative. His death was going to provide a way for condemned sinners to escape the inevitable and unavoidable judgment of God. Paul explains it this way:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. – Romans 3:23-25 ESV

The only way to escape judgment is through faith or belief in Jesus Christ. That is what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus, “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him” (John 3:18 NLT). Through belief in Jesus, the sinner moves from condemnation to justification. He or she is made right with God because they have placed their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus. As John wrote in one of his later letters, “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7 ESV).

The death of Jesus would bring judgment upon the world because it would force sinful men and women to make a decision. The only way they could escape judgment would be through faith or belief in Jesus as their atoning sacrifice. But John reveals that “despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him” (John 12:37 NLT). Even after witnessing Jesus raise a dead man back to life, some would still refuse to believe He was the Messiah. And John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sees this failure to believe as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:1.

Who has believed what he has heard from us?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? – Isaiah 53:1 ESV

As John wrote in the opening chapter of his gospel, Jesus “came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11 ESV). Jesus had appeared, speaking His Father’s words, and displaying His Father’s power. But they had refused to believe. The light of the world had appeared in their midst, but they chose the darkness over the light. It was just as Jesus had told Nicodemus.

“...the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.” – John 3:19-20 NLT

Again, John reaches back into the writings of the prophet Isaiah to show that the rejection of Jesus by the people of Israel was inevitable. It was part of the will of God. Paraphrasing the words of Isaiah, John announces that the stubborn refusal of the people of Israel was the handiwork of God.

*“He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.” – John 12:40 ESV*

Their disbelief, pre-ordained by God, was part of His redemptive plan. It was essential that Jesus be rejected and, ultimately, crucified because His death was absolutely necessary if mankind was to have any hope of escaping future judgment.

But many of the Jews continued to stubbornly cling to their own way of doing things. They could not bring themselves to believe that Jesus was offering them a means of being made right with God that did not require their strict adherence to the law. And the apostle Paul would later report that their continued belief in law-keeping as the means for achieving a right-standing with God was preventing them from believing in Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved. I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God’s way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God. – Romans 10:1-4 NLT

Belief and disbelief. That is the crux of the matter. Belief brings salvation and a right standing with God. Disbelief brings the judgment of God because it rejects the gracious gift of the Son of God.

Yet John indicates that there were those among the Jews who believed in Jesus. But he adds that they kept their belief to themselves, out of fear.

Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God. – John 12:42-43 NLT

Belief and disbelief. Light and darkness. The closer Jesus gets to the cross, the more intense the contrasts become. The day of reckoning is quickly approaching. When the time comes for Jesus to hang on the cross, it will be a watershed moment in history. Jesus said, “when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32 ESV). All eyes will be fixed on Him. And, from that moment forward, His death will force every man and woman to make a decision, a choice to believe or disbelieve. To embrace the light or to continue to dwell in the darkness of sin. To face judgment or accept the free gift of a right standing with God through faith in His Son.

It Pays to Listen

⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” – John 12:44-50 ESV

In this passage, John describes Jesus as crying out. He literally shouted, as if to ensure that everyone within the sound of His voice would not only hear what He had to say but understand its importance. The reason for raising His voice seems clear. Jesus is explaining the dramatic consequences that come with belief in Him. Earlier, in His late-night encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus had explained some of the other outcomes of expressing belief in Him.

*“...whoever believes in him **may have eternal life.**”* – John 3:15 ESV

*“...whoever believes in him [God’s Son] **should not perish** but have eternal life.”* – John 3:16 ESV

*“Whoever believes in him **is not condemned...**”* – John 3:18 ESV

Later in his gospel, John records the words of Jesus spoken to those who had experienced the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

*“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me **shall not hunger**, and whoever believes in me **shall never thirst.**”* – John 6:35 ESV

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes **has eternal life.**”* – John 6:47 ESV

And sometime later, on the final day of the Feast of Booths, Jesus declared another benefit or consequence of believing in Him.

*“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘**Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**’”* – John 7:38 ESV

On another occasion, after having arrived in Bethany and hearing the news that His friend Lazarus had died, Jesus informed Martha:

*“Whoever believes in me, **though he die, yet shall he live**, and everyone who lives and believes in me **shall never die.**”* – John 11:25-26 ESV

Belief in Jesus comes with some fairly significant benefits: Eternal life, freedom from judgment, release from death's grip, and complete spiritual satisfaction and sustenance.

But now, with His voice raised for added emphasis, Jesus announces another vital consequence that accompanies belief in Him: Access to God.

"If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me." – John 12:44-45 NLT

With this emphatic statement, Jesus stresses His unity with the Father. He wants His audience to know that to believe in Him is really an expression of belief in God because He had been sent by God. And, by inference, a failure to believe in Jesus would be nothing less than a refusal to believe in the one who sent Him. Jesus was not operating on His own initiative. He was on a divine mission that had been sanctioned by God Himself.

It's important to note that John placed this statement from Jesus immediately after his notation about those who believed.

Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God. – John 12:42-43 NLT

Their belief was mixed with timidity and fear – primarily a fear of man. But, as John's careful ordering of events suggests, there was much more going on than meets the eye. These people had failed to understand the vital link between Jesus and His Heavenly Father. While they believed Jesus to be someone of great significance, possibly even the Messiah, they were less convinced of the indisputable reality of Jesus' deity and unrivaled unity with God. To believe in Him was to believe in God. To see Him was to see God. Jesus was boldly declaring His identity as the Son of God.

A few days later, Phillip, one of Jesus' disciples, would make a request of Him.

"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." – John 14:8 NLT

And Jesus would respond:

*"Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. **Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me,** or else believe on account of the works themselves."* – John 14:9-11 NLT

This link between God the Son and God the Father was to be a vital part of their belief. Believing Jesus to be a supernaturally gifted man who had been sent by God was not enough. Even believing that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah promised by God was insufficient. Jesus was differentiating Himself from everyone else. He was not merely a well-spoken Rabbi. He was much more than a miracle-working teacher from Nazareth. And, even in His role as Messiah, He was far more than they could have ever imagined. He was the Son of God and the light of the world.

"I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark." – John 12:46 NLT

What these people needed to understand was that they were living in spiritual darkness, completely separated from God because of their sin. Their attempts to satisfy God through law-keeping had been completely unsuccessful and could do nothing to mitigate their state of condemnation and spiritual separation from God.

So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life." – Galatians 3:11 NLT

For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. – Romans 3:20 NLT

Jesus was simply reiterating what John had stated in the opening verses of his gospel.

*The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it. – John 1:4-5 NLT*

In the natural realm, darkness is an absence of light. And the same thing is true of the spiritual realm. To live in darkness is to live apart from the light of God. It is to experience an absence of His presence, provision, and power. Much later in life, John would discuss this important reality in a letter he wrote to believers living in the late-1st-Century.

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. – 1 John 1: 5-7 NLT

And Jesus was saying it was impossible to have fellowship with the Father without understanding that He was the Father's Son. He was the very light of God illuminating the darkness of men's lives and revealing the glory of the Father. Through belief in Him, sinful men and women could experience the joy of walking in the light of God's glorious presence.

As the light of God, Jesus did not come to expose the sins of men, but to cleanse and forgive them. As He has stated before, His mission was not to judge the world but to provide salvation. But there would be dire consequences for those who refused to walk in the light. They would remain in spiritual darkness, condemned by their sin, and facing a future day of judgment that would result in eternal separation from God the Father.

“I will not judge those who hear me but don’t obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken.” – John 12:47-48 NLT

Again, Jesus is simply expanding on the message He delivered to Nicodemus.

“...anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.” – John 3:18-21 NLT

Notice what Jesus said. Those who refuse to believe in Him are really refusing to believe in “God’s one and only Son.” They are rejecting the Son of God. They are turning their backs on the light of God and, in so doing, they are expressing their love for the darkness. And Jesus closes out His short but vital discourse with a reminder that His words were not His own. He was acting as the mouthpiece for God. All that He has said was directly from the lips from His Father in heaven.

“I don’t speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say.” – John 12:49-50 NLT

So, in other words, it would pay to listen to what He had to say. These were not the words of a mere man. They were the very words of God Almighty and they came from the lips of His one and only Son.

Completely Cleansed

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." – John 13:1-11 ESV

As Jesus senses the day of His death drawing closer, He begins to focus His attention more directly on the men He has chosen to carry on His work in His absence. His public ministry is officially over. The raising of Lazarus from the dead would be His last miracle. There would be no more debates with the religious leaders or discourses with the people in the temple. At this point, with just days remaining before He goes to the cross, Jesus' primary mission became the preparation of His disciples for all that was about to happen.

In his account of Jesus' final week on earth, John diverges from the narratives found in the Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke place considerable emphasis on the institution of the Lord's Supper, John chooses to leave it out. It would appear that John wrote his account late in the 1st-Century, likely making it the last of the four gospels to be written. Having had access to the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John knew that they had amply covered the institution of the Lord's Supper. So, rather than echoing the same content, he focused his attention on Jesus' teaching of the disciples. His record of the Passover meal shared by Jesus and His followers contains material not found in the other three gospels. In fact, he is the only one who records the well-known scene of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples.

It is important to remember that John's purpose for writing his gospel was to give evidence of the doctrine of the deity of Jesus. Even by the end of the 1st-Century, when John likely wrote his gospel, there were those who had begun to reject or repudiate the doctrine of the deity of Jesus. And because John had addressed his gospel to a Christian audience, he was attempting to reassure them that Jesus truly was who He claimed to be. John even reminded his readers of his purpose for putting pen to paper: "that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (John 20:31 NLT).

So, while the Lord's Supper was important to John, it was not pertinent to the point he was trying to make to his readers. Instead, he chose to focus on an event that the other gospel writers left out of their accounts: Jesus washing His disciples' feet.

John presents a very compressed and compacted account of what took place that night. He sets the scene by juxtaposing the heart of Judas with that of Jesus.

...the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him...
– John 13:2 ESV

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper... – John 13:3-4 ESV

The heart of Jesus was motivated by love for His own. He knew He was about to leave His disciples and He greatly desired to provide them with some final words of encouragement and insight. Jesus, knowing “that his hour had come to depart out of this world” (John 13:1 ESV), performed an act of unspeakable humility and love.

So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. – John 13:4-5 NLT

The Son of God visibly placed Himself in the role of a servant and willingly washed the feet of His disciples. He provided them with an object lesson that left them stunned, embarrassed, and confused. Jesus even washed the feet of the one who would betray Him. And He did so, fully aware of His undisputed deity and superiority. He was living out the words He had spoken earlier.

“...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Matthew 20:28 ESV

But the disciples were shocked by Jesus' actions, as evidenced by Peter's response.

“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” – John 13:6 NLT

Always the first to speak his mind, Peter exhibited reticence at the thought of his master washing his feet. He knew this was not appropriate. Jesus was doing the work of a common slave and this embarrassed Peter. But there is far more going on here than first meets the eye. John describes Jesus as laying aside His outer garments. John did not use the normal Greek word for the removal of a piece of clothing. In fact, he will use this very same word again, when Jesus asks Peter, “Will you **lay down** your life for me?” (John 13:38 ESV). It is the same word Jesus used when speaking of His coming death.

“I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” – John 10:17-18 ESV

This imagery of Jesus laying down and taking up His life is played out in the upper room, as Jesus lays down of His outer garments and then takes them back up again. And in-between doing so, He performs a sacrificial act of cleansing. But Peter and the disciples didn't grasp the significance of what Jesus was doing. They didn't make the connection. And Jesus makes this point perfectly clear.

“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” – John 13:7 ESV

When Peter vehemently refused to be cleansed by Jesus, he was unknowingly exhibiting the self-righteous attitude of the religious leaders.

In Peter's response we see the pride and self-will that is at the heart of all sin and that is the very thing for which the cross will atone and bring healing. Peter is working from a worldly point of view, and not for the first time. – Rodney A. Whitaker, *John: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*

But Jesus responded to Peter with a word of warning: “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (John 13:8 ESV). It would only be through Jesus' death on the cross that true cleansing from sin could be attained. And without it, no one could have a right relationship with Christ or the Father.

Jesus' words seemed to have gotten Peter's attention because he immediately demanded that Jesus wash his hands and his head as well. If getting his feet washed by Jesus was a non-negotiable requirement, Peter wanted to show his enthusiasm by requesting a more intensified cleansing. But he was missing the point.

Yet, Jesus doesn't exactly clear up Peter's confusion. His next statement is rather cryptic, providing the disciples with little clarity as to what He is talking about.

“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” – John 13:10 ESV

It would seem that Jesus is trying to let Peter and his companions know that they belong to Him. Having been chosen by God and placed in the care of His Son, the disciples had been set apart as His servants. In a sense, they had already been cleansed, but not completely. The final phase of their cleansing will take place on the cross. And when that happens, they will be made ready for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Their lives will have been completely purified and made worthy vessels for the Spirit of God. It would not be until Jesus had died, been raised again, and ascended, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on His followers.

But there was one of them who would not experience this cleansing. He would not live to enjoy the coming of the Spirit of God. Judas was not clean. He was not a true believer in Jesus. He was a betrayer. And the death of Jesus would provide Him with no further cleansing from sin. As Matthew recorded in his gospel, Peter had clearly expressed His belief in Jesus when he stated, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16 ESV). But evidently, Judas did not share that belief. He was not fully convinced by Jesus' claims to be divine. He likely began following Jesus because he had hopes that He was the Messiah. But as time went by and Jesus failed to announce His Kingdom on earth, Judas lost patience and interest. And he would walk out that very night with a preconceived plan to make the most of his relationship with Jesus by betraying Him to the religious authorities. But for the time being, Peter and the rest of the disciples would remain by Jesus' side.

Do as I Have Done

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ ¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” – John 13:12-20 ESV

Earlier in John’s narrative, he described Jesus as having “laid aside his outer garments” (John 13:4 ESV). The Greek word is *tithēmi* and it means to “lay down, to wear or carry no longer.” The same word is found three times in Jesus’ Good Shepherd discourse as He discusses His pending death.

*“For this reason the Father loves me, because I **lay down** [tithēmi] my life that I may **take it up** [lambanō] again. No one takes it from me, but I **lay it down** [tithēmi] of my own accord. I have authority to **lay it down** [tithēmi], and I have authority to **take it up** [lambanō] again. This charge I have received from my Father.”* – John 10:17-18 ESV

It is no coincidence that John chose to use this very same word when describing Jesus laying aside His outer garment in preparation to wash the feet of the disciples. And when Jesus had completed His task, John states that He “put on his outer garments” (John 13:17 ESV). Again, notice the word John used to describe this action by Jesus. It is *lambanō*, a Greek word that means “to take what is one’s own” or “to get back.” And it is the same word used in Jesus’ discourse on the Good Shepherd when He stated that He had the authority to lay down His life and to take it up again (*lambanō*).

John, writing long after the scene he personally experienced in the upper room, is revealing his understanding of what took place that fateful evening. While the true meaning behind Jesus’ actions had evaded him that night, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, John had been able to comprehend the symbolic meaning behind the foot-washing ceremony.

In taking off His outer garment, Jesus was signifying His death. And by taking up and putting on the very same garment, Jesus was illustrating His resurrection. And all that He did in-between was meant to reveal the spiritual cleansing that would come as a result of His sacrificial and selfless death.

It is interesting to note that Jesus, having put on His outer garment and rejoined the disciples at the table, asked them, “Do you understand what I have done to you” (John 13:12 ESV), and

they made no reply. They had no idea what this strange and unexpected ritual meant, because they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Jesus will later tell them, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26 ESV).

Having their feet washed by their Master had been an uncomfortable experience for the disciples. It had been awkward to be on the receiving end of such treatment and had left them embarrassed and confused. But after the coming of the Holy Spirit, their spiritual eyes would be opened, and they would be able to see the events of that evening from a whole new perspective.

But on that night in the upper room, Jesus made no attempt to explain what He had done. He simply challenged them to follow His example.

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” – John 13:13-15 NLT

It is important that we understand Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet as what it was, “an acted parable of the Lord’s humiliation unto death” (George R. Beasley-Murray, “Baptism, Wash.” In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*). Jesus had provided them with a tangible demonstration of His coming death on the cross. It was going to require abject humility, the laying aside of His divine rights, and the willing sacrifice of His life. And the apostle Paul would later use the death of Jesus as an example for believers to follow, calling them to live lives of humility and selfless service.

Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had... – Philippians 2:3-5 NLT

And then he describes the “attitude” or mindset of Jesus they were to emulate.

*...who though he existed in the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
but emptied himself
by taking on the form of a slave,
by looking like other men,
and by sharing in human nature.
He humbled himself,
by becoming obedient to the point of death
—even death on a cross! – Philippians 2:6-8 NLT*

And Jesus commended His disciples for recognizing Him as their “Lord and Teacher.” He seems to have used these words in a non-spiritual and more “earthy” sense. He acknowledges that His disciples saw Him as their Rabbi or teacher and respected Him as their superior. But they were not yet fully convinced of His deity and true identity. So, Jesus seems to be emphasizing that, if their “Lord and Teacher” would be willing to humble Himself and wash their feet, they had no excuse for viewing themselves as too good to follow His example. If Jesus could humble Himself and do the unthinkable, so could they. There was no place in His Kingdom for pride, arrogance, or self-conceit.

And Jesus makes it clear that His washing of their feet had been intended as an example to follow, not a mandatory and perfunctory ritual to be mechanically performed. The Greek word translated as “example” means “a sign suggestive of anything.” His washing of their feet had been intended as a representation of a far greater act of selflessness they would need to make. And Jesus would later reveal to His disciples just what that more significant act of sacrifice would be.

“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” – John 15:12-13 NLT

The disciples had no idea what was coming. Even though Jesus had repeatedly alluded to His coming death, they were not yet able to grasp the weight of what was taking place around them. So, Jesus simply called them to follow His example.

“I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.” – John 13:16-17 NLT

It is likely that all they heard Jesus saying was that they should wash one another’s feet. And it is even more likely that they couldn’t understand why. But before any of them could express their confusion or ask for clarification, Jesus changed the subject.

“I am not saying these things to all of you; I know the ones I have chosen. But this fulfills the Scripture that says, ‘The one who eats my food has turned against me.’ I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I am the Messiah.” – John 13:18-19 NLT

Jesus was preparing His disciples for what was to come, including His betrayal by Judas. But Jesus lets them know that all of this was divinely ordained. He had chosen them all, including Judas. Each of them had a role to play. For his part, Judas would betray Jesus into the hands of the religious leaders, in direct fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus quotes from Psalm 41:9, revealing that He had chosen Judas to fulfill the prophecy it contained. Nothing that was about to happen would be a surprise to Jesus. He would not be caught off-guard by Judas’ actions or shocked by the outcome of His pending trials before the high priest, Pilate, or Herod. It would all take place according to God’s sovereign plan. And Jesus wanted His disciples to know that He knew. In

time, they would look back on all that happened and recognize that He had been exactly who He had claimed to be: The Messiah.

And speaking prophetically, Jesus lets the disciples in on what the future has in store for them. When He has ascended back to His Father's side in heaven, they will become His ambassadors, His "sent ones," acting on His behalf and fulfilling the will of the Father in His absence.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who welcomes my messenger is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me." – John 13:20 NLT

And this would all be made possible by His death, resurrection, ascension, and the Holy Spirit's coming.

"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." – Acts 1:8 NLT

They would have plenty of opportunities to do as He has done, selflessly sacrificing their lives for the spread of the Gospel and the glory of God.

All Part of the Plan

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. – John 13:21-30 ESV

What immediately followed Jesus' washing is His disciples' feet was His betrayal by Judas. But this shocking and unexpected event did not catch Jesus by surprise because He had always known it was part of His Father's plan. In fact, all the way back in chapter six, John recorded Jesus' first allusion to this fateful but necessary event.

Jesus had just finished delivering a very revealing yet confusing message regarding His pending death. He left the audience in the synagogue stunned when He described Himself as the bread of life and told them that their consumption of His body and blood would be the key to eternal life.

“For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” – John 6:55-58 ESV

As a result of this rather strange pronouncement, many of Jesus' followers left Him. And once again, Jesus was not surprised by their reaction. He simply stated, “there are some of you who do not believe” and John added an aside, “For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and **who it was who would betray him**” (John 6:64 ESV). Jesus had always been aware that there would be unbelievers, even among His 12 disciples. And He reminded these men that true believers were those who had been called by His Father.

“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” – John 6:65 ESV

Even the ability to believe in Jesus was a gift from God. That is why Jesus had told them, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all” (John 6:63 ESV).

So, as Jesus watched His former “followers” walk away, He asked His disciples if they wanted to leave Him as well. To which Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69 ESV). Peter, speaking on behalf of the other disciples, declared their belief in Jesus as the Son of God. But Jesus knew something Peter did not know. One of them was an imposter and an unbeliever.

Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. – John 6:70-71 ESV

This news did not register with Peter or the other disciples. It is even possible that Judas was nonplussed by this announcement because he had yet to make his fateful decision to betray Jesus. But the point Jesus seemed to be making was that He knew exactly what was going to happen because it had always been a part of God’s sovereign plan. Even Jesus’ choosing of Judas had been for his future role as a betrayer, not as a believer. It was all part of the preordained will of God and it had been foretold by the prophets of God. Jesus made this point clear that evening in the upper room.

“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’” – John 13:18 ESV

The role Judas would play had been foreordained by God and would be in fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Psalm 41:9. And Jesus, as the Son of God, was fully aware of this aspect of His Father’s plan and not surprised by what was about to take place.

Yet John described Jesus as being “troubled in his spirit” (John 13:21 ESV). It seems likely that Jesus’ was visibly moved by the thought of all that was about to take place and His outward demeanor became evident to the disciples. This would be His final meal with them before His betrayal, arrest, trials, and crucifixion. And while Jesus was fully God and completely aware of how things would turn out, He was also fully human and impacted by the thought of all that faced Him in the hours ahead. He was about to be betrayed by one who had spent three years at His side. Even the rest of His disciples would eventually end up deserting Him. And He would undergo a series of humiliating trials, brutal beatings, and an excruciating death on a Roman cross.

Jesus, moved in spirit, announced to His disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me” (John 13:21 ESV). As expected, His disciples were shocked by this news and began to speculate who among them would dare to do such a thing. Matthew records in his gospel that the disciples were saddened by this news “and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’” (Matthew 26:22 ESV).

And Peter, anxious to know who the guilty party might be, got the attention of John, who was reclining at Jesus’ right side at the table. John, the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23

ESV), leaned back against Jesus and asked, “Lord, who is it?” (John 13:25 ESV). To which Jesus responded, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it” (John 13:26 ESV). This was in direct fulfillment of Psalm 41:9.

There are some scholars who believe that Judas was seated to Jesus’ left hand, a place of honor. So, all Jesus had to do was dip the morsel of unleavened bread into the paschal stew and hand it to His betrayer. And John reports that as soon as Jesus gave the bread to Judas, “Satan entered into him” (John 13:27 ESV).

Metaphorically, Jesus, as the bread of life, personally handed Himself over to His betrayer. In passing the morsel of bread to Judas, Jesus was symbolically offering His life to the very one who would reject His offer of eternal life – all in exchange for “the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19 ESV). Judas was going to sell out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

John would later write a letter to believers, warning them of the danger of allowing a love for the world to replace their love for God and His Son.

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. – 1 John 2:15 NLT

And he would go on to describe the destructive and unfulfilling nature of this illicit love affair with the world.

For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. – 1 John 2:16 NLT

Judas was a sell-out. It seems likely that his decision to follow Jesus had been motivated by what he thought he could get out of it. And when Jesus failed to manifest Himself as the conquering warrior and made no effort to establish His kingdom on earth, Judas lost interest. He was driven by a love of the world and a desire for fame and fortune. And knowing that the religious leaders were anxious to arrest Jesus, Judas had decided to turn his three wasted years as a disciple of Jesus into a financial windfall. But Jesus warned that this decision by Judas would have deadly consequences.

“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” – Matthew 26:24 ESV

Both men were fated for death. Jesus would be betrayed by Judas so that He might fulfill the will of His Heavenly Father and suffer for the sins of mankind by His death on a tree. And Judas, after selling out the sinless Lamb of God, would also suffer an ignoble death by hanging himself from a tree. His crime and its punishment would be remembered throughout the centuries.

After handing the bread to Judas, Jesus whispered to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (John 13:27 ESV). His hour had come, and it was important that Judas fulfill his role. His betrayal of Jesus was going to set into motion the final phase of God’s grand redemptive plan. And John simply records: “after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night” (John 13:30 ESV).

Darkness descended. Day turned to night. With the last four words of verse 30, John reminds his readers of the words spoken by Jesus in regard to His pending death.

“My light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.” – John 12:35-36 NLT

The time had come for the light to be extinguished. The moment for Jesus’ death was fast approaching. But it was all part of the divine plan to bring salvation to a sin-darkened world.

A Long and Painful Goodbye

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.” – John 13:31-38 ESV

After the shocking announcement that one of His own would betray Him, Jesus begins what has come to be known as His “farewell discourse.” Judas had left the upper room, leaving Jesus alone with His 11 remaining disciples. These men were likely still in a state of bewilderment, trying to assimilate all that Jesus had just said and done.

The fact that no one attempted to hinder Judas from leaving reveals that they had not fully comprehended the gravity of the situation or the meaning behind Jesus’ words. John even alludes to their misunderstanding by revealing what he and the other disciples had been thinking when Jesus said to Judas, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (John 13:27 ESV).

Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. – John 13:28-29 ESV

From their places at the table where they had just celebrated the Passover, the 11 disciples watched as their brother walked into the night. With Judas’ departure, another form of cleansing or separation took place. When Jesus had finished washing the disciples’ feet, He had told them, “you are clean, but not every one of you” (John 13:10 ESV). The inference was that Judas, who had also had his feet washed by Jesus, remained unclean. He was not one of them. His intention to betray Jesus revealed his true heart and exposed his state of disbelief.

But with Judas gone, the room was left occupied by those whom Jesus had originally chosen to be His followers and who were destined to be His future ambassadors. Everything Jesus would say from this point forward would be designed to brace these men for all that was about to happen. But it would also prepare them for the roles they would play once He was gone. He began by telling them:

“The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. And since God receives glory because of the Son, he will give his own glory to the Son, and he will do so at once.” – John 13:31-32 NLT

In the opening verses of his gospel, John testified regarding Jesus: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 ESV).

As one of those chosen by Jesus, John had been an eyewitness to all that Jesus had said and done. He had been able to see the amazing miracles Jesus had performed. He had sat under the remarkable teaching of this Rabbi from Nazareth. And over the three years he had spent with Jesus, John had become convinced that Jesus really was the Word become flesh. He was the Messiah, and His entire life and ministry revealed the glory of His identity as the Son of God.

Now, Jesus tells John and the other disciples that the time has come for Him to “enter His glory.” He was going to be returning to His Father’s side in heaven, but the path to His glory would pass through Golgotha. Jesus had already alluded to the fact that His glorification would require His crucifixion. Earlier in the day, He had told His disciples:

“Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.” – John 12:23-24 NLT

In the physical world, life precedes death. But in the spiritual realm, it is the other way around. Death precedes life. All that Jesus had done in His earthly life had given evidence of His glory as God’s own Son. But God would use His Son’s death on the cross as the ultimate proof of His identity, and He would do so by raising Him back to life. The Son of Man would die, but the Son of God would rise again and return to His Father’s side in heaven.

This was not the first time that Jesus had communicated to His disciples the idea of death preceding life. He had told them that they too would be required to sacrifice their temporal earthly lives in order to gain eternal life.

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.” – Matthew 16:24-25 NLT

What they didn’t understand was that Jesus was about to take up His own cross. He was just hours away from laying down His life for their sake. But with the Father’s help, He would pick it up again. In a split second of time, God would restore to life the beaten, broken, and bloodied body of His Son. And He would see to it that His glorified Son was restored to His rightful place at His side.

The apostle Paul describes this death-to-life transformation in powerful terms, stating that Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11 ESV).

But Jesus informs His disciples that His glorification would result in their isolation from Him. In addition to the news that He would be betrayed by one of His own, Jesus now informs them that He would be leaving them, and they would not be able to follow Him.

“Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can’t come where I am going.” – John 13:33 NLT

Upon His departure, the disciples would find themselves alone and in need of one another’s companionship and support. Jesus wanted them to understand that they were going to be part of a new and totally unique community, made up of all those who believed in Him and become members of His body. And one of the requirements for membership in this community would be mutual love for one another.

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” – John 13:34-35 NLT

Later on, in this same farewell discourse, Jesus will elaborate on this command to love one another, using His own death as an example of the kind of love He is talking about.

“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” – John 15:12-13 NLT

Jesus had earlier described Himself as the Good Shepherd and had indicated that His love for His sheep would be exhibited by His willingness to die for them.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” – John 10:11 NLT

Now, He was telling His disciples that they too would need to be willing to die for one another. The life of a follower of Christ is marked by self-sacrifice and selfless love for others. Again, the apostle Paul used Jesus as the prime example of what this kind of selfless, sacrificial life was to look like.

Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. – Philippians 2:3-5 NLT

With His death on the cross, Jesus exhibited an attitude of humility, sacrifice, obedience, and love. He faithfully followed the will of His Father and willingly laid down His life for the good of others. And He expected His disciples to do the same.

But Peter, as the unofficial spokesman for the group, vocalized their confusion by asking, “Lord, where are you going?” (John 13:36 ESV). All the talk about glorification and loving one another went right over their heads. All they had heard was “Where I am going you cannot come” (John 13:33 ESV). In spite of all that Jesus had said, they were oblivious to the reality of the cross. The last thing on their minds was the death of Jesus.

And Jesus, speaking rather cryptically, assured His disciples that while they could not immediately accompany Him to His destination, they would one day join Him. This is probably a veiled reference to both His death and His glorification. He was headed to the cross and, ultimately, to His Father’s side in heaven. And one day, each of the disciples would experience their own physical deaths, most by martyrdom, and then join Jesus in heaven. But for now, they would remain behind because God had work for them to do.

But Peter, impulsive and outspoken as ever, blurted out, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:37 ESV). He boldly proclaimed his love and allegiance to Jesus, declaring that he was willing to face anything, even death, to prove His faithfulness. But little did Peter know that his commitment to Jesus would prove wholly insufficient and, ultimately, insincere. The next words out of Jesus’ mouth must have left Peter devastated and embarrassed.

“Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.” – John 13:38 ESV

But Jesus knew that Peter, however well-intentioned he might be, lacked the one thing he and the other disciples were going to need if they were going to survive His departure: The Holy Spirit.

All You Need to Know

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

Jesus has just told Peter that he will deny Him; not once, but three times. Then He followed this painful pronouncement with a rather incongruous statement that seems a bit out of place.

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” – John 14:1 ESV

Everyone in the room that night was troubled, including Jesus (John 13:21). Jesus’ mind was filled with knowledge about all that was about to take place. He had been aware of Judas’ betrayal. He knew that Peter, one of the members of His inner circle, would end up denying any knowledge Him. Jesus also knew His disciples would all desert Him in His hour of greatest need. The crowds that had eagerly flocked to watch Him perform signs and wonders would be long gone. And He was fully aware that the hours ahead would be filled with humiliation, insufferable pain, and the agony of the cross.

But what about the disciples? They were unaware of most of these details, yet they were still reeling from all that Jesus had just told them. They were disturbed by the news that one of them would betray Him. But even when Judas left the upper room, they remained unsure as to where he was going or what he was about to do. Yet their hearts *were* troubled. Because they knew something ominous was about to happen. They just couldn't put their finger on what it was.

And when Jesus had announced His imminent departure, He added the disconcerting news that they would not be joining Him. After three years of constant companionship with them, Jesus was going to abandon them. And then He tells them, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled.”

And poor Peter must have taken this statement particularly hard. He had just been outed as the one who would deny Jesus. How was he supposed to be untroubled by this news? And was Jesus’ statement about belief aimed at him? Was Jesus insinuating that Peter lacked faith?

Jesus, in His compassionate and caring way, is attempting to encourage His dismayed and discouraged disciples. He knows they are struggling. And as the Good Shepherd, He cares deeply about their physical and spiritual well-being. His love for them is a primary factor behind His pending death for them.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” – John 10:11 NLT

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” – John 15:13 NLT

But in their greatest moment of confusion and consternation, Jesus encourages them to believe. The darkness is closing in, but He still remains the light of the world. While everything around them is looking bleak and foreboding, He remains the same. He is still “the Christ, the Son of the living God” just as Peter had confessed Him to be (Matthew 16:16). He was still “the Messiah,” just as Andrew had announced to Peter three years earlier (John 1:43). And He was still “the Son of God” and “the King of Israel” as Nathanael had proclaimed (John 1:49).

But now, they were beginning to get a glimpse into His true mission. He had not come to set them free from subjugation to Rome. His advent as the Son of God had not been so He could set up His Kingdom on earth. He had come to offer His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), and the time had come for Him to fulfill His God-ordained mission.

There was so much they didn’t know or understand. But it is not as if Jesus had kept them in the dark about His future. In fact, Matthew records that immediately after Peter had made His public confession that Jesus was “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16 NLT), Jesus “began to tell his disciples *plainly* that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead” (Matthew 16:21 NLT).

And yet, the very same man who had boldly confessed Jesus to be the Messiah pulled Him aside and rebuked Him.

“Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!” – Matthew 16:22 NLT

Jesus’ plain words concerning His death left Peter stunned and appalled. It was not what he expected or wanted. It didn’t fit into his concept of the Messiah. So, he simply rejected it.

And this had not been the last time Jesus shared news of what was going to happen. Even as they had made their way to Jerusalem and before His triumphal entry into the city, Jesus had reiterated to His disciples all that was about to happen.

“Listen,” he said, “we’re going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die. Then they will hand him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip, and crucified. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead.” – Matthew 20:18-19 NLT

He couldn’t have made it much clearer. But they had refused to accept what He had to say because His words were not what they wanted to hear. And it is interesting to note that,

immediately after Jesus made this announcement to His disciples, John's own mother had approached Jesus with a rather presumptuous request on behalf of John and his brother, James.

"In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left." – Matthew 20:21 NLT

She obviously expected Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom and was hoping to convince Him to award her two sons with places of prominence in His administration. But Jesus informed her and her two sons who were standing right beside her, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?" (Matthew 20:22 NLT).

They had the timeline all wrong. They had been expecting a Messiah who would come as a conquering King. But Jesus had come to play the part of the suffering servant. And, once again, Jesus had made this aspect of His earthly ministry quite clear.

When the other 9 disciples had gotten wind of what the mother of James and John had done, they had been furious. They all shared an expectation that they would play major roles in Jesus' coming kingdom. But Jesus had news for them.

"You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." – Matthew 20:25-28 NLT

Jesus had come to earth so that He could hang on a cross, not sit on a throne. He had taken on human flesh so that He might wear a crown of thorns, not one made of gold and precious stones. His incarnation had been so that He might suffer the humiliation of crucifixion, not the joy of His own inauguration as king. That time would come, but it would not be now.

But Jesus wanted His disciples to know that they could still trust Him. Despite all that was happening around them, they could take Him at His word as the Son of God. And while much of what they had heard Him say had been less-than-encouraging, He wanted them to know there was good news. This dark cloud had a silver lining.

"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." – John 14:2-3 ESV

Yes, Jesus would be leaving them, but for a very good reason. He would be returning to His Father's side where He would begin preparations for the day when they would each join Him. And when the time was right, Jesus assured them, He would return for His own.

Like so many of Jesus' other statements, this one flew right over the heads of His disciples. It would only be after Jesus had died, been resurrected, and returned to heaven, that the disciples would put all the pieces together and understand the significance of His words. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, John and the other 10 disciples received a divine capacity to comprehend all that Jesus had said and done in their three years with Him. For the first time, it all began to make sense.

But on that night in the upper room, when Jesus insinuated that they knew where He was going, Thomas had confessed, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5 ESV). He was confused and concerned. How would they find Jesus if they didn't know His destination?

Then Jesus dropped the bombshell that destroyed all their preconceived notions concerning righteousness, salvation, forgiveness, and justification before God.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." – John 14:6 ESV

He boldly and unequivocally proclaimed Himself to be the one and only source of access to God. And the pathway to the Father would pass through the shadow of the cross. Jesus tells His disciples that it is their relationship with Him that assures them of having a permanent relationship with God. Verse seven might be better translated, "If you have known me, you will know my Father too" (John 14:7 NET). And the inference seems to be that they since they *have* known Jesus, they most certainly *have* known and seen God. It was their belief in Jesus as the Son of God that made possible their access to and relationship with God. So, when Thomas had said they didn't know the way, Jesus assured him that he was wrong. They knew Him and that was all they needed to know.

Seeing Is Believing

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” – John 14:8-14 ESV

Jesus seems to be trying to make a not-so-subtle point with His disciples.

*“**believe** also in me.”* – vs 1

*“**Believe** me...”* – vs 11

*“whoever **believes** in me.”* – vs 12

In attempting to prepare them for His death and departure, Jesus stresses the need for their continued belief or trust in Him. During the last three years, He has given them ample evidence regarding His identity as the Son of God. By virtue of His many miracles and messages, Jesus had revealed His power and authority, given to Him by God. These men had witnessed never-before-seen signs and wonders, from the turning of water into wine to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. From had watched Jesus walk on water in the midst of a storm. They could recall the many occasions when Jesus had debated with the Pharisees, amazing them with the boldness and authority with which He spoke. He had repeatedly left His learned adversaries speechless and seemingly powerless to refute His words.

But as the day of His death drew closer, Jesus knew that these men were going to have their faith in Him tested like never before. Even though He had repeatedly told them exactly what was going to take place in Jerusalem, His death was going to catch them completely off guard. And the last 24 hours had been an emotional roller coaster for these men, as they had gone from the ecstatic high associated with His triumphal entry to the depths of despair after hearing that one of them would betray Him.

The days ahead were going to be dark. The spiritual battle that had been simmering under the surface for the last three years was going to explode on the scene in dramatic fashion. The steadily increasing anger of the Pharisees and their fellow members of the Sanhedrin would finally reach its boiling point, manifesting itself in a practically maniacal call for the death of Jesus.

But knowing all this, Jesus had told them, “Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me” (John 14:1 NET). He wanted them to keep believing – in spite of the circumstances. Things were going to get worse before they got better, but they could still trust Him. Yes, their world was about to be rocked and they would be tempted to believe the worst, but Jesus wanted them to keep their minds focused on who He was and all that He had done. He was the Son of God, the Messiah, the King of Israel, the bread of life, the source of living water, the Good Shepherd, and the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. None of that had changed. And nothing that was about to happen would alter the reality of Jesus’ identity or keep Him from accomplishing His God-ordained mission. In fact, all that was about to take place would be according to the Father’s divine plan and in keeping with His sovereign will.

And Jesus assured His disciples that His relationship with the Father would be unaltered by anything that was about to happen. The subsequent events surrounding Jesus’ death were going to provide them a direct pathway to the Father. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 ESV). But the reality was that Jesus had already revealed the Father to them by virtue of His presence among them. As Paul wrote, Jesus was “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 ESV). And John had opened his gospel with the assurance that Jesus was the very manifestation of God.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father’s side, has made Him known. – John 1:18 BSB

But when Jesus told His disciples “From now on you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:7 ESV), Phillip blurted out, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8 ESV). He didn’t get it. After three years of intimate contact with Jesus, he still failed to grasp the full reality of His identity as the Son of God. Phillip, like the rest of the disciples, believed in Jesus, but he did not understand that to see Jesus was to see God. When Jesus had said, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30 NLT), the full import of His words had escaped them.

So, Phillip did what any good Jew would have done if given the opportunity. He asked that he might get a glimpse of God. He expressed the same desire that Moses had communicated to God in the wilderness: “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18 ESV).

But Jesus gently rebuked Phillip and, in doing so, revealed a vital truth regarding the relationship between the Father and His Son.

“Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?” – John 14:9 NLT

Notice Jesus’ emphasis on His identity. “You still don’t know who I am.” After three years of walking with Jesus, Phillip and his companions were still unconvinced of Jesus’ deity. Yes, they believed He was *from* God but were having difficulty believing Him to actually *be* God.

Jesus' claim to be one with God was the fuel that had inflamed the hatred of the religious leaders against Him. In an earlier confrontation with them, immediately after He had healed a man on the Sabbath, He had stated, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17 ESV). And John records the response of the Jewish leaders:

*This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but **he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*** – John 5:18 ESV

The Jewish religious leaders had clearly understood what Jesus was saying, and they rejected it as nothing less than blasphemy, a crime worthy of death. But the disciples never uttered a word. They had heard the same statements from the lips of Jesus, but John never provides any insights into what they thought about His claims.

But Phillip's request speaks volumes. It clearly shows that the disciples were still wrestling with the concept of Jesus' deity. So, Jesus confronted their unbelief.

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me." – John 14:10 NLT

The relationship between Jesus and His Father was essential. It was the key to all that was about to take place. Jesus wanted them to know that the events they were about to witness would be the sovereign will and work of God. Jesus was doing exactly what His Father had told Him to do. And every word He had ever spoken had come directly from the throne of God.

As Jews, Phillip and his fellow disciples had been steeped in the concept of monotheism – the belief that there was only one God. They had been raised on passages like those found in the book of Isaiah:

"I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God..." – Isaiah 45:5 ESV

"I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." – Isaiah 44:6 ESV

"I alone am God. There is no other God— there never has been, and there never will be."
– Isaiah 43:10 NLT

The concept of the Trinity was nowhere on their radar screen. They had no way of understanding what Jesus was saying. Jesus was revealing to them a truth that had escaped their biblical scholars and seemed to contradict a basic tenet of their faith system. But the deity of Jesus was vital to all that was about to happen. It was His identity as the Son of God that would make His pending death effectual, as the sinless Son sacrificed His life on behalf of sinful mankind.

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. – 2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT

And Jesus pleaded with His disciples to believe that He and the Father were one. No matter how difficult it was for them to grasp this concept, it was essential that they recognize it as true. And yet, knowing that they would continue to struggle right up until the bitter end, Jesus encouraged them to believe what they would see. If they still couldn't believe with their ears, they were going to have ample opportunity to believe with their eyes.

“Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, but if you do not believe me, believe because of the miraculous deeds themselves.” – John 14:11 ESV

The Best is Yet to Come

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

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” – John 14:15-21 ESV

Jesus has just assured His confused and shell-shocked disciples that they will do “greater works” than He has done. But this amazing promise is only for those who believe in Him and will only be available after He has returned to His Father (John 14:12). And Jesus further assures them that when that day comes, they will be able to ask Him anything “in His name” and He will do it (John 14:14). The ability to do greater things and divinely answered prayers. Those two promises were meant to encourage the disciples but, like so many of His other statements, they went right over their heads. All throughout His time with them, Jesus had fielded all kinds of questions from these men. They had constantly bombarded Him with requests about everything from the nature of the kingdom to the meaning of His parables. They were naturally curious and filled with childlike inquisitiveness, anxious to know more about who Jesus was and what He had come to do. But the closer He got to the cross, the less they seemed to comprehend His true identity and purpose.

But Jesus is letting them know that things are about to change, and not just for Him. While His life will end in death, it will be followed by His miraculous resurrection. Then, when Jesus has returned to His Father’s side, their lives will be changed forever. They will end up doing “greater things” than He has done. But what does this mean? Is this a promise that they will raise the dead just as He did? Will followers of Jesus have the capacity to walk on water or turn water into wine? While some believe that is exactly what Jesus was promising, the context seems to indicate something far different. While the “great things” that Jesus did had amazed His onlookers, what truly made them great was that they were done in the power of God, according to the will of God, and for the glory of God.

They were intended to be signs of who Jesus was and were meant to bring glory to the one who had sent Him. And Jesus is telling His disciples that the same will be true for them. They will do “greater things” because each of them will be operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. And their number will grow. But the point of emphasis is not the nature of the things they will do, but the power in which they will do them, and the fact that what they do will be done in God’s power and for His glory.

And they will still be able to make requests of Jesus, but now they will ask in His name and according to His will. They will no longer be driven by selfish concerns but will pray according to the will of God and in keeping with the character of Jesus Himself. Their motivations will shift from self-gratification and personal pleasure to the desire to bring God glory. The kinds of requests they bring to God in Jesus' name will change dramatically.

But how will the death and resurrection of Jesus make all this possible? How will His departure bring about such radical transformations in the lives of His disciples? The answer is found in verses 14-31. Jesus introduces His disciples to the secret that will allow them to do greater things and pray successfully in His name.

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth." – John 14:16 ESV

Jesus informs His dispirited disciples that His departure will be followed by the Spirit's arrival. This "helper" or "advocate" will be the Spirit of truth. The Greek word is *paraklētos*, and it refers to "one who comes alongside." This word has been translated as counselor, helper, assistant, and intercessor. But Jesus is referring to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Yet Jesus is not insinuating that the Holy Spirit's arrival will be the first time He has come to earth. He is letting the disciples know that the Spirit, who has been *with* them all along, will take up residence *in* them.

"You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." – John 14:17 ESV

Their relationship with the Spirit will change. As long as Jesus was with them, He served as their helper or advocate. But with His departure, they would need "another helper," one who would step in and guide the followers of Jesus in His absence. The Spirit of God would play a more integral and intimate role in their lives. He would not only be with them, but he would also come to dwell *within* them. And once again, the full weight of this news escaped the disciples. They had no way of understanding what Jesus was talking about. But it would be the Holy Spirit's presence within them that would empower them to do the greater things that Jesus promised.

And this power would only be available to those who believe in Jesus – those who love Him and keep His commandments. But what are the commandments to which Jesus is referring? It would seem that, based on the context, Jesus is referring back to His two earlier statements concerning belief.

"Believe in God; believe also in me." – John 14:1 ESV

"Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." – John 14:11 ESV

The greatest expression of their love for Jesus would be their willingness to believe in who He was – all the way to the end. Notice that Jesus provided them with a conditional statement:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper...” – John 14:15-16 ESV

The conjunction, *kai* can also be translated as “then,” and it would seem that Jesus is letting them know that their love for Him will allow them to believe in Him, in spite of all that is about to happen. And their belief will not be in vain. He will rise from the dead, ascend to His Father, and send the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and empower them for future service for God.

Knowing exactly what is going through His disciples’ minds, Jesus assures them that He is not going to leave them and allow them to live like abandoned children in the world. While His death will seem like the end of the world to them, He lets them know that they will see Him again. The world, referring to all those who refused to believe in Him, would never see Jesus again. The Pharisees would assume that their adversary was permanently gone. The Jews who had followed Jesus would return to their old lives and, in time, would forget that Jesus ever existed. But after His resurrection, Jesus would appear to hundreds of His followers – those who loved Him and continued to believe in Him.

And Jesus provides His disciples with a powerful message of encouragement.

“Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” – John 14:19 ESV

His resurrection would be life-changing for them. And it would fulfill what He had said to Martha just prior to raising her dead brother back to life.

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” – John 11:25-26 ESV

With His resurrection and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus and the Father were one. And they would know it because they would experience unity with the Father and the Son through the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God.

Jesus is encouraging His disciples to keep believing. He knows they are struggling with doubt and fear. They are confused by all that He has been saying and are finding it difficult to understand how any of this could be in the will of God. And as the events unfold in the hours ahead, it will only appear to get worse. But Jesus assures them:

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” – John 14:21 ESV

While the disciples would continue to display fear and doubt, even abandoning Jesus at His moment of greatest need, they would never stop loving Him. And even in their weakness and filled with all kinds of questions, they would continue to believe in Him. And their belief would not be disappointed. Their love and belief would be rewarded by the love of the Father, expressed in the gracious gift of His Son as the payment for their sin debt. And when Jesus had fulfilled His mission, God would raise Him to life again, guaranteeing the hope of eternal life to all those who loved and believed in His Son.

The Promise of Peace

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.” – John 14:22-31 ESV

The disciples were good men. They legitimately loved Jesus and, over the last three years of living with and listening to Him, they had come to believe that He was the Messiah. But their synagogue-sponsored religious education as young boys had not prepared them for what they were hearing from the lips of Jesus. Their concepts regarding the Messiah were being turned upside down. All of Jesus’ talk about His pending death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders was disturbing because it made no sense. When the long-awaited Messiah finally appeared on the scene, He was supposed to be welcomed as a King and the Savior of His downtrodden and oppressed people. And when Jesus had entered into Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna” and “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13 ESV), the disciples must have been ecstatic. Their King had come. And they had assumed that, as His faithful disciples, they would be part of the Messiah’s royal retinue.

But within hours, their joy had turned to sorrow and confusion. At their celebration of the Passover, Jesus had announced the news that one of them would betray Him. Peter had been informed that he would end up denying Jesus. Their newly announced King had begun talking about being “lifted up” and even leaving them. And His repeated calls for them to believe in Him must have come across as an indictment of their faith. Was He questioning their commitment? Did He doubt their love for Him?

And their growing confusion and concern are evident in the words of one of His lesser-known disciples, who had the unfortunate burden of bearing the same name as Jesus’ betrayer.

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to him, “Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large?” – John 14:22

NLT

His question was in response to Jesus' earlier statement: "Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me" (John 14:19 NLT). He was perplexed by Jesus' words because he believed that when the Messiah came, He would reveal Himself to every nation on earth. The Messiah's coming would have worldwide significance.

He was thoroughly confused by all of Jesus' talk about leaving and reappearing. He was hung up on all the references about going, coming, disappearing, and revealing. But rather than answer Judas' question, Jesus returned to the subject of loving and obeying.

"All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me." – John 14:23-24 NLT

Jesus is narrowing the playing field. While Judas is thinking globally and has an image in his mind of a Messianic Kingdom with worldwide implications, Jesus is focused on the flock that had been given to Him by God. In His role as the Good Shepherd, Jesus was committed to caring for those whom the Father had called and for whom He had come to die.

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." – John 10:14-16 ESV

It is interesting to note that this question came from a man named Judas. The other disciple who shared that same name had just departed the upper room, under the direct influence of Satan himself, and was in the process of preparing to betray Jesus. But this Judas, while struggling with understanding all that was happening, was still by Jesus' side. And like his fellow disciples, Judas was being encouraged to continue believing. Jesus was asking them to trust Him in spite of all the questions they wanted to ask Him. And He reminded them that His words were not His own. He was not making this stuff up, but everything He was telling them was directly from God the Father.

"And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me." – John 14:24 NLT

And while Jesus knew they were having a difficult time accepting what He had to say, He assured them that the day would come when it would all make sense to them.

"But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you." – John 14:26 NLT

When the Holy Spirit came, He would clear up any remaining confusion by providing the disciples with the divine enablement to recall and comprehend all that Jesus had ever said to them. The “comforter” would become their instructor. And Jesus describes this coming ministry of the Holy Spirit as a “gift.”

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” – John 14:27 NLT

Yes, for the moment, Judas and his friends were wrestling with doubt and fear. But if they would keep believing and trusting, they would eventually experience an overwhelming sense of peace when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in them and began to minister to them. Jesus was leaving, but He was not going to leave them alone or empty-handed. He was going to leave them with a parting gift – the Holy Spirit of God – who would come alongside them, providing them with power, insight, and the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

One of the most difficult things the disciples would have to do was to believe and *wait*. Jesus expected them to trust Him. But that was going to require that they remember all that He had said to them while their whole world seemed to be collapsing around them.

“Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.” – John 14:28-29 NLT

But the day was coming when the proverbial light would come on and they would see with a new Spirit-induced clarity. All the pieces would come together. The clouds of confusion would dissipate and be replaced with a faith-building, belief-stirring sense of understanding of everything. And as John penned the words of his gospel, he was doing so from the other side of the cross. He had experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. His eyes had been opened and all the cryptic-sounding, mind-numbing messages of Jesus had suddenly made sense. All the miracles and messages of Jesus had taken on a whole new meaning. As a result, John’s belief in Jesus had grown exponentially. And as John reflected back on all that He had seen and heard, He couldn’t help but tell others of the glories of Jesus, the Son of God.

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy. – 1 John 1:1-4 NLT

But Jesus, knowing that the time for His death was fast-approaching, abruptly ended His farewell discourse and set His mind on the task at hand.

“I don’t have much more time to talk to you, because the ruler of this world approaches. He has no power over me, but I will do what the Father requires of me, so that the world will know that I love the Father. Come, let’s be going.” – John 14:30-31 NLT

A Future Full of Fruitfulness

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” – John 15:1-5 ESV

Jesus and His disciples have now departed the upper room where they had shared the Passover meal together. He is resolute in His determination to keep His providentially preordained appointment with the cross and the death appointed for Him by His Heavenly Father. But the 11 disciples who remain are still trying to get their heads around all that Jesus has been revealing to them. And even as they make their way into the night, He continues to expand their understanding and prepare them for what lies ahead.

This passage, which is part of Jesus’ ongoing farewell discourse, provides one of the most powerful descriptions of what it means to experience eternal life with God through the Son. Jesus borrows from the familiar imagery of the vineyard to create an extended metaphor designed to convey the non-negotiable dependency His followers must have in Him. As a result of His death, burial, and resurrection, these men will no longer be independently minded followers, but they will become totally reliant extensions of God’s glory as expressed through His Son.

Over a period of three years, these men had expressed their allegiance to Jesus by choosing to follow Him and sacrifice all else on behalf of Him. They had given up their careers, left their families, exposed themselves to ridicule, gone hungry, suffered life-threatening storms at sea, traveled countless miles, and listened to more lessons than they could even remember. They were dedicated men who loved Jesus greatly. On several occasions, they had even expressed their willingness to lay down their lives for Him. But Jesus knew that the key to their continued faithfulness and fruitfulness would be through His death and resurrection. The very thing they feared the most would be the one thing that would transform their lives and transcend all their expectations of greatness and glory.

So much of what Jesus has told His disciples has escaped them. And His continued discussions regarding His death had left them frightened and frustrated. They couldn’t understand why He had to die. They couldn’t bear the thought that He was going to leave them. But Jesus had told them that His death would prove to be life-giving and fruit-bearing.

“Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for

eternity. Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.” – John 12:23-26 NLT

Extending His earlier discussion of death, life, and fruitfulness, Jesus declares, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1 ESV). This will be the last of His “I am” statements and, with it, Jesus conveys to His disciples that everything is about to change, including their relationship with Him.

The imagery of the vine would have been very familiar to the disciples, not just because they lived in an agrarian culture where vines were ubiquitous, but because the vine was a symbol of Israel’s relationship with God. Every time they passed by the temple in Jerusalem, they would have seen the golden vine that adorned its walls. But according to the prophets, the nation of Israel, planted by God to produce abundant fruit, ended up producing wild grapes.

*Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes. – Isaiah 5:1-2 ESV*

And Isaiah made it painfully clear that this lovingly planted vine that produced less-than-quality fruit represented the people of God.

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry! – Isaiah 5:7 ESV*

Now, Jesus was declaring Himself to be the vine. In doing so, He was letting His disciples know that He had replaced Israel as the sole source of fruitfulness. He would be the fulfillment of all that Israel should have been. Unlike the people of Israel, His life would yield abundant fruit and bring glory to God. The sad reality was that God’s people had failed to remain faithful. They had refused to keep their preferred status as God’s chosen people and chose instead to worship false gods. And the prophet Jeremiah had expressed to them God’s displeasure.

*But I was the one who planted you,
choosing a vine of the purest stock—the very best.
How did you grow into this corrupt wild vine? – Jeremiah 2:21 NLT*

But with this final “I am” statement, Jesus lets His disciples know that He is the true vine. He has been faithful and fully obedient to the will of God, the vinedresser. He was “planted” by God with a purpose in mind: to bear much fruit. And Jesus, by sacrificing His life, would fulfill that purpose by producing a “plentiful harvest of new lives” (John 12:24 NLT).

And the most amazing aspect of Jesus’ fruit-bearing ministry is the vital role His disciples will play. They will become the branches through which His life-giving, fruit-bearing ministry will flow. But it will require constant abiding on their part. The key to their role in producing fruit will be their dependence upon the vine. And Jesus utilizes the imagery of the vinedresser or gardener tending His vines to convey exactly what He means.

“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he [the vinedresser] takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” – John 15:2 ESV

There has been much debate over the centuries as to what Jesus meant in these verses. In stating that a fruitless branch will be taken away, was He describing a believer’s loss of salvation? This idea would stand in direct opposition to the clear teaching of the Scriptures regarding the believer’s assurance of salvation. Jesus goes on to describe these fruitless branches as worthless and destined for destruction.

“Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.” – John 15:6 NLT

Again, is Jesus suggesting that believers who fail to produce fruit will be removed from their relationship with Him and turned over to eternal judgment? That seems highly unlikely, based on His own admission to His Father that He had not “lost” any of those the Father had given Him.

“While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction...” – John 17:12 ESV

It is important to remember that Jesus is addressing the 11 disciples who have chosen to remain with Him. They are walking with Him as He makes His way across the Kidron Valley from the city of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane. These men represent all those who have placed their faith and hope in Jesus. But Jesus is revealing that the real key to their future fruitfulness and faithfulness will be the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God. As a result of His coming death, resurrection, and ascension, they will find themselves the recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit. He will permanently attach them to the vine, allowing them to play a vital role in the fruit-bearing plans of God.

The emphasis in this passage is on fruitfulness, not fruitlessness. It is on the vinedresser's purpose to reap a harvest of fruit through the vine and the branches. Jesus was not threatening His disciples with a loss of salvation. He was simply conveying that their future relationship with Him would be all about fruit-bearing. To not bear fruit would be illogical and unacceptable. The very fact that He describes God as the vinedresser who "prunes" the branches so they can bear even more fruit reinforces His point.

He calls His disciples to remain or abide in Him.

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me." – John 15:4 NLT

This had immediate application, as the disciples faced the uncertainty of the circumstances surrounding them. Jesus knew that the next few hours were going to be trying and He was calling them to remain faithful, continuing to believe in who He was. In a sense, they were about to be pruned, as God cut away all their preconceived notions regarding the Messiah. In just a matter of hours, all their lofty hopes and aspirations that Jesus would establish His Kingdom on earth would be shattered. But Jesus pleads with them to remain.

From the other gospel accounts, we know that the disciples ended up deserting Jesus. When the authorities came to arrest Jesus, they each fled into the night. But there is a sense in which they remained. They stayed nearby and together. A faint flicker of hope remained even as they faced an unknown and uncertain future.

But Jesus was assuring them that their days of fruitfulness were not over. He would still use them to do great things. But the primary lesson they were going to learn from it all was their need for total reliance upon Jesus for all things. They could produce no fruit apart from Him. And their lives after His return to heaven would be marked by complete dependence upon Him.

The Promise of Fruitfulness

⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. – John 15:6-11 ESV

So, what does Jesus mean when He says that those who do not abide in Him will be taken away, thrown out, and left to wither, then collected and burned? Whatever He is trying to say, it doesn't sound good. And these enigmatic verses have caused generations of believers to speculate and debate over their exact meaning. The sad result is that the church has ended up placing far more emphasis on what it might mean to *not* abide rather than finding comfort and encouragement from Jesus' call to *remain* in Him.

This entire passage is about fruitfulness. And Jesus establishes that fact from the onset.

*“Every branch in me that does not **bear fruit** he takes away, and every branch that does **bear fruit** he prunes, that it may **bear more fruit.**”* – John 16:2 ESV

His message to His disciples is that He fully expects them to bear fruit because they are in a relationship with Him. They share a special bond with Him that is intended to result in fruitfulness. But the key to their fruitfulness will be their continued relationship with Him. To leave Him would be disastrous. It would sever the tie to the vine and result in a life of unfruitfulness. It would destroy any sense of purpose for their lives. And Jesus' mention of the branch that fails to abide is meant to sound absurd and ridiculous. It is a non sequitur, a statement containing illogical conclusions. No branch would ever choose to remove itself from the vine. To do so would be to go against its very purpose for being.

This passage recalls an earlier conversation between Jesus and His disciples. In His lengthy discourse on the bread of life, Jesus mentioned that “Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood **remains in me, and I in him**” (John 6:56 ESV). This rather graphic and confusing statement from Jesus resulted in many of His followers leaving Him. And He turned to His disciples and asked them if they were going to leave Him as well. To which Peter responded:

*“**Lord, to whom would we go?** You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.”* – John 6:67-68 ESV

Yes, the words of Jesus had been difficult to understand. His talk of eating His body and drinking His blood had sounded bizarre to the disciples. Yet they believed in Him. He was the Holy One of God, and to walk away from Him would make even less sense than some of the things He said. So, they were sticking with Him.

Notice that Jesus had told the crowds that day that if they ate His flesh and drank His blood, they would **remain** in Him and He would **remain** in them. Jesus used the very same word that is found John 15:4.

*“**Abide** in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it **abides** in the vine, neither can you, unless you **abide** in me.”*

All who partake of Jesus' body and blood, by believing in His sacrificial death on their behalf, will experience a permanent and irrevocable bond with Him. And that bond will make possible a life filled with fruitfulness and spiritual prosperity. This message from Jesus was meant to be a source of encouragement to the disciples. In the dark days ahead, they were to recall these words from Jesus and find hope.

But sadly, the church has tended to turn the act of abiding into a **work**. We have made it a mandatory requirement for experiencing fruitfulness. In other words, if **we** don't abide, **we** don't bear fruit. Which tends to convey the idea that any fruitfulness in our lives is completely up to us. But that is not what Jesus was saying. In fact, He conveyed just the opposite message. He told His disciples, “you cannot be fruitful *unless* you remain in me” (John 15:4 NLT). In other words, it is the relationship that results in fruit, not the **act** of abiding. No branch can produce any fruit on its own. And at the same time, no branch has to **work** at remaining attached to the vine. It is a natural relationship that requires no effort on the part of the branch.

Yet, when we find our lives spiritually fruitless, we tend to question what we might be doing wrong. We begin to wonder what it is that we need to do to get the spiritual juices flowing so that we might be more productive and fruitful. And rather than abiding in the relationship we already have, we begin to act as if the fruit production is all up to us. But what does Jesus say?

*“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. **For apart from me you can do nothing.**” – John 15:5 NLT*

No branch can produce fruit apart from the vine. And no Christian can live a life of spiritual abundance apart from His relationship with Jesus. The key to fruitfulness is recognizing our dependence and complete reliance upon Jesus. That is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote, “For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13 NLT).

Don't miss what Jesus said in verse 5: “Those who remain in me, and I in them.” That is exactly what He said in John 6:54: “Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood **remains in me, and I in him.**” The remaining or abiding to which Jesus refers is not an act of the flesh, but a work of the Spirit. It takes place through belief, not effort. That is the point Paul made to the believers in Ephesus.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. – Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

Our fruitfulness is not a result of our strenuous efforts to abide. It is the byproduct of believing that our sanctification or fruitfulness is entirely up to Jesus, just as our salvation was. The entire point of this passage is to remind us that it is our relationship with Jesus that matters most. There is no hope of salvation apart from Him. There is no chance of living a life of fruitfulness except through our relationship with Him. He does it all. And like a branch, the degree of our fruitfulness is entirely up to the vine and the vinedresser. The less productive branch will receive special attention from the vinedresser, resulting in pruning and careful cultivating so that the end result will be increased fruitfulness. That is what Jesus means when He says, “he [God] prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more” (John 15:2 NLT).

The goal is fruitfulness. And Jesus is assuring His disciples that they will be *fruitful* because their God is *faithful*.

So, what about the branches that bear no fruit? It would seem that these branches were never truly attached to the Vine. They had no lasting relationship with the Vine and, therefore, no hope of producing fruit. They were non-grafted branches, that had never been attached to the Vine by the Vnedresser.

There were like those who heard Jesus declare Himself to be the bread of life, but walked away from the very source of life and fruitfulness.

*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. – John 6:66
ESV*

They had been curious but not committed. They appeared to be branches but lacked a true relationship with the Vine. And Jesus had clearly communicated the non-negotiable requirement for a life of fruitfulness.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, **you have no life in you.**” – John 6:53 ESV*

Belief in who He was and what He had come to do was the key to having a true relationship with Him. Following *after* Jesus without having faith *in* Jesus will never produce fruit. Claiming to be a branch is not the same as abiding in the Vine. And all those so-called branches will one day find themselves judged. And the basis for their judgment will be their fruitlessness. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus referred to the fate of these false branches.

“On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you.’” – Matthew 7:22-23 NLT

They will brag about their fruit, but it will be the wrong kind. They will boast in their knowledge of the Lord, but He will declare that He doesn’t even know them. And these false branches will

be “gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15:6 ESV). But for those branches that remain attached to the Vine, Jesus has some outstanding news.

“...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” – John 15:7 ESV

They will have access to power like they have never known before. But because of their relationship to the Vine, they will share the same desires. They will want what Jesus wants and ask for those things that are near and dear to His heart. And Jesus clarifies exactly what they will ask for.

*“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”
– John 15:8 ESV*

Faithful branches desire nothing more than fruitfulness. They long to fulfill the wishes of the Vinedresser and act as willing agents in carrying out the work of the Vine. And Jesus describes all of this as nothing less and nothing more than abiding in His love. The very act of the branch remaining in the Vine is a beautiful picture of the love of the Father flowing through the Son into the branch and out into the world. And Jesus assured His disciples that His words were meant to encourage them.

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” – John 15:11 ESV

No Greater Love

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

It’s rather odd to hear Jesus speaking about love when you consider the fact that He is just hours from His own death. And for the disciples, all His talk about dying and leaving them behind must have sounded like a strange way to show His love. Yet, for these men and all who would come to faith through their future ministry, the cross would eventually become the greatest expression of divine love.

Just a short time earlier, in the upper room after Judas had departed, Jesus had disclosed to His remaining disciples a new commandment.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” – John 13:34-35 ESV

Notice the point of qualification that Jesus adds: They were to love one another, “just as” He had loved them. Jesus made this statement just hours before He would hang on a cruel Roman cross as the payment for their sin debt. He was going to follow through on His earlier promise concerning His role as the Good Shepherd.

“The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” – John 10:11 NLT

And it would not be until Jesus had died, resurrected, and ascended back into heaven, that the disciples would fully grasp the full import of what Jesus meant about loving as He had loved them. In a later letter, John would disclose His Spirit-enabled understanding of Jesus’ incredible expression of selfless, sacrificial love.

If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead. Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them.

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. – 1 John 3:14-16 NLT

The sacrifice Jesus was about to make on the cross was totally motivated by love, and not just His own. The death of Jesus was going to be a priceless expression of God's love for mankind. This is exactly what Jesus had told Nicodemus.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:16 NLT

The apostle Paul was blown away by this reality and saw the death of Jesus as ongoing evidence of the Father's love for him.

But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8 BSB

God had loved Paul *in the midst* of his sinfulness. He didn't require Paul to get his spiritual act together. It was while Paul was still firmly entrenched in his rebellion and sin that God sent His Son to die in Paul's place. And the same thing is true for each and every follower of Christ. Paul makes that point to the believers in Rome.

...he [God] did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all... – Romans 8:32 NLT

And Paul would encourage the believers in Ephesus to use the selfless love of God as a model for their own lives, just as Jesus had done.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant sacrificial offering to God. – Ephesians 5:1-2 BSB

According to Jesus, the greatest expression of love is for someone to willingly sacrifice their life for the sake of another.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” – John 15:13 ESV

The disciples were not yet able to grasp the full significance of this statement. But in time, they would come to understand and appreciate what Jesus had meant. They would stand by and watch their friend and mentor die a gruesome death by crucifixion. They would weep and mourn as His life slowly and painfully ebbed away. They would see His broken and beaten body removed from the cross and placed in a borrowed tomb. And in the days following this hope-shattering event, they would gather together in sorrow and self-pity, as they tried to wrap their minds around what had just happened. But then they would receive the shocking and mind-blowing news: “he has risen, as he said” (Matthew 28:6 ESV). They would discover the tomb to be empty, Jesus to be alive, and their lives to be forever changed.

But on the other side of the cross, Jesus called His confused and concerned disciples to love one another. He referred to them as His friends, further indicating His love for them. He did not view them as servants or slaves, but as close friends to whom He was sharing the most intimate details concerning His life. Rather than leaving them in the dark, Jesus was disclosing the content of His private conversations with His Father.

"...all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." – John 15:15 ESV

They were the recipients of privileged information, passed down from God through His one and only Son. And Jesus makes it clear that the time they had spent with Him had been divinely ordained.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..." – John 15:16 ESV

He had chosen them. But as Jesus will disclose in His high priestly prayer, God had been the guiding hand behind His selection of these men.

*"I have revealed you to **the ones you gave me from this world**. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word."* – John 17:6 NLT

While each of them had chosen to follow Jesus on their own accord, they were actually operating according to the sovereign will of God. Their selection by Jesus had been preordained by God and He had great things in store for them. The events of the last three years would pale in comparison to what was about to happen to them and through them. Their greatest days were ahead of them because Jesus loved them and was going to lay down His life for them. That selfless, sacrificial act of love would make possible the fulfillment of the promise He had made to them.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one believing in Me, the works that I do, also he will do. And he will do greater than these, because I am going to the Father." – John 14:12 BSB

They didn't realize it at the moment, but they were going to bear much fruit, just as Jesus had told them.

"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."
– John 15:8 ESV

And their fruitfulness would be accompanied by unlimited access to God. The imagery of the vine and the branches comes into play here. God, as the vinedresser, would fulfill His will through the Vine, producing lasting fruit through the branches. This interdependency between the Father, Son, and the Son's faithful followers, would result in an abundant harvest of fruit. And the disciples would come to experience the joy of desiring to do the will of the Father. Like Jesus, they will learn to say, "not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42 ESV). They will slowly

discover that their desires have changed. Their requests of God will become less selfish and more selfless. And Jesus assures them that His words are meant to produce in them a love for one another. But it will be His actions, not His words, that make that kind of selfless, sacrificial love possible. His death, as the ultimate expression of God's love for sinful mankind, will provide the power they need to keep His commands, love one another, bear fruit, and do greater things.

Despised by the World

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

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.” – John 15:18-27 ESV

From the very outset of His public ministry, Jesus faced opposition. It began immediately after His baptism when the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan. Jesus, who had just received the blessing of His Heavenly Father, found Himself in a face-to-face confrontation with the prince of this world.

God had just pronounced Jesus as “my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy” (Matthew 3:17 ESV), but Satan saw Jesus as a powerful enemy who had to be distracted from His God-given mission or be destroyed. Satan attempted to disqualify Jesus by offering Him tempting alternatives to the will of God. He proffered a range of attractive options that were designed to distract Jesus from His ministry objective and render Him useless to God. But Jesus did not take the bait. As the author of Hebrews states, Jesus was “tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15 ESV).

But while Jesus won the battle over Satan in the wilderness, the war was far from over. Satan simply shifted his tactics. Almost immediately, the enemy implemented a new and less direct strategy that utilized guerrilla warfare tactics. He called upon all the weapons at his disposal to wage war against God and His Son. Satan knew that Jesus was the Messiah and had been sent by God to free humanity from their life of bondage under his merciless rule. This was, as Paul made clear, a spiritual battle of epic proportions.

...we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:12 NLT

But that does not mean that the battle remained invisible and relegated to the spiritual realm. This spiritual conflict quickly spilled over into the natural world as the enemy put into play

those human agents who were under his control. The gospels provide ample evidence that Jesus faced human opposition to His ministry. And His most formidable and vehement foes proved to be the religious leaders of Israel. It is no coincidence that Jesus labeled these men as the sons of Satan.

“For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.” – John 8:44 NLT

These men were revered by the common people as icons of righteousness and virtue. Yet, Jesus saw through their pious-looking facades and recognized them for what they were: deceptive hypocrites who stood opposed to His mission because they were enemies of God. Jesus exposed them for what they were.

*“If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God...Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don’t listen because **you don’t belong to God.**”* – John 8:42, 47 NLT

They may have fooled the people, but Jesus was fully aware of their true identities and intentions.

“You say, ‘He is our God,’ but you don’t even know him.” – John 8:52 NLT

And His exposure of them only enraged them further. The more they saw of Jesus, the angrier they became. His messages and miracles failed to impress or persuade them. Ironically, they accused Jesus of being demon-possessed and under the influence of Satan. And their growing revulsion turned into an obsession to see Jesus killed. They would stop at nothing to see to it that this madman from Nazareth was put to death.

Now, just hours from their perverted wish becoming a reality, Jesus informs His disciples that they could expect more of the same. As if all He has told them so far had not been enough, Jesus reveals that their relationship with Him has placed a target on their backs. They were guilty by association, and they would find themselves hated for His sake. And while Jesus refers to the world as the source of that hatred, He is speaking of the same Jewish religious leaders who would orchestrate His death. And these men were representatives of the nation of Israel at large. That is why John opened his gospel account with the statement: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11 ESV).

Throughout this passage, Jesus uses the pronoun, “they.”

*“...**they** will also persecute you...”* – John 15:20 ESV

*“...all these things **they** will do to you on account of my name.”* – John 15:21 ESV

*"...**they** do not know him who sent me."* – John 15:21 ESV

*"...**they** have no excuse for their sin."* – John 15:23 ESV

*"...**they** have seen and hated both me and my Father."* – John 15:24 ESV

Then, quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus reveals the identity of these individuals.

*More in number than the hairs of my head
are **those who hate me without cause**;
mighty are **those who would destroy me**,
those who attack me with lies. – Psalm 69:4 ESV*

The "world" to which Jesus was referring was the nation of Israel. His own people hated Him without cause, and they were out to destroy Him. So, He wanted His disciples to know that they would suffer the same treatment because of His name.

"But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." – John 15:21 ESV

The battle that had been raging since the beginning had always been about the identity of Jesus. That is what He means by "my name." Jesus was the Son of God and everything He had done from the day of His baptism by John until that very moment had been intended to reveal His identity as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And because the disciples would continue to proclaim the name of Jesus in His absence, they too would find themselves facing the same level of animosity and opposition.

And because Jesus would later command them be His "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8 ESV), they would face even greater opposition as Satan turned the entire world order against them. The disciples would eventually take the Gospel to the non-Jewish world and discover that the enemies of God were everywhere and comprised every tribe and tongue. They would find themselves hated by Jews and Gentiles alike. And while they would find some eager to hear and accept the message of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, they would also encounter fierce opposition. It is believed that all of the disciples eventually died as martyrs, after having faithfully spread the good news concerning Jesus to the world.

But as the disciples stood in the darkness of the garden, listening to these foreboding words from Jesus, they must have been filled with fear and trepidation. Jesus had just told them, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20 ESV). This must have brought to mind an earlier warning He had given them.

“You will be dragged into synagogues and prisons, and you will stand trial before kings and governors because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me.” – Luke 21:12-13 NLT

What Jesus was describing was unsettling and disturbing. It must have filled His poor disciples with despair and disillusionment. But Jesus wanted them to know that their relationship with Him had dramatically altered their lives for eternity. Nothing would ever be the same. Just three years ago, they had each been minding their own business, when an unknown and unimpressive Rabbi from Nazareth made their acquaintance. Little did they know at the time, that in choosing to follow Jesus they were leaving the world behind. Yes, they would still live in it, but they would no longer be part of it. By becoming friends with Jesus, they had become enemies of the world.

“The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.” – John 15:19 NLT

The Jewish religious leaders would turn their hatred for Jesus onto the disciples and any others who chose to follow Him. And as this small group of men and women grew in number and spread their influence from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the ends of the earth, Satan would throw everything in his arsenal against them. But he would be fighting a losing cause. The victory had been won. With Jesus’ death on the cross, He brought an end to Satan’s vice-like grip on humanity. Jesus conquered sin and death, bringing salvation to all those who would accept it.

And, anticipating His disciples’ sense of fear and foreboding, Jesus reminds them once again that they will not be alone.

“But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.” – John 15:26-27 NLT

They were going to face intense opposition, but they would do so in the power of God. The world would hate them, but the love of God for them would protect them and flow from them. They would pick up the mantle of ministry given to them by Jesus and proclaim His name with boldness and joy – even in the face of persecution and the threat of death.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

¹ “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” – John 16:1-11 ESV

It must have pained Jesus greatly to watch His disciples struggle as they tried to take in all He was telling them. He knew their hearts were troubled and their minds were reeling from all that He had shared with them. Jesus was fully aware that little of what He had told them made sense to them. His announcement that one of them would betray Him had stunned them. His repeated mentions of His coming death had left them depressed and disillusioned. And His warning that, in His absence, the Jewish religious leaders would turn their attention and anger on them, must have petrified them. It had all been more than they could handle. But Jesus assured them that He had told them these things for a reason: “so that you won’t abandon your faith” (John 16:1 NLT).

It’s difficult to comprehend exactly what Jesus is trying to convey to His disciples. The Greek word is *skandalizō* and it has a variety of meanings. It is a verb that typically refers to someone’s reaction to an unexpected event or circumstance. It is often translated as “offended.” If a person accidentally stumbles over a rock or other unseen impediment, they may react with anger, frustration, or resentment. Their response may even result in sin.

Jesus knew that the events of the next few days were going to be difficult for His disciples. And He did not want them to be taken by surprise. So, He was going out of His way to bring them up to speed on what to expect. Even so, there was a good chance that they might respond in anger and resentment, regretting their decision to follow Jesus in the first place. One of the other meanings of the Greek word *skandalizō* is “to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey.” This seems to be the very thing Jesus is trying to prevent.

And once again, in an effort to remove any possibility of surprise, Jesus tells them exactly what is going to happen to them once He is gone.

“For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God.” – John 16:2 NLT

With Jesus out of the way, the Jewish religious leaders will simply refocus their hatred onto His disciples. Remember, these men had seriously considered murdering Lazarus, just because he had been raised from the dead by Jesus. He was living proof of Jesus’ power and they saw him as a threat.

So, the disciples were going to find themselves facing the full brunt of the irrational and unrelenting anger of the Sanhedrin. It would begin with their excommunication from their local synagogues. They would be ostracized as heretics and prevented from gathering with other Jews as they had done since they were little boys. But Jesus warns them that their persecution will not end with their physical removal from the synagogues. They will likely suffer the same fate as their Lord and Master.

Jesus pulls no punches. He is brutally honest with His disciples about what they can expect in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Their continued relationship with Him would cost them. These men were going to become outcasts and social pariahs, even facing death at the hands of their fellow Jews. And “the world” – the unbelieving and unrepentant Jewish population out of which they had been called – will think they are doing God a favor by killing the followers of Jesus. This is exactly the attitude that Paul had before He came to faith in Christ. In his former life as a Pharisee, he had persecuted the followers of “the Way,” rounding up Christians and putting them in prison – all out of His zeal for God. His own testimony provides insight into the mindset Jesus is trying to describe.

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.” – Acts 22:3-5 NLT

And Jesus informs His disciples that this intense hatred will not be motivated by love for God but will stem from their ignorance of Him. The Jews will think they are doing God a favor but, in reality, they will be opposing His divine will. Like their ancestors, they will end up resisting the sovereign will of God by putting to death those who have been by God with His message of repentance and salvation.

You can almost hear the disciples asking, “Why didn’t you tell us this earlier?” They had to have been shell-shocked by these last-minute revelations from Jesus. And He answers their unspoken question by telling them, “I didn’t tell you earlier because I was going to be with you for a while longer” (John 16:4 NLT). As long as Jesus was physically with the disciples, there was

no need for them to know this information. His main focus over the last three years with them was to reveal His identity to them. He had spent all His time manifesting His glory to them through His miracles and messages, so that they might believe Him to be the Son of God.

Now, it was time for Him to manifest His glory one final time. The hour had come for Him to fulfill the will of His Father by offering His life as a ransom for many. He was about to lay down His life for the sheep. And when His work was done, He would be restored to life by the power of the Holy Spirit and glorified by His Father by returning to His rightful place at His side in heaven.

But the disciples are filled with sorrow. Nothing they have heard Jesus say has left them with any sense of hope. And He is fully aware of their inability to see the light at the end of the tunnel. So, He reminds them of His earlier promise concerning the coming Holy Spirit.

“...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” – John 16:7 ESV

Once again, the words of Jesus must have left the disciples scratching their heads in confusion, wondering how He could possibly think His death could be to their advantage. But what they didn't yet realize was that His leaving would make possible the sending of the Holy Spirit. And as Jesus had told them earlier, “He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth...he lives with you now and later **will be in you**” (John 14:17 NLT). They were going to experience a new and profoundly different relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. The Holy Spirit of God would take up residence within them, providing them with the permanent manifestation of God's power and presence. And while they couldn't fully comprehend that news at the moment, they would soon discover just how life-transforming and world-changing the Spirit's coming would be.

And Jesus provided them with a brief synopsis of the Holy Spirit's coming ministry.

“...when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.” – John 16:9-11 NLT

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the followers of Jesus, He will empower them in such a way that their lives will end up convicting the world of sin. Their very lives will become evidence of the truth. They will be lights shining in a dark world, reflecting the glory of God as they share the good news concerning salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These men were going to become God's messengers, preaching the truth that a right standing with God is only available through a relationship with His Son. By preaching the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the disciples would force the world to make a decision. They would have to choose belief over unbelief. With His death and resurrection, Jesus would make a restored relationship with God available, but it would require belief in Him. And the

disciples were going to become the main purveyors of that redemptive message. Through the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit, they would become ambassadors for Jesus, taking His message of salvation to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Give God Time

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

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

¹⁷ *So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." – John 16:12-18 ESV*

Verse 12 almost sounds as if Jesus is feeling pressed for time. He has so much He wants to tell His disciples, but with His death just hours away, He won't be able to. Yet, that is not what John is trying to convey. Jesus has not run out of time. His disciples have run out of capacity. They can't handle any more information because their brains and emotions are on overload.

For three years, Jesus had been revealing Himself to His disciples. By means of His messages and miracles, He had displayed His glory "as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 ESV). Everything He had said and done had been intended to reveal His identity as the Son of God and to help bolster the disciples' belief in Him. But even though His death was imminent, Jesus wanted them to know that His self-revelation was not coming to an end. There was so much more they needed to know about Him, but they were not yet ready to receive it.

That led Jesus to return to His discussion of the Holy Spirit. His own death and eventual departure would pave the way for the Spirit's coming. And Jesus assures them that "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13 ESV). Jesus does not promise His disciples that the Spirit will give them an encyclopedic knowledge of all things. He lets them know that, with the Spirit's divine assistance, they will know the truth about the Son and the Father. All their questions regarding the Kingdom of God will be answered. Their confusion about Jesus' identity will be cleared up. Because the Spirit will pick up where Jesus left off, revealing the glory of the Son "by telling you whatever he receives from me" (John 16:14 NLT).

One of the primary roles of the Spirit of God is to reveal the truth concerning the Son of God. Because it is only through the Son that we can know the Father. And the apostle Paul reminds us that the indwelling Spirit of God makes it possible for believers to grasp the deep truths concerning the will and the ways of God, including the redemptive plan made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection.

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined*

*what God has prepared
for those who love him.”*

But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. – 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 NLT

And Jesus attempts to comfort His disillusioned and dispirited disciples with the same reassuring news concerning the Spirit.

“All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, ‘The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.’” – John 16:15 NLT

All the while Jesus had been with them, He had been speaking the words of God. Everything He had said to them had come directly from the Father.

“My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own.” – John 7:12-16 NLT

“I don’t speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it.” – John 12:49 NLT

“...remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me.” – John 14:24 NLT

Ultimately, Jesus had come to reveal God to mankind. He was “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 NLT). His incarnation had been intended to make the unseen God seeable and knowable.

No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us. – John 1:18 NLT

The author of Hebrews states that, in His incarnation, Jesus revealed the very glory and character of God. But when His work was done, He returned to His Father’s side.

...in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. – Hebrews 1:2-3 NLT

But Jesus wanted His disciples to know that when He returned to heaven, He would be sending them special assistance in the form of the Holy Spirit. And, as He had told them earlier, the Spirit would not just be *with* them, He would take up residence *within* them (John 14:17). And in Jesus' absence, the Holy Spirit will take over the role as the revealer of all truth. He will provide the disciples with divine insight into everything, including the deep thoughts of God. For the first time, they will be able to discern the truth behind all that Jesus had said during His time with them. They will recall His miracles and messages and, for the first time, comprehend the deep truths they contained. And, as a result, their faith in Him will increase all the more.

Sadly, these words of comfort failed to register with the disciples. They were still struggling to take in all that Jesus was telling them. And His words continued to leave them confused and conflicted. And the somewhat cryptic manner in which Jesus spoke didn't make things any easier for them.

"In a little while you won't see me anymore. But a little while after that, you will see me again." – John 16:16 NLT

This statement must have sounded like a riddle to them. Was He leaving and then returning? Was He really going away? Had all the talk about His death been some kind of metaphor or analogy?

John had been there that evening, so he knew from personal experience just how perplexing Jesus' words had been. And he records exactly what the disciples had thought when Jesus had said them.

Some of the disciples asked each other, "What does he mean when he says, 'In a little while you won't see me, but then you will see me,' and 'I am going to the Father'? And what does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand." – John 16:17-18 NLT

"We don't understand!" That just about sums it up. They were literally and figuratively "in the dark." They were most likely standing somewhere outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. They were tired and confused. Their minds were reeling from the tsunami of information Jesus had dumped on them over the last few hours. Their hearts were heavy as they thought about the possibility of their friend dying. And to make matters worse, with His death, all their hopes that He was their long-awaited Messiah would die with Him.

None of this was what they had expected. Their concept of the Messiah had not included His suffering and death. The triumphal entry had been the highlight of their time with Jesus. The shouts of the crowds, the victory parade, and the pomp and circumstance surrounding Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem had raised their hopes to an all-new high. In those glorious moments, they had assumed that Jesus was about to set up His Kingdom on earth. But in no time, their hopes had been turned to despair. Their joy had given way to sorrow. And there they stood, in the darkness of night in the company of the Light of the world, wondering what had happened

to their hopes and dreams. But little did they know that their gloom would soon be replaced by gladness. Their confusion would give way to a Spirit-inspired clarity and confidence. Their sorrow would be transformed into unspeakable joy. And their debilitating fear would fade in the presence of an unshakeable faith.

Sorrow Turned to Joy

¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” – John 16:19-24 ESV

Seven times in just four verses, John records Jesus using the phrase, “a little while.” It is the Greek word *mikron*, and it refers to a small or brief space of time. Jesus basically told His disciples that it would not be much longer before He would be gone. But then He followed up that bit of bad news by assuring them that, in no time at all, they would see Him again. Rather than finding Jesus’ words encouraging, the disciples became further confused and more anxious. They had no idea what He was talking about. He seemed to be speaking in riddles that left them with more questions than answers. And, while Jesus had so much more that He wanted to share with them, He knew they lacked the mental and emotional bandwidth to handle it.

Jesus, always alert and aware of what was going on in His disciples’ hearts, heard them discussing among themselves.

“What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” – John 16:18 ESV

They were afraid to admit their ignorance to Jesus, so they polled one another, hoping that one of them might have a clue as to what He was talking about. But Jesus, knowing that they were dying for an explanation, graciously answered the question they were too scared to ask.

Their confusion revolved around that little Greek word, *mikron*. They wanted to know just how long “a little while” was going to be. In other words, they were focused on the length of time, rather than on the events themselves and their subsequent outcome. How long would it be before they could no longer see Jesus? How much time did they have left? And then, how long would they have to wait before they could see Him again?

These men were stuck on an earthly plane, unable to see behind the veil and incapable of understanding the spiritual dimension of the moment. Jesus had already told them all that was going to take place in Jerusalem, but they had failed to grasp the significance of His words.

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”
– Matthew 20:18-19 ESV

Just two days before the Passover Festival was to begin, Jesus had reiterated the details concerning His fate to His disciples.

“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” – Matthew 26:2 ESV

And later, on the Mount of Olives, just outside of the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus would add another new twist to the pending proceedings.

“You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” – Matthew 26:31-32 ESV

Jesus had spoken to them about His death and resurrection, but the news appears to have gone in one ear and out the other. It had never fully registered with them. In fact, Matthew provides powerful proof that the disciples had failed to comprehend what Jesus had told them. It seems that immediately after Jesus had announced He would be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, condemned to death, mocked, flogged, crucified, and raised on the third day, the mother of James and John approached Jesus with a request.

“Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” – Matthew 20:21 ESV

And the text reveals that these two brothers were standing right next to their mother when she made this request on their behalf. They were hoping for positions of power and prominence in Jesus’ earthly kingdom. They believed Him to be the Messiah and were fully expecting Him to rule as the King of Israel from David’s throne in Jerusalem. Nothing of what Jesus had said to them about His death and resurrection had sunk in. And now, as He revealed to them that time was running out and His death was at hand, they were still unable to get their minds around the epic nature of what was happening around them.

And Jesus breaks the news to them that things were going to get worse before they got better.

“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice.” – John 16:20 NLT

The unbelieving world, comprised of the Jewish religious leaders and all those former followers of Jesus who had turned their backs on Him, would rejoice over His death. But all those who believed Him to be the Messiah would weep and mourn because His death would be proof that

they had been wrong. Their hopes would be dashed. Their eager anticipation that their Savior had come would die alongside Jesus as He hung on the cross.

But Jesus gives them the good news: “You will grieve, but your grief will **suddenly** turn to wonderful joy” (John 16:21 NLT). Their sorrow will be real, but it will also be brief. It will only last “a little while.” Just when everything appears dark and grim, something remarkable will take place. And the words of Jesus will be fulfilled.

“...the Son of Man...will be raised on the third day.” – Matthew 20:19 NLT

Just three days after being placed in a grave and written off as a failure and a fraud, Jesus will appear to His disciples. They will see Him again. And while the period of time is significant, it pales in comparison to the reality of the resurrection. For the disciples, those three days will feel like an eternity. They will be days filled with fear, sorrow, confusion, and a growing sense of despair. All will look lost. The future will appear bleak. But then, the impossible will take place. And their sorrow will be turned to joy. They will discover the truth of the psalm written by King David.

*Weeping may last through the night,
but joy comes with the morning.* – Psalm 30:5 NLT

Jesus doesn't diminish the reality of their sorrow and suffering. Instead, He puts it into perspective by comparing it to a woman in labor. In the midst of childbirth, she suffers very real and intense pain. It is overwhelming and all-consuming. And while her labor may seem to last an eternity, it is all over in “a little while.” And all the former suffering turns to overwhelming joy because it has resulted in the birth of a child.

“...her anguish gives way to joy because she has brought a new baby into the world.” – John 16:21 NLT

And Jesus lets His disciples know that what they are experiencing is natural, normal, and to be expected. But like the birth of a child, their suffering and sorrow will be turned to joy and celebration when they see the miracle of “new birth” that God brings about through the resurrection of His Son.

“So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.” – John 16:22 NLT

Not only will they witness the supernatural transformation of Jesus from death to life, but they will also experience a spectacular alteration in their relationship with God. Things will be radically different. With Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the disciples will find themselves experiencing an intimacy with God the Father that they have never known before. With the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they will be able to communicate directly with God. And Jesus informs them that even the nature of their questions will change.

“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.” – John 16:23 ESV

Up until this point, the disciples had aimed all kinds of questions at Jesus. And most of their inquiries had to do with points of clarification and explanation. They rarely, if ever, petitioned Jesus for anything. Unless you include the request made by the mother of James and John. Jesus seems to be saying that the very nature of their questions is going to change. They will be less self-focused and motivated by ignorance. With the Spirit’s assistance, their questions will fall in line with God’s will and guarantee His gracious answer.

The disciples had been great at asking questions like, “when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4 ESV). They asked questions because they were looking for answers. But Jesus wants them to know that, in the future, their questions will become less focused on receiving information and more desirous of seeing that God’s will be done. The Holy Spirit will provide them with all the insight and information they need. So, rather than focusing their questions on things they need to know, they will ask God for things that will further their task of making *Him* known.

And Jesus points out the key difference between their current line of questioning and how they will ask in the future.

“Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” – John 16:24 ESV

They will ask “in His name.” This means that they will ask according to the very character and nature of Jesus as the Son of God. They will make requests of God in the same way that Jesus did, in keeping with the will of God. And, in a later letter He authored, John wrote of this Christlike form of petitioning the Father.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. – 1 John 5:14-15 NLT

All of their questions will be answered. All their requests will be in keeping with God’s will and guaranteed to come to fruition. And all their sorrow will be turned to joy.

Do You Now Believe?

²⁵ *“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”*

²⁹ *His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* – John 16:25-33 ESV

Jesus continues to stress the radical change that is about to take place in the lives of the disciples. While their current circumstances and the news of His pending death have left them distressed, Jesus wants them to know that things will improve – dramatically.

But He admits that His words have been veiled in secrecy and symbolic language, such as His analogy of the woman in childbirth. He had referred to this naturally-occurring process in an attempt to explain the spiritually-based transformation that awaited them. Yet, despite His efforts to inform and encourage them, they remained just as confused and perplexed as ever. All His talk about a woman giving birth and her sorrow being turned to joy had escaped them. They had more questions for Him than ever but were afraid to ask them.

So, Jesus makes them a promise.

“The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father.” – John 16:25 ESV

He brings up the issue of time again. Having already used the phrase “a little while” seven different times to emphasize the imminent nature of His death and resurrection, Jesus now assures them “the hour” (*hōra*) is near at hand. The end is closer than they realize, and it will bring about a series of unexpected and unprecedented changes.

This is not the first time Jesus has used this term. John recorded a number of instances where Jesus spoke of this future hour or moment in time. The first instance was at the wedding in Cana when Jesus had stated to His mother:

*“Woman, what does this have to do with me? **My hour [hōra] has not yet come.**”* – John 2:4 ESV

Later on, in His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus informed her:

*“Woman, believe me, **the hour [hōra] is coming** when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” – John 4:21 ESV*

*“...**the hour [hōra] 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 ESV*

In one of His confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus brought up this matter again.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, **an hour [hōra] is coming**, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” – John 5:25 ESV*

*“Do not marvel at this, for **an hour [hōra] is coming** when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice...” – John 5:28 ESV*

The religious leaders had not been impressed by Jesus’ claims, but instead, they had become angered by His apparent arrogance and boastful assertions. Rather than acknowledge Him as their Messiah, they had sought to arrest Him.

*So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because **his hour [hōra] had not yet come**. – John 7:30 ESV*

In another encounter with these men, Jesus had claimed to be the light of the world, and their response had been the same. They had wanted to arrest Him so that they might silence Him. But their plans were foiled because His time had not yet come.

*These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because **his hour [hōra] had not yet come**. – John 8:20 ESV*

Sometime later, after Jesus had made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He had told His disciples, “**The hour [hōra] has come** for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23 ESV). And Jesus would inform His disciples that this “hour” or time was the sole reason behind His incarnation. It was why He had come to earth in the first place.

*“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, **save me from this hour [hōra]**’? But for this purpose **I have come to this hour [hōra]**.” – John 12:27 ESV*

In the very next chapter, John points out that, even before His final Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus “knew that **his hour [hōra] had come** to depart out of this world to the Father” (John 13:1 ESV). And He later told them, “I have said these things to you, that **when their hour [hōra] comes** you may remember that I told them to you” (John 16:4 ESV).

The very moment to which Jesus had been referring was closer than ever. The climax to His earthly ministry and the focal point of His entire incarnation was right around the corner, and it was going to result in unfathomable changes in the lives of His disciples. His death was going to set in motion a chain of unprecedented events that would have truly life-altering implications for His followers.

Jesus tells them that the long-expected “hour” was going to bring about “that day” – another point in time when they would experience remarkable changes in their relationship with Him and with His Heavenly Father.

“In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” – John 16:26-27 ESV

With this statement, Jesus informs His disciples that, because of their relationship with Him, they will have direct access to the Father. They will be able to go to God, in the name of Jesus, and receive answers to their prayers. Their love for Jesus will ensure the Father’s love for them, and guarantee their access into His presence and His answers to their petitions. It would be just as He had told His disciples:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!” – John 14:6-7 NLT

The whole purpose behind His coming had been to provide sinners with a means of experiencing a restored relationship with God. Their sinful state had left them separated from God and with no means to remedy the problem. But Jesus had come to make atonement for their sins by offering His sinless life as the sacrificial substitute or payment for their sin debt.

And the hour was fast approaching when Jesus would fulfill His God-ordained assignment to serve as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 ESV). He would faithfully accomplish the will of His Father and offer His life as the ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). And when He had done what He had come to do, Jesus would be raised back to life and return to His Father’s side in heaven.

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

It was all part of the Father’s plan. He had come to die, but His death would be followed by His resurrection and ascension. And upon His return to heaven, Jesus would send the Holy Spirit. In time, every single facet of God’s redemptive plan would be unveiled and revealed to be a vital aspect of the long-awaited “hour” Jesus had told them about. The cross would not be the end, but it would only be the beginning. It would set in motion a series of momentous, earth-shattering events that would radically transform the disciples and revolutionize the world.

But in the meantime, the disciples reveal their eagerness to understand what Jesus is saying, but their words make it clear that they remain just as ignorant as ever.

“Now we understand that you know everything, and there’s no need to question you. From this we believe that you came from God.” – John 16:30 NLT

They meant well, but their words reveal the insufficiency of their understanding. They were sincere when they stated their belief that Jesus had come from God, but they had no real concept of what that meant. They clearly did not understand the part about Him returning to God. It seems that the disciples were still expecting Jesus to meet the criteria they had established for the Messiah by setting up His Kingdom on earth. They believed Him to be the Son of God who had been sent by God, and they were still hoping He would establish Himself as the King of Israel and re-establish the Kingdom of God on earth. But Jesus bursts their bubble.

“Do you finally believe? But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.” – John 16:31-32 NLT

This revelation must have been a blow to their egos and served as a final wake-up call, putting to bed once and for all any lingering expectations they might have about an earthly kingdom. Jesus let them know that their self-proclaimed belief in Him would turn into fear and result in their abandonment of Him.

But, once again, Jesus lets them know that these things are to be expected. They were all part of “the hour” that was fast approaching. Jesus knew these things would happen because they were all part of His Father’s plan. He wasn’t shocked, disappointed, or surprised. And He wanted His disciples to know that their desertion of Him would not be the end. He would die, but He would soon be back. They would leave Him, but they would eventually return. And they could take heart because His mission was as good as done. The will of His Father would be done, and the victory would be theirs to share.

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” – John 16:33 NLT

The Path to Glory

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

Chapter 17 contains what has come to be known as Jesus’ “high priestly prayer.” This somewhat lofty designation is based on the role that the high priest of Israel played in mediating the spiritual needs of the people before God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and offer sacrifices intended to atone for the sins of the people. And God had warned Aaron, Moses’ brother and the high priest of Israel, that he was prohibited from entering the Most Holy Place at any other time.

“Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.” – Leviticus 16:2 ESV

The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews picks up on this theme as he compares the role of the high priest with that of Jesus.

But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use. This is an illustration pointing to the present time. – Hebrews 9:7-9 ESV

During the days of the Exodus, when the Israelites were making their way from Egypt to the land of Canaan, the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle was where the glory of God’s presence was said to dwell. It hovered above the mercy seat which covered the Ark of the Covenant. And this sacred place was off-limits to all, including the high priest, except on the Day of Atonement. Even then, the high priest could only enter into God’s presence after performing a series of ritual cleansings to purify himself from sin.

Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. – Leviticus 16:3-4 ESV

Aaron, performing his role as the high priest, was also required to offer a bull as a sin offering for himself and a goat as a sin offering for the people. He would take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. Then he would do the same thing with the blood of the goat, “sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins” (Leviticus 16:15-16 ESV).

These elaborate and mandatory rituals were designed to illustrate the glory and the holiness of God and to stress the unrighteousness of the people. Without the sacrifice of blood, the high priest could not enter into God’s presence. The sinfulness and he and the people separated them from God. And there was no way for them to stand before a holy and righteous God in their sinful state. So, as the author of Hebrews states, atoning blood was required.

...according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. – Hebrews 9:22 ESV

And according to Hebrews, Jesus had come to replace the old system with a new and better one.

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. – Hebrew 9:11-12 NLT

So, when Jesus prayed this prayer, He was interceding on behalf of the people of God. He was acting as their high priest, mediating for them before God the Father. But in reality, Jesus would not fully fulfill His role as the high priest until He sacrificed His own blood on the cross as a payment for the sins of mankind.

Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. – Hebrews 9:14 NLT

But this powerful prayer provides us with a glimpse into Jesus’ heart and mind as He prepared to fulfill His Father’s redemptive plan. He had just told His disciples, “But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 ESV). And then John states, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said...” (John 17:1 ESV). There is no break in the action. John doesn’t indicate that Jesus left the disciples and found a quiet place to be alone. He simply describes Jesus as lifting up His eyes and praying. One moment He had been talking to the disciples and then suddenly, He was talking to God. And John and the other disciples were allowed to eavesdrop on this intimate conversation between Jesus and His Heavenly Father.

Jesus had assured His disciples that they could take heart because He had overcome the world. His mission was as good as done. They could have complete confidence that what He had been

sent to do, He would do. And Jesus expressed His complete commitment to fulfill His Father's wishes by requesting that His glorification take place just as it had been planned.

*"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you..." – John 17:1
ESV*

Jesus is not just focusing His attention on His future resurrection and ascension. In other words, He's not expressing His desire to get the crucifixion over with as quickly as possible so He can enjoy a restored relationship with the Father. For Jesus, the cross was a central part of the glorification process. By offering His life as an atonement for the sins of mankind, He would be faithfully fulfilling the will of His Father, performing the final act of obedience that would mark His life as pleasing to God.

*"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." – John 8:28-29
ESV*

Jesus knew that it was necessary for His death to proceed His glorification. The path to future glory passed through the shadow of the cross. It was just as He had told His disciples.

*"Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives." – John 12:23-24
NLT*

His death would produce new life – not only for Himself but for all those who placed their faith in Him. His crucifixion would result in His own glorification but also that of His followers. The apostle Paul reminds us of this incredible reality.

*And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, **He also glorified.** – Romans 8:28-30
BSB*

Ultimately, Jesus was expressing His desire to bring glory to God. He knew that by sacrificing His life on the cross He would be expressing His Father's love for mankind. The willingness of God to offer up His Son on behalf of sinful, undeserving humanity would end up glorifying Him by demonstrating His goodness and grace.

*This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. – 1 John 4:9
BSB*

Jesus was the means by which God would extend His offer of eternal life to sinful humanity. And Jesus knew that He had been given divine authority to extend this offer on behalf of His Father.

For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. – John 17:2-3 NLT

Everything that Jesus had done and said up until this point had brought glory to His Heavenly Father. He had done nothing of His own initiative or for His own glory.

“I have no wish to glorify myself, God is going to glorify me.” – John 8:50 NLT

He had come to earth in order to point people to God. The sole purpose behind His incarnation had been to be “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6 NLT). There were no other means by which sinful men and women could find access to and a restored relationship with God.

Jesus indicates that He had done all He had been commissioned to do.

“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” – John 17:4 ESV

His miracles and messages had all been in keeping with His Father’s will. And now, it was time to complete His mission and return to His Father’s side.

“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” – John 17:5 ESV

Again, Jesus knew full well that the path to His glorification led through the cross. He would have to be “lifted up” before He could be raised up to His former place of glory at His Father’s side. The apostle Paul describes well this path of humility and suffering that would ultimately lead to Jesus’ glorification.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:8-11 ESV

A Prayer of Encouragement

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

From the surrounding context, it would appear that Jesus is praying this prayer audibly, and in the hearing of His disciples. His words are directed to His Heavenly Father but for the benefit of His disciples. Jesus wants them to overhear this conversation because it contains vital information concerning their relationship with God that should provide them with further encouragement in the face of what lie ahead.

He begins by stating, “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:6 ESV). As John revealed in the opening chapter of his gospel, with His incarnation, Jesus made God known (John 1:18). As the Son of God, Jesus manifested the glory of God on earth. He was “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 NLT) and “the exact likeness of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4 NLT).

Jesus manifested or made known the name of God by revealing the divine nature of God through His life and ministry. His miracles displayed the power and authority of God. His words were spoken on behalf of God and revealed the truth of God. And His death on the cross would be the ultimate expression of the love of God. For the last three years, He had been providing His disciples with an earned theology degree on the nature of God. These were “the people” given to Him by God to instruct and prepare for their future roles in the ongoing redemptive plan. They belonged to God because He had chosen them and then given them to His Son to train up as the future ambassadors of the Gospel.

Jesus reveals that these men, whom God had given Him, had remained faithful. They were still with Him, in spite of all the disturbing news He had just shared with them. While they didn’t

understand everything Jesus had said, they still believed He was sent from God. And they were still walking with Him even as the darkness around them seemed to grow increasingly more intense. Their continued presence was proof of their commitment. All that they had seen and heard over the last three years had left them convinced that Jesus was the Son of God.

“I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.” – John 17:8 NLT

And Jesus audibly states that His prayer was on their behalf.

“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.” – John 17:9 ESV

It seems doubtful that Jesus would have made this clarification for God’s benefit. The more likely explanation is that His words were aimed at His disciples. As they listened in on Jesus’ prayer to His Father, they would have realized He was speaking not only *about* them but *to* them. He wanted them to know that, because of their relationship with Him, they were no longer of this world but were united to God. They belonged to Him.

“All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory.” – John 17:10 NLT

The disciples were going to share in the unity that exists between Jesus and His Father. God had given them to Jesus and now Jesus was giving them back to God. He had prepared them and was now presenting them to His Father for use in His divine plan for redeeming a lost and dying world. Jesus was leaving but they would be staying. And He makes that point clear.

“I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.” – John 17:11 ESV

This is a somewhat strange statement for Jesus to make because He was still standing right in front of them. But it reflects His attitude at that moment. His earthly ministry was over. He had one last task to perform and that was to offer His life as a ransom for many. Jesus was fully committed to completing His God-given assignment and His mind was fixed on the glory that awaited Him. The author of Hebrews explains the motivation behind Jesus’ single-minded focus.

Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. – Hebrews 12:2 NLT

But as Jesus makes clear, His disciples would remain behind. Yet He wanted them to know that while they would be in the world, they were not to be of the world.

“...they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” – John 17:14-15 ESV

Yes, He was leaving them behind, but He was not leaving them alone or on their own. He was asking His Father to protect them. Again, it seems unlikely that Jesus is attempting to remind God to take care of His own. But this prayer would have revealed to His disciples that their future was going to be marked by spiritual warfare. Yet they could rest assured that their Heavenly Father would be caring for them every step of the way. As Jesus prepared to leave, He was turning over the daily care of these men to God. He had faithfully and successfully protected them for the last three years.

“While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction...” – John 17:12 ESV

But now, in anticipation of His return to His rightful place at His Father’s side in heaven, Jesus was placing His disciples in His Father’s all-powerful hands.

Verse 13 strongly suggests that Jesus was praying within the hearing of His disciples.

*“I am coming to you, and **these things I speak in the world**, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” – John 17:13 ESV*

He spoke so that they could hear, and, in due time, they would recall His words and be filled with joy in knowing that His prayer had been answered. They would experience the joy of seeing Jesus in His resurrected state. They would watch Him ascend into heaven and then, days later, receive the promised Holy Spirit and know the joy of having the indwelling presence of God to guide and protect them.

Once again, Jesus stresses that the disciples were no longer of this world. And, as He had told them earlier, they would be hated by the world just as He had been.

“The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.” – John 15:19 NLT

This “in it, but not of it” relationship the disciples would have with the world was not going to be easy. Jesus had come into the world and been rejected by it, so the disciples could expect to experience the same fate. And Jesus makes it clear that their presence in this sin-filled and hateful world was part of the divine plan.

“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” – John 17:18 ESV

Just as Jesus had been commissioned to bring God’s plan of redemption to stubborn and rebellious world, the disciples would receive their marching orders from Jesus to carry on His work after He was gone.

“And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” – Acts 1:8 NLT

And Jesus asks the Father to continue to provide these men with the one thing they will need to accomplish their mission: The truth.

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” – John 17:17 ESV

To sanctify simply means to set apart for service. The disciples were going to need a constant and steady flow of truth. Up until this point, Jesus had been their sole source of truth. As He had told them, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6 NLT). But now, they were going to receive truth directly from God through the indwelling presence of His Spirit. They would experience the reality of what Jesus had foretold.

“When you are arrested, don’t worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” – Matthew 10:19-20 NLT

But for this to happen, Jesus was going to have to complete His assignment. The Spirit would not come until Jesus had died, been resurrected, and returned to His Father’s side. That’s why Jesus states, “And I set myself apart on their behalf, so that they too may be truly set apart” (John 17:19 NET). His death was going to make possible their ongoing exposure to the truth of God through the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” – John 16:13 ESV

Unity and Glory

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

The 11 disciples are being given the privilege of listening in as Jesus prays to the Father on their behalf. Overhearing this “private” conversation was providing them with a glimpse into the intimate relationship shared between Jesus and His Heavenly Father. But it also seems clear that Jesus meant for them to hear His prayer because He wanted to encourage them. He knew they were full of fear and struggling with doubt. The thought of losing their teacher and friend, whom they had believed to be their long-awaited Messiah, had left them confused. So, Jesus allowed them to eavesdrop in on His prayer so they would better understand what was about to happen.

The Good Shepherd was preparing to lay down His life for the sheep (John 10:11), but He was turning over the care of the flock to His Father. In His absence, they would find themselves in the highly capable hands of God Almighty. And Jesus requests the Father to “keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15 ESV) and that He “sanctify them in the truth” (John 17:16 ESV). When Jesus left, they would remain behind, but they would not find themselves alone and unprotected. Their sorrow would be turned to joy. Their devastated hope would be renewed as they witnessed Jesus in His resurrected state. And their confidence would soar as they experienced the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks to John, who recorded this prayer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, generations of believers have been allowed to listen in as Jesus prayed to His Father on behalf of His disciples. And Jesus made sure that these future followers would also receive encouragement and insight from His private petition to the Father.

*“I do not ask for these only, **but also for those who will believe in me through their word...**” – John 17:20 ESV*

Even before going to the cross, Jesus prophetically proclaims the effectiveness of His mission. He will sacrifice His life on behalf of the sheep and His faithful under-shepherds will carry the good news of His death, burial, and resurrection to the world. And the result will be the “ransom of many” (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus was fully confident that His sacrificial death would result in the salvation of all those who had been given to Him by His Heavenly Father. His death would be, as the theologians like to put it, efficacious or effective. Not a single drop of His atoning blood would go to waste. As the author of Hebrews puts it, the sacrifice of Jesus' life would not be in vain.

Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. – Hebrews 9:28 NLT

His seemingly wasteful and meaningless death would end up producing a rich and bountiful harvest, just as He had told His disciples.

"...unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives." – John 12:24 NLT

And as Jesus looks into the future, He prays on behalf of all those who would place their faith in His sacrificial, substitutionary death on their behalf. His desire is that they experience the joy of unity and the hope of future glorification.

His first request is for a spirit of unity among all of His followers. And He is very specific as to what He means.

"I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." – John 17:21 NLT

Jesus is not describing some kind of monochromatic homogeneity where all believers look and sound the same. He is expressing His desire that His followers reflect the same kind of unity He shares with the Father. He and the Heavenly Father are unified by their love for one another and by their commitment to redeem and restore the world they have made. They share a common mission to recreate and renovate what sin has marred. And Jesus, out of love for His Father, has faithfully carried out His commission and will soon complete the final task given to Him, setting in motion the final phase of God's divine redemptive plan. And Jesus' greatest desire is that His followers share in that undistracted and unwavering commitment to the divine mission. And this request of Jesus would be fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit who, by indwelling each believer, would permanently unite them to God the Father and God the Son.

And it is this spiritual union with the Godhead that provides the proof or evidence of the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrificial death. The ability of Jesus' followers to live in unity, despite their many differences, will reflect the life-transforming nature of the Gospel.

Back in chapter 13, John recorded a message Jesus gave to His disciples.

"I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." – John 13:34-35 NLT

But their ability to carry out this command would not be possible until Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit. It would be the indwelling and empowering presence of the Spirit of God that made mutual love and unity achievable among the increasingly diverse and disparate followers of Jesus. The unity for which Jesus prayed would come about through the work of God's Spirit. And the result would be a miraculous ingathering and unifying of people from all walks of life and every conceivable background.

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:26-28 NLT

Jesus explains that this supernatural unity has been made possible because He has faithfully shared the glory given to Him by God.

"I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one." – John 17:22 NLT

But what does this mean? How did Jesus share God's glory and what does this have to do with the unity of His followers? Well, to understand what Jesus means we have to go all the way back to chapter one, where John describes the incarnation of Jesus.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14 ESV

By taking on human flesh, the Son of God made the glory of God visible. Through His miracles and messages, Jesus revealed Himself to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He made the glory of God known to men and, for all those who believed Him to be who He claimed to be, they were united to God through faith in Him. Their acceptance of Jesus as the manifested glory of the invisible God resulted in their restoration to a right relationship with God. And, as Jesus puts it, this reunion with God the Father is what makes it possible for His followers to live in unity and so prove to be His disciples.

"I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me." – John 17:23 NLT

The lives of the disciples would end up bringing glory to God on earth. And all those who would come to faith in Christ through their ministry and message would do the same. But Jesus fast-

forwards and expresses His desire that all His disciples experience the future glorification that will result in their reuniting with Him in heaven.

“Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!” –

John 17:24 NLT

The ultimate goal behind Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross was the justification of sinful men and women so that they might be restored to a right relationship with God the Father. But this wonderful truth will not be fully fulfilled until Jesus returns again and makes possible the future glorification of our mortal bodies so that we might spend eternity with He and the Father. The apostle Paul expresses this hope in clear and compelling terms.

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control. – Philippians 3:20-21 NLT

Jesus had His eyes fixed on the far-distant future. His ability to face death was made possible by His understanding of its ultimate outcome. And the author of Hebrews used Jesus’ example of confident hope as an inspiration to all those who follow in His steps, so that we might remain steadfast to the end.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. – Hebrews 12:2-3 NLT

Just as God Intended

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

For 17 chapters, John has gone out of his way in establishing the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. But at this point in the story, it would be easy to understand if a reader of John’s gospel began to question whether Jesus really was who He claimed to be. After all, Jesus Himself has admitted that He is going to die. He has warned that His own disciples are going to desert Him. For an uninformed observer, this could all begin to raise doubts about the validity of John’s claims about the divinity of Jesus.

And the scene described in chapter 18 will raise further doubts. But, in fact, John would argue that the scene that took place in the garden that fateful night, which he witnessed and later recorded, would be one of the greatest proofs of Jesus’ identity.

The scenes of betrayal, humiliation, suffering, and death that mark the end of Jesus’ life are not meant to call into question His identity, but to confirm it. While they appear to the human eye as evidence of defeat and failure, they are actually powerful proofs of God’s divine strategy for bringing about Satan’s fall and Christ’s victory over sin and death.

Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. – Hebrews 2:14 NLT

He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. – Romans 8:3 NLT

When reading the gospels, many Christians find themselves wishing these graphics scenes could have been left out. They would prefer to skip all the gory details concerning Jesus’ humiliating trials, merciless beatings, and agonizing crucifixion and death. Why couldn’t John just have fast-

forwarded to that Hallmark-card image of the empty tomb? After all, isn't that the point of the whole story? Jesus rose again.

But John wants us to understand that, without the crucifixion, there would have been no resurrection. And as painful as it may be to read about all that Jesus had to suffer and endure, it is essential that we understand the high price that Jesus paid. The apostle Peter would have us remember that our salvation didn't come cheaply.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life you inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot. – 1 Peter 1:18-19 BSB

And Paul told the believers in Corinth, "God paid a high price for you..." (1 Corinthians 7:23 NLT). That idyllic image of the empty tomb came with a hefty price tag.

So, as we read these all-too-familiar chapters, may we do so with a sense of awe and gratitude for what God ordained and Jesus fulfilled. Every step Jesus took, every blow He suffered, every nail driven into His body, and the very last breath He breathed, were all part of the price He paid that we might be made right with God. Do not hurry through these uncomfortable moments in your rush to get to the empty tomb. Savor every painful, agonizing moment, because not only do they represent the high price God paid for your salvation, but they reveal the staggering scope of the debt you owed.

After having completed His high priestly prayer, Jesus led His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane. And it was in this familiar spot that Judas decided to carry out his plan to betray Jesus into the hands of the religious leaders.

So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. – John 18:3 ESV

Don't miss the stark contrast contained in this scene. Jesus, the faithful Lamb of God, is in the company of his disillusioned and dispirited disciples. But Judas, the unfaithful disciple, is accompanied by armed soldiers and the sworn enemies of Jesus. You can sense the tension. And the fear and confusion of the disciples are almost palpable. But Jesus was unsurprised and unmoved by this obvious display of force. John juxtaposes the heavy drama of the moment with Jesus' calm demeanor and measured response.

Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. "Who are you looking for?" – John 18:4 NLT

This simple question is the key to understanding the Gospel of John. By asking it, Jesus is demanding that Judas and his associates confess who they believe Him to be. Early in His ministry, Jesus had asked His disciples a similar question: "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27 ESV). And their answers had been all over the map. So, Jesus had followed that question

up with another one: “But who do **you** say that I am?” (Mark 8:29 ESV). And to that question, Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16 ESV).

Now, in the darkness of the garden, illuminated by the glow of torches, the Light of the World asks Judas and his companions to reveal the identity of the one they are seeking. And, unlike Peter, their response is neither bold nor enlightened.

They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” – John 18:5 ESV

They are simply looking for a man, and nothing more. They had not come looking for the Messiah. They weren’t expecting to encounter the Son of God. And their answer revealed all that they knew about Jesus: His name and hometown.

And Jesus responds to their answer by confirming that He was the one for whom they were looking. But His simple answer carries tremendous weight.

Jesus said to them, “I am he.” – John 18:5 ESV

In Greek, it reads, “I am!” Why is this important? This was the very same phrase Jesus used when stating the various aspects of His identity.

“I am the bread of life.” – John 6:35 ESV

“I am the light of the world.” – John 8:12 ESV

“I am the door.” – John 10:7 ESV

“I am the good shepherd.” – John 10:11 ESV

“I am the resurrection and the life.” – John 11:25 ESV

“I am the way and the truth and the life.” – John 14:6 ESV

“I am the true vine.” – John 15:1 ESV

Every time Jesus uttered this two-word statement, He was declaring Himself to be God. He was echoing the very words spoken by Yahweh when He had appeared to Moses in the form of the burning bush in the wilderness. When God had commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and lead the people of Israel out of captivity, Moses had asked, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” (Exodus 3:13 ESV).

And God had responded, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14 ESV). That was His name. It was a declaration of His transcendency and eternity. He was God, the alpha and omega, the

beginning and the end. As God would later reveal through the prophet Isaiah, “**I am** the first and **I am** the last; besides me there is no god” (Isaiah 54:6 ESV).

And just to make sure Moses heard what He had said, God repeated His answer. “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘**I am** has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14 ESV).

So, when Jesus declared Himself to be “I am,” He was not-so-subtly declaring that He was far more than just Jesus of Nazareth. He was the very one Philip had told Nathanael about.

“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” – John 1:45 ESV

And John reveals the power inherent in Jesus’ self-proclaimed statement of identity by describing what happened when the words left His lips.

When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. – John 18:6 ESV

This was not a voluntary act of reverence or submission. It was an uncontrollable response to the power and presence of God almighty. Of no choice of their own, they were driven to the ground in submission and subjugation to the Son of God. It was a foreshadowing of a future day when all mankind will acknowledge Jesus as who He really is.

*...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
– Philippians 2:10-11 NLT*

But their submission proved to be short-lived. When they recovered their senses, they arrested Jesus but allowed His disciples to go free. And John reveals that this was in keeping with the declaration Jesus had made to His Father: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one” (John 17:12; 18:9 ESV).

Throughout this tension-filled scene, Jesus exhibits a strong sense of calm and composure. But Peter displays the turmoil taking place within the hearts of the disciples. He draws a sword and cuts off the ear of one of the high priest’s servants. Rather than wield his sword against one of the armed guards, Peter attacks a defenseless slave. It was likely his attempt to prove his earlier boast to Jesus, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you” (Matthew 26:23 NLT).

But Jesus calmly responded, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (John 18:11 ESV). John ignores the fact that Jesus healed the ear of the servant. For him, the salient point behind this encounter was the willingness with which Jesus faced His God-ordained fate. What He was about to do, He would do willingly because, as He had told His disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his

work” (John 4:34 ESV).

When Men Judge God

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. – John 18:12-14 ESV

The trials of Jesus begin. In a real sense, the scenes which John is about to describe portray the Son of God, the creator of all things (John 1:3), being judged by those He has made. Mortal men will dare to put on trial the immortal God of the universe. It brings to mind the words of the prophet, Isaiah.

*“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him,
a pot among earthen pots!
Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’
or ‘Your work has no handles?’” – Isaiah 45:9 ESV*

And the apostle Paul picked up on this theme in his letter to the churches in Rome.

*“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder,
“Why have you made me like this?” – Romans 9:20 ESV*

And yet, John is going to record for posterity the unjust and unfathomable audacity of mere men standing in judgment of the one and only Son of God. The high priest of Israel, members of the Sanhedrin, the Roman governor, and the puppet-king of Israel will all consider themselves worthy of determining the fate of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The irony behind all of this is how the guilty and condemned are attempting to try and convict their own Judge. Jesus had earlier warned the Jewish religious leaders that God had given Him the authority to judge.

*“...the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge,
so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” – John 5:22-23 NLT*

But they had refused to accept Jesus as the Son of God. To them, His words were nothing more than the ravings of a madman or the twisted rhetoric of a false Messiah vainly hoping to stir up a revolution. So, when He spoke, they failed to believe what He had to say. And His warnings of future judgment went in one ear and out the other.

“The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don’t be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise

to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.” – John 5:26-29 NLT

Jesus had made it perfectly clear that He had God-given authority to judge, and when the right time came, He would “judge everyone.” And the result of that judgment would have eternal consequences. And Jesus had boldly declared to the pious and self-righteous religious leaders, “my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will” (John 5:30 NLT).

Immediately after describing the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, John recorded an encounter between Jesus and the crowds who had cheered His arrival into the city. In spite of the royal welcome Jesus had received, John reported that there were many who still refused to believe in Him. But he added, “Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn’t admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43 NLT).

And John portrays Jesus as literally shouting at these people, in an attempt to open their eyes to the reality of who He was and why He had come. He wanted them to understand that He was the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

*“If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should remain in darkness. As for anyone who hears My words and does not keep them, I do not judge him. **For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world.** There is a judge for the one who rejects Me and does not receive My words: The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” – John 12:44-48 BSB*

Here, Jesus reveals the truth that the religious leaders had missed. Yes, He had been given full authority by God to judge all men. And the day would come when He would exercise that authority. But that was not the purpose behind His incarnation. Jesus had not come to judge, but to save. In point of fact, the world had already been judged and condemned. God had passed judgment against all humanity when Adam and Eve had rebelled against Him in the garden. The parents of the human race were judged guilty and condemned to live the rest of their lives separated from God’s holy presence. And rather than enjoying eternal life and unbroken fellowship with God, their lives were marked by spiritual isolation and ended in physical death and eternal separation from God.

And Paul reports the sad fact that the sinful disposition exhibited by Adam and Eve was passed on, infecting their future offspring.

...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... – Romans 5:12 ESV

And he adds that “the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation” (Romans 5:16 ESV). But Paul wasn’t content to leave it at that. He wanted his readers to fully grasp the gravity of the situation.

*...because of one man’s trespass, **death reigned** through that one man... – Romans 5:17
ESV*

*...one trespass **led to condemnation** for all men... – Romans 5:18 ESV*

*...by the one man’s disobedience the **many were made sinners**... – Romans 5:19 ESV*

What Paul is attempting to describe is the pervasive nature of the darkness that shrouded the world when Jesus arrived on the scene. All humanity stood as guilty before God because all were sinners. And all faced the same miserable fate to which God had condemned Adam and Eve: Death and eternal separation from Him.

But Jesus had come to save the world, not judge it. The whole intent behind His incarnation had been to bring salvation, not condemnation. The Light had invaded the darkness in order to bring life to those living under the condemnation of sin and death. And John opened his gospel with the sober words that describe the reception Jesus would receive.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. – John 1:9-10 ESV

And now, three years later, the life-giving Light of the World was preparing to submit Himself to a series of trials officiated by men who will day have to stand before Jesus, with Him as their Judge and King. Whether they realized it or not, these “clay pots” were going to judge their Maker. And, once again, the prophet Isaiah has some strong words for those who would attempt to reverse the roles and place themselves as God’s judge.

You have turned things upside down, as if the potter were regarded as clay. Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “He did not make me”? Can the pottery say of the potter, “He has no understanding”? – Isaiah 29:16 BSB

Consider the absurdity of it all. Men blinded by darkness were going to judge the Light of the World. The spiritually dead were about to condemn to death the One who gave them life and could provide them with eternal life. Those suffering from spiritual hunger were about to destroy the Bread that gives life to the world. The spiritually thirsty were preparing to crucify the only source of “living water” that could provide them with “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14 ESV).

Don’t miss the visual paradox that John describes.

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. – John 18:12 ESV

The creator of the entire universe is bound with ropes and led like an animal, or as Isaiah put it, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7 ESV). The one who “never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone” (1 Peter 2:22 NLT) is dragged from the garden like a common criminal. The “great high priest who has passed through the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14 ESV) and who will offer the once-for-all-time sacrifice for the sins of mankind is forced to submit Himself before a frail and flawed human high priest.

...they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. – John 18:13 ESV

According to the *NET Bible* study notes, “Annas had been high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15 when he was deposed by the Roman prefect Valerius Gratus (according to Josephus, *Ant.* 18.2.2 [18.34]). His five sons all eventually became high priests. The family was noted for its greed, wealth, and power.”

Annas, the father-in-law of the current high priest, was still considered the patriarch of his family and was treated with reverence and respect. Here John provides a not-so-subtle father-and-son motif. Jesus, the Son of God, is brought before Annas, the father of Caiaphas. The father is shown respect and honor by being allowed to be the first to interrogate Jesus. These religious representatives of the people of Israel will gladly honor an earthly father but will treat their Heavenly Father with disrespect by refusing to accept His Son.

And John reminds his readers that it was Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, and the current high priest, who had unknowingly prophesied of Jesus’ pending death.

It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people. – John 18:14 ESV

John recorded this conversation back in chapter 11.

But one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

Caiaphas did not say this on his own. Instead, as high priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to gather them together into one. – John 11:49-52 BSB

Jesus may have been the one whose hands were bound, but these men were captives to the will of God. They were mere pawns in the hands of the sovereign God of the universe and would prove to be His instruments for fulfilling His divine plan of redemption. And Jesus, the

Son of God, accepted His fate with an attitude of willing submission and faithful trust in His loving, all-knowing Heavenly Father.

He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. – 1 Peter 2:23 NLT

The Trial of Peter

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

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

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed. – John 18:15-27 ESV

Jesus has been dragged before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest. Of the four gospel authors, John is the only one who records this meeting between Jesus and Annas. The Synoptics each have Jesus being brought before Caiaphas and then taken to the Roman Governor, Pilate. John refers to Jesus’ appearance before Caiaphas (v. 24) but chooses not to provide any of the details concerning their meeting. It seems that John is more interested in the patriarch of the high priestly dynasty because Annas’ father/son relationship with Caiaphas, his son-in-law, echoes the many references to Jesus and His Father found in his gospel.

The setting is the residence of the high priest. Jesus has been brought to the home of the man who served in the same role as Aaron, the brother of Moses and the first high priest of Israel. God had ordained Aaron and his sons to serve as His priests, ministering on behalf of the people of Israel throughout the generations.

*“I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.” – Exodus 29:44-46
ESV*

But over the centuries, the high priesthood had mirrored the spiritual state of the nation. They were just as guilty of apostasy and idolatry. Rather than maintain their consecrated status as God's priests, they led the people in committing sins against the Almighty. And the prophet Hosea records God's indictment against them.

*“When the people bring their sin offerings, the priests get fed.
So the priests are glad when the people sin!
‘And what the priests do, the people also do.’
So now I will punish both priests and people
for their wicked deeds.” – Hosea 4:8-9 NLT*

*“But like Adam, you broke my covenant
and betrayed my trust.*

*“Gilead is a city of sinners,
tracked with footprints of blood.
Priests form bands of robbers,
waiting in ambush for their victims.
They murder travelers along the road to Shechem
and practice every kind of sin.” – Hosea 6:7-9 NLT*

And not much had changed by the time Jesus appeared in the courtyard of the high priest. As John has shown, the high priest and his fellow members of the Sanhedrin had no love for Jesus, and they refused to accept His claims to be the Son of God. The whole reason Jesus stood before Annas with His hands bound like a criminal was that they saw Him as a threat to their way of life. When Jesus had ransacked the temple, turning over the tables of the moneychangers, the priests had seen this as a direct attack on their authority and power. So now, Jesus was about to stand for His crimes against the religious authorities of Israel.

But as John records, there was more than one person facing a trial this night. Peter, in the darkness of the courtyard, would also find himself undergoing intense interrogation and facing the very real prospect of suffering guilt by association. This entire scene brings to mind an earlier conversation between Jesus and Peter. It had taken place not long after Jesus and His disciples had shared their final Passover meal together. After Judas had left the room, Jesus had made a shocking announcement to Peter.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” – Luke 22:31-32 ESV

This news left Peter stunned and indignant. And he responded with a strong sense of denial, declaring his willingness to lay down his life for Jesus.

Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." – Luke 22:33 ESV

But to Peter's shock and embarrassment, Jesus prophesied a far different outcome.

"I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." – Luke 22:34 ESV

Now, that fateful moment had come. Peter and John had followed the procession from the garden, keeping to the shadows to avoid detection. But when they arrived at the high priest's residence, John arranged for them to gain entrance because he was known to the servants of the house. John doesn't disclose the nature of his relationship with the high priest but simply states that he was able to negotiate Peter's entrance into the courtyard, an act of kindness Peter would probably later regret.

As Peter made his way through the gate into the courtyard, a servant girl asks him a simple and somewhat harmless question.

"You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" – John 18:17 ESV

It seems that this girl had recognized John and knew him to be a disciple of Jesus. When John had asked her to allow his friend to enter the courtyard with him, she was curious to know if Peter was a disciple as well. There was no threat involved. She wasn't pointing a finger of accusation against Peter. She was simply making small talk.

But Peter, in his heightened state of fear, immediately took her question as an accusation. And with a short and quick reply, he vehemently denied any association with Jesus.

"I am not." – John 18:17 ESV

In his record of the night's proceedings, John leaves Peter warming himself by a charcoal fire and shifts the scene inside, where Jesus stands before Annas. What takes place here is less a trial than an interrogation. Annas "questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching" (John 18:19 ESV). Just as the servant girl had asked Peter about his relationship with Jesus, Annas wants to know about Jesus' relationship with the disciples. He has heard all the rumors concerning Jesus and now he wants to hear what Jesus has to say for Himself. Who were His disciples and what exactly had He been teaching them? Annas is wanting to know how this uneducated Rabbi from Nazareth has managed to attract such a large following in such a short period of time. The news of Jesus' grand entrance into Jerusalem before thousands of cheering people had not escaped Annas.

Jesus, unphased by His surroundings and unimpressed by the lofty reputation of His interrogator, simply replies: "Everyone knows what I teach. I have preached regularly in the

synagogues and the Temple, where the people gather. I have not spoken in secret. Why are you asking me this question? Ask those who heard me. They know what I said” (John 18:20-21 NLT).

Jesus was not being disrespectful. He was simply stating that His days of teaching and explaining Himself were over. His witness concerning His ministry and identity was complete. He was done teaching and the final phase of His mission had begun. If Annas was looking for witnesses to vouch for who Jesus was, there were more than enough people who could speak on His behalf. And the time was quickly coming when the followers of Jesus would lift their voices and declare the good news of the gospel. But the words of Jesus recall the sad image of Peter, cowering in silent fear by the glow of the charcoal fire.

But Jesus’ response to Annas earned Him a slap in the face from the hand of one of the officers standing beside Him. His answer had come across as dishonoring and deserving of rebuke. His face still stinging from the guard’s physical assault, Jesus calmly replied, “If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I’m speaking the truth, why are you beating me?” (John 18:23 NLT).

This statement will establish the tone for the rest of the night’s proceedings. Jesus is going to be repeatedly questioned and physically abused. But even Pilate would later confess, “I find no guilt in him” (John 19:4 ESV). Nothing Jesus had said over the last three years had been false. And what He said to Annas had not been disrespectful. He had simply been stating the truth. These trials would prove to be a mockery of justice. They were not interested in the truth. The one who claimed to be “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6) stood before them, but they would declare Him to be a liar and a deceiver. And in so doing, they would prove what Jesus had said about them earlier:

“...you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.” – John 8:44 NLT

And with that, Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas. But what about Peter? He was still standing by the fire, awaiting the final two of his “siftings” by Satan. And they came in quick succession. But rather than serve as a faithful witness to His friend and Messiah, Peter denies knowing Him...“and at once a rooster crowed” (John 18:27 ESV).

An Unlikely and Unholy Alliance

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰ They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." ³¹ Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." ³² This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. – John 18:28-32 ESV

John has chosen to give an abbreviated version of Jesus' trial before the high priest and the other members of the Sanhedrin. Perhaps it was because he understood this charade to be anything but a fair trial. Jesus had been brought before these self-righteous religious leaders for questioning, but they had already made up their minds concerning His guilt. In his gospel account, Matthew records that all the teachers of religious law and the elders had gathered at the home of Caiaphas, the high priest. And while Jesus was being interrogated by Annas, the members of the Sanhedrin were busy plotting how they could falsely accuse Jesus.

...the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would lie about Jesus, so they could put him to death. – Matthew 26:59 NLT

But according to Jewish law, they were required to have two witnesses with corroborating testimonies.

Finally, two men came forward who declared, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" – Matthew 26:60-61 NLT

When they demanded that Jesus answer these charges, He remained silent. And it was not until the high priest demanded, "tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63 NLT), that Jesus spoke.

"You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven." – Matthew 26:64 NLT

In a rather melodramatic display of shock and awe, the high priest tore his own robe and cried out, "Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" (Matthew 26:65-66 NLT). And the council-turned-mob shouted in unison, "Guilty! He deserves to die!" (Matthew 26:66 NLT).

Their verbal declaration of Jesus' guilt was followed by physical abuse as they began to beat him with their fists and spit in His face. And as they slapped the face of the Son of God, they mocked Him saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who hit you that time?" (Matthew 26:68 NLT).

They had their official charge of blasphemy, which was a capital offense in Israel (Leviticus 24:16). They had their two witnesses. Now, all they needed was the assistance of the Roman government to see that Jesus' death was carried out. According to Roman law, the Jews were prohibited from carrying out any form of a death sentence. But it was going to be unlikely that the Romans would execute Jesus based on a violation of some obscure religious law of the Jews. So, the high priest and his companions knew they would have to drum up additional charges that portrayed Jesus as a threat to the Roman government.

Interestingly enough, John records none of this. Perhaps he considered the whole affair a travesty of justice and not worth the time and effort to document. Whatever his reasons, John picks up the story in the morning as they transferred Jesus to the headquarters of Pilate, the Roman governor over the region.

In a subtle statement cloaked in irony, John records that Jesus' "accusers didn't go inside because it would defile them, and they wouldn't be allowed to celebrate the Passover" (John 18:28 NLT). Unwilling to risk becoming ceremonially unclean by entering the un-kosher home of a Gentile, these pious hypocrites chose to remain outside. There were the same men who had gone out of their way to solicit false witnesses so they could draw up fabricated charges against Jesus. Their self-righteous display of moral superiority was a sham, and their actions gave proof of the veracity of Jesus' earlier statements concerning them.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness." – Matthew 23:25-28
NLT

These men were little more than actors in a play. In fact, the Greek term, "hypocrite" with which Jesus described them was commonly used to refer to an actor or stage player. To be a hypocrite was to portray yourself falsely, putting on an outward act meant to conceal your true nature or identity. And as these men stood outside the offices of the Roman governor, they pompously displayed their commitment to moral purity as they prepared to betray the sinless Lamb of God and condemn Him to an undeserved death. His face still red and swollen from their repeated slaps and beatings, Jesus, the innocent Son of God, was handed over to the Romans by men who were spiritual pretenders, full of pretense and dissimulation.

When Pilate demanded to know the nature of the charges they were bringing against Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders responded somewhat sarcastically, "We wouldn't have handed him over to you if he weren't a criminal!" (John 18:30 NLT). It wasn't that they lacked any charges to

level against Jesus, it was that they wanted Pilate to know just how serious they were. According to their description of Jesus, He was *kakopoios* – an evildoer. Luke records that they accused Jesus of trying to foment an insurrection against the Romans.

“This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king.” – Luke 23:2 NLT

But, once again, John leaves out these details.

Pilate, out of frustration over this early morning disturbance and the lack of an official charge against Jesus, demanded that they judge Jesus according to their own law. He had heard nothing that deemed this matter worthy of a Roman trial. And in an effort to drive home the seriousness of their intentions, the Jews reminded Pilate that they were forbidden by Roman law to carry out capital punishment. They had determined Jesus to be worthy of death and they would not be satisfied until Pilate acquiesced and accommodated their wishes.

It is at this point in the narrative that John adds the note: “This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (John 18:32 ESV). This is similar to what he wrote when Jesus had declared that when He was “lifted up from the earth” (John 12:32 ESV), He would draw all people to Himself. On that occasion, John had added the aside, “He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:33 ESV).

Several times in his gospel, John reports that the Jews had intended to stone Jesus but had failed to do so (John 8:59; 10:31). According to God’s divine plan, stoning would not be the means by which Jesus would die. He would be “lifted up” on a cross. And for that to happen, Jesus would have to be condemned by the Roman government. Crucifixion was the official form of capital punishment used by the Romans, and God had foreordained that Jesus would be betrayed by the Jews and officially executed by the Romans. And just days after Jesus ascension, the apostle Peter would address a crowd of Jews, declaring the sovereign will of God behind all that took place during Jesus’ final days.

“People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him.” – Acts 2:22-23 NLT

And sometime later, Peter would pray a powerful prayer of thanks to God, expressing the gratitude of the believers for all that God had accomplished through the sacrificial death of His Son on their behalf. He recognized all that God had done had been in spite of the efforts of the Gentiles and the Jews who had joined forces against the Son of God.

“Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.” – Acts 4:27-28 NLT

What a remarkable thing to consider that all the forces of Rome and Israel were aligning themselves to stand against Jesus, the Savior of the world. The Jews were the chosen people of God and the Romans were the most powerful nation on earth, and they were sworn enemies. But these two unlikely partners were linking arms in order to put to death the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And all according to the sovereign will of Almighty God. They would be instruments in His all-powerful hands, unwittingly performing His will and accomplishing His divine strategy for the redemption of men from every tribe, nation, and tongue.

A Different Kind of Kingdom

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

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” ⁴⁰ They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber. – John 18:33-40 ESV

It doesn’t take long to recognize that Pilate, the Roman governor, has no clue as to the seriousness or scope of what is taking place outside his headquarters. His early morning routine has been interrupted by a contingent of angry Jewish religious leaders who are demanding the execution of one of their own people. Pilate, whose official residence was in Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea, had traveled to Jerusalem because of the Jewish Feast of Passover. This was one of the most well-attended of all the Jewish festivals, attracting pilgrims from all over the world. As a precaution, the Romans tended to increase their military presence in order to quell any trouble that might occur. So, Pilate was in town to ensure that the proceedings were peaceful and non-eventful. The last thing he would have wanted was a riot on his hands.

So, when the religious leaders showed up outside his door with a prisoner in tow, he was forced to give it his full attention. But it seems obvious that he saw the situation as nothing more than an internecine religious dispute that had nothing to do with Rome. He even demanded that they judge the man according to their own law. But the men who had dragged the beaten and disheveled Jesus to Pilate’s doorstep were not going to be satisfied by a sentence of ex-communication. They were seeking His execution.

Leaving the Jewish leaders outside, Pilate entered his residence and had Jesus brought before him. In an attempt to get to the bottom of the matter, Pilate asked Jesus a series of short but direct questions.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” – vs. 33

“Am I a Jew?” – vs. 35

“What have you done?” – vs. 35

“So you are a king?” – vs. 36

“What is truth?” – vs. 38

Pilate’s line of questioning was directed at determining the identity of Jesus. He needed to know who this man was and what He had done to cause such an uproar among the religious leaders of Israel. Since the first question that Pilate posed had to do with kingship, it is apparent that the Jews had communicated Jesus’ claim to be the King of Jews.

Matthew records that during Jesus’ interrogation before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas, the high priest had said to Him, “I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63 NLT). And when Jesus had answered in the affirmative, He had sealed His fate. They declared Him to be a blasphemer for having declared Himself to be equal with God. But knowing that the Roman governor would have no interest in Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God, the Jews put their charges in terms that would get Pilate’s full attention. By claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus was also declaring Himself to be the King of the Jews.

One of the greatest concerns of the Romans was any form of insurrection or uprising. So, a Jew claiming to be the rightful King of Israel was a potential problem that had to be addressed quickly and effectively. But Pilate, more curious than concerned, asked Jesus to confirm the charge against Him.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” – John 18:33 ESV

He was looking for a simple “Yes” or “No” answer. But instead, Jesus responded with a question of His own: “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” (John 18:34 ESV). Jesus doesn’t confirm or deny His Kingship. He simply asks Pilate whether his question is based on personal curiosity or professional protocol. Was Pilate really interested in knowing if Jesus was the King of the Jews or was he simply reiterating the charges of the Sanhedrin?

But Jesus needed no response because He already knew the answer. Pilate, as a Roman, had no interest in whether Jesus was the legitimate King of the Jews or not. In his mind, Caesar was not only the king but his boss as well. And his job was to protect Caesar’s interests in Judea. And Pilate responded to Jesus with a tone of incredulity and disdain.

“Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” – John 18:35 ESV

What Pilate failed to understand was that Jesus really was the King of the Jews. But not only that, He was Pilate and Caesar’s King as well. This royal prefect was staring into the face of the King of kings and Lord of lords. He was in the company of true royalty. Yes, Jesus’ face was

bloodied and bruised, His clothes were disheveled, and His hands were bound, but He was no less a King.

And Jesus affirms and clarifies the nature of His Kingship by declaring, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36 ESV). In a sense, Jesus assuaged any concerns Pilate might have had. Caesar had nothing to fear from Jesus or His Kingdom because it was of a different kind. His Kingdom was other-worldly.

“If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” – John 18:36 ESV

In His high priestly prayer, recorded in chapter 17, Jesus made a declarative statement concerning His disciples:

“they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” – John 17:14-16 ESV

And now, He tells Pilate that if His kingdom was of this world, His followers would be mounting an insurrection to set their King free. But He alone stood before Pilate. There were no riots in the streets. There were no enraged followers pounding down the doors of Pilate’s residence demanding the release of their rightful King. And yet, Jesus was still affirming His kingship and His right to rule and reign.

But before Jesus could sit on His throne, He would have to hang on a cross. He had come to be “lifted up” but not on a royal dais wearing flowing robes and a jewel-encrusted crown. No, He would have His garments stripped from Him and a crown of thorns mockingly placed on His head. And just hours later, Pilate himself would command that a sign be placed above the head of Jesus as He hung on the cross. It would read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19 ESV).

Pilate, clueless as to what Jesus was talking about, simply responded: “So you are a king?” (John 18:37 ESV). He had no time or interest in discussing the nature of Jesus’ kingdom. All he wanted to know was if the charge against Jesus was accurate. Did Jesus consider Himself to be the King of Jews? And, once again, rather than answer Pilate directly, Jesus somewhat cryptically responded:

“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” – John 18:37 ESV

Jesus seems to be saying that Pilate's use of the term "king" was laden with all kinds of misconceptions and misunderstandings. He and Pilate were talking on two different levels and the governor was incapable of understanding what Jesus was saying to him.

Pilate was stuck on the earthly topic of kingship. All he wanted to know was if Jesus was a real threat to Rome's authority in the region. Had this obscure Rabbi from Nazareth been trying to mount an insurrection and establish Himself as the King of Israel? If so, then Pilate would have to deal with this threat quickly and effectively.

But Jesus claims that He was born into the world for a different kind of purpose. He was from line of King David and therefore, the rightful heir to the throne, but He had come into the world to "bear witness to the truth."

In the opening chapter of his gospel, John declared, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17 ESV). Jesus came to earth in order to declare the truth regarding God's plan of salvation. He was the embodiment of that truth. He had later declared of Himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 ESV).

And Jesus confirms to Pilate that, while He was a King, He had not come to earth to set up an earthly Kingdom. He had come to reveal the truth about how sinful humanity could be made right with God. And this offer of redemption and restoration was available to "everyone."

*He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. **But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.** – John 1:11-12 NLT*

*"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, **so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**" – John 3:16 NLT*

Pilate was standing face-to-face with the truth of God but didn't realize it. So, he was left asking the question: "What is truth?" (John 18:38 ESV). The very "truth" that could set him free was standing right in front of him, but all Pilate saw was a Jewish Rabbi bound with ropes and facing charges of insurrection.

So, he walked back out to Jesus' accusers and announced, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:38-39 ESV). Hoping to diffuse the situation, Pilate offered what he believed to be a viable option. Since he could find no legal reason for putting Jesus to death, he offered to release Him as a gesture of goodwill. But he made the mistake of referring to Jesus as "the King of the Jews." And this unintended slight infuriated the Sanhedrin, leading them to demand the release of a common criminal named Barabbas. They preferred a convicted felon over the Savior of the world. The one who had been declared guiltless would take the place of the guilty.

Behold Your King!

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

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." ¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." ¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. – John 19:1-16 ESV

When Pilate had asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33 ESV), he was not implying a hidden suspicion that perhaps Jesus was who the rumors claimed Him to be. The Roman governor was simply trying to ascertain the reason behind the Sanhedrin's hatred for Jesus. If Jesus was their king, why were they so desperate to have Him put to death? At the end of the day, Pilate could have cared less whether Jesus was a king or not. He simply wanted to avoid any kind of trouble during the Passover celebration, a time when Jerusalem was overflowing with pilgrims, making the city a potential tinderbox for civil unrest.

And when Pilate had found no evidence that Jesus had committed a crime worthy of capital punishment, he had offered to release Jesus, as part of an annual custom during Passover. But the Jewish religious leaders had refused his offer, demanding instead that the governor release a convicted criminal named Barabbas.

From what happens next, it seems quite evident that Pilate harbored no suspicions that Jesus was royalty. He had Jesus flogged and then stood back and watched as his soldiers "twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe" (John 19:2 ESV). As the blood flowed down the face of Jesus, the soldiers took turns slapping and mocking

Him, crying out, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (John 19:3 ESV). This blatant display of disrespect was not only aimed at Jesus but was intended to offend the high-minded religious leaders. It was a reminder of what would happen to any Jew who chose to stand against the power of Rome and the sovereign reign of Caesar.

After beating and humiliating Him, Pilate presented Jesus to the members of the Sanhedrin who remained outside the royal residence. He paraded Jesus before them, dressed in a purple robe and wearing a crown of thorns, and announced once again, “I find no guilt in him” (John 19:4 ESV). Don’t miss the significance of Pilate’s actions. He was presenting Jesus to them as their “king” – dressed in nothing more than a borrowed robe and wearing a crude crown of thorns. And he loudly and sarcastically declared for all to hear, “Behold the man!” (John 19:5 ESV).

This scene brings to mind the prophetic words of Isaiah, describing the future suffering of the Messiah.

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... – Isaiah 53:3 ESV*

Here was the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the true King of Israel, being displayed before His own people as a wretched and rejected, beaten and abandoned shell of a man. But rather than feeling pity for Jesus, the chief priests and the officers cried out in anger, “Crucify him, crucify him!” (John 19:6 ESV).

Pilate, frustrated by their incessant demands, once again declared His belief that Jesus was innocent. “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him” (John 19:6 ESV). Jesus had committed no crime worthy of death. He had led no insurrections or had fomented no rebellions against the Roman government. So, if the Jews wanted Him dead, they would have to do it themselves.

Pilate’s persistent insistence of Jesus’ innocence forced the Jews to take a different tactic. They reminded Pilate that, according to Jewish law, anyone who committed blasphemy was to be put to death. And since they were prohibited by Roman law from carrying out capital punishment on their own, they wanted him to use his authority to sanction Jesus’ death. In his gospel account, Matthew indicates that things got so heated that Pilate feared a riot would take place.

So, in one last attempt to avoid a very ugly situation, Pilate asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” (John 19:9 ESV). The Jews had just claimed that Jesus “ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7 ESV). But Pilate’s question regarding Jesus’ place of origin doesn’t indicate that he was beginning to believe Jesus was from heaven. He was simply wanting to know what part of the country Jesus called home. Luke makes this clear in his gospel account. The Jews had accused Jesus of stirring up the people, “teaching throughout all Judea,

from Galilee even to this place” (Luke 23:5 ESV). This led Pilate to ask whether Jesus was a Galilean.

And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. – Luke 23:7 ESV

John’s emphasis on Pilate’s question is intentional because it supports the overall theme of his gospel account: The deity of Jesus. Pilate’s question was intended to solicit geographical information for jurisdictional purposes. But John used it as a subtle reminder that Jesus was “the living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:51 ESV). Or, as he put it in his first epistle, Jesus was the Son who had been sent by the Father.

...the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. – 1 John 4:14 ESV

Jesus refused to answer Pilate’s question, because He knew the governor had no interest in who He really was. But Pilate, shocked by Jesus’ silence, arrogantly responded, “Don’t you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?” (John 19:10 NLT). Yet Jesus informed him that nothing was further from the truth.

“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.” – John 19:11 NLT

Pilate’s authority came from Caesar, but Jesus revealed that there was a much higher authority behind all that was happening. Every player in this unfolding drama was under the sovereign hand of God Almighty. And while Pilate would be held responsible for his actions, he was only operating according to God’s will. The one who had committed the greater sin was Caiaphas, the high priest of the Jews who had chosen to turn Jesus over to the Romans. Both of these men would be complicit in the death of Jesus, but Caiaphas, as a Jew and a priest over the people of Israel, would have a higher degree of culpability. But neither man had any real power or authority over Jesus. They were simply instruments in the hands of God, accomplishing His divine will by playing the roles He had assigned them.

John indicates that Pilate went out of his way to release Jesus. Matthew adds that Pilate’s wife had warned him against convicting Jesus because she had suffered a disturbing nightmare about this man (Matthew 27:19). The Jewish leaders, sensing that they had Pilate on the ropes, pressed their demand for Jesus’ death, warning the governor that his refusal to carry out their wish would make him look like an enemy of Caesar. So, finally giving into the pressure, Pilate mounted the dais to the seat of judgment, where he proclaimed, “Behold your King!” (John 19:14 ESV).

Once again, John carefully chooses the details he wants to include in his record of the proceedings. And he continues to focus his attention of the Kingship of Jesus. The soldiers have dressed Jesus in a robe of royal purple and placed a mock crown on His head. Now Pilate declares Him to be the King of the Jews. And in anger and indignation, the Jews cried out,

“Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” (John 19:15 ESV). They refused to acknowledge Jesus as their King. They rejected the deity and sovereignty of the Son of God.

And when Pilate mockingly asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” the chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15 ESV). With these words, the religious leaders thought they were condemning Jesus to death. But, in reality, they were condemning themselves. And they fulfilled the words spoken by Jesus to Nicodemus, one of their own members.

“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” – John 3:17-18 ESV

Jesus was their King, but they refused to accept Him. Now, their failure to believe in Him would condemn them. They sealed their fate when they declared their allegiance to Caesar over the one who had come to be their Savior.

And John closes this scene with the sobering words, “he delivered him over to them to be crucified” (John 19:16 ESV).

Jesus, King of the Jews

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

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

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

So the soldiers did these things,²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. – John 19:17-27 ESV

John presents the trials of Jesus in an abbreviated form, choosing to leave out many of the details provided in the Synoptic gospels. His record of these events is rather short and to the point, but the one thing he clearly intended to emphasize was the Kingship of Jesus. The very first question Pilate asked Jesus was, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33 ESV).

From Matthew's account of this scene, it appears that the Jewish leaders had brought a series of charges against Jesus, which most likely included such things as sedition, insurrection, and an accusation that Jesus had claimed to be the King of the Jews. When Jesus had refused to answer Pilate's question, the governor had responded with a second question.

"Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" – Matthew 27:13 ESV

Unknowingly, the Jewish religious leaders had been speaking prophetically. In their attempt to convince the Roman government to put Jesus to death, they had concocted the story that Jesus was a dangerous radical who was fomenting revolution and claiming to be the rightful King of Israel. But as the events unfold, it will become increasingly clear that they did not believe what they were saying about Jesus. And yet, John will use their words against them. While they saw their mention of Jesus' kingly aspirations as a way to get Him killed, John viewed it as the focal point of the entire narrative.

The abusive and demeaning treatment of Jesus by the Roman soldiers was intended to mock and humiliate Him.

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. – John 19:2-3 ESV

But their words, while spoken with mocking sarcasm and disdain, were actually true. They were unwittingly declaring the identity of Jesus. These unbelieving and stone-cold Roman soldiers had become unwilling and unknowing ambassadors for God. They were actually declaring the truth regarding the Son of God.

This brings to mind an earlier encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees that took place immediately after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Luke records that as Jesus made His way into the city, the crowds had shouted, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38 ESV). But the Pharisees had accosted Jesus, demanding that He rebuke these people for their preposterous claims. But Jesus had simply responded, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very **stones** would cry out" (Luke 19:40 ESV).

The Greek word for "stones" is *lithos*, and it refers to a small rock or pebble. It is the same word John the Baptist used when speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees.

*"Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very **stones**." – Matthew 3:9 NLT*

John the Baptist had declared that God could create children out of inanimate, lifeless rocks. And Jesus had claimed that, should the Jews stop declaring His Kingship, the common, everyday stones would pick up the cry.

So, when these unbelieving Gentile soldiers shouted, "Hail, King of the Jews!" they were fulfilling Jesus' prediction. The Jewish crowds had long disappeared and their voices had grown silent. The streets of Jerusalem were dark and empty, but the sound of voices declaring the Kingship of Jesus still echoed through the night.

When Pilate presented Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders, he had sarcastically declared, "Behold your King!" (John 19:14 ESV). To which they had replied, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" (John 19:15 ESV). And when Pilate mockingly asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" the chief priest of the Jews had angrily declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15 ESV).

Pilate mocked Jesus for claiming to be the King of the Jews. But the high priest and his companions, who because of their knowledge of the Scriptures, should have recognized Jesus

for who He claimed to be, chose to reject Him instead. And they would not be content until this would-be-king was put to death. So, Pilate, having decided to give into their demands, handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Once again, John provides an abbreviated account of the crucifixion. He leaves out many of the details contained in the other three gospels. But he continues to focus His attention on the Kingship of Jesus. The scene shifts to a hillside outside the city walls, a location known as Golgotha, which means “The Place of the Skull.” It was evidently a common site used by the Romans for crucifixions and that may have led to its grim-sounding name. While the other gospel writers spend a great deal of time describing the details of Jesus’ agonizing transition from Pilate’s residence to the place of His crucifixion, John chose to concentrate his attention on one particular and often overlooked aspect of Jesus’ death.

It was a common practice for the Romans to place a sign above the head of the one being crucified describing the nature of the crime committed. In this case, Pilate personally dictated what was to be inscribed on the placard that was placed above the head of Jesus.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” – John 19:19 ESV

There is little doubt that Pilate meant this as mockery of Jesus but also as a subtle slight to the Jewish religious leaders. He knew that it would infuriate them, and he was not disappointed. Pilate had ordered that the inscription be written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, ensuring that the Jewish pilgrims, who had come from all over the world for the Passover celebration, would be able to read what was written.

Caiaphas, the high priest, accompanied by Annas, his father-in-law, attempted to convince Pilate to make a slight, but significant edit to the wording on the sign.

So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” – John 19:21 ESV

But Pilate refused. So, the sign that hung above the head of Jesus, declaring the nature of His crime and the reason for His death, read: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” The Rabbi from Nazareth was being put to death for being exactly who He had claimed to be. He was killed for being the King of kings and Lord of lords.

There is a sense in which this inscription was intended as a not-so-subtle reminder to the Jews of what happens when anyone attempts to stand opposed to the rule and reign of Caesar. The sight of Jesus hanging on the cross, wearing a crown of thorns, would have been a very gruesome, yet effective means of deterring any future would-be kings.

And as the King of kings hung dying on the cross, a handful of “stones” gambled over his garments. These hardened and dispassionate Roman soldiers were attempting to profit from

Jesus' death, and little did they know that their callous actions were in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Hundreds of years earlier, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the great King David had penned these prophetic words:

*For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
**they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.** – Psalm 22:16-18 ESV*

And as the soldiers gambled over what they believed to be the sparse remains of Jesus' inheritance, another group of individuals looked on in horror and heartache.

Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. – John 19:25 NLT

While the soldiers were hoping to gain some small financial advantage from the death of Jesus, these women were forced to face the loss of all their hopes and dreams. For Mary, the mother of Jesus, this was not what she had been expecting. At no time over the last 33 years had Mary ever expected this outcome. As she stood watching her Son being nailed to the cross and hoisted up before the angry crowd, she must have replayed over and over again the words that Gabriel had spoken to her 33 years earlier.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” – Luke 1:30-33 ESV

And yet, here was her Son hanging on a cross rather than reigning over the house of Jacob. And to make matters worse, some of the last words she would hear her Son say simply emphasized the finality of the horrific scene she was having to witness.

“Woman, behold, your son!” – John 19:26 ESV

Jesus was letting His mother know that John would be responsible for her care from this point on. His earthly life was coming to an end. And His imminent death would also bring with it a change to His relationship with Mary. With His resurrection, Jesus would no longer be her earthly Son. He would be her King, Lord, and Savior. Everything was about to undergo a radical and revolutionary change. The insurrection the Romans feared was going to take place, but it would be nothing like what they had expected. It would be a revolution of a different sort, because as Jesus had told Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36 ESV).

It Is Finished!

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

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.” – John 19:28-37 ESV

Just as he did with his recounting of Jesus’ trials, John presents a highly truncated version of Jesus’ crucifixion. In some sense, John portrays the death of Jesus as the work of men. The Sanhedrin had plotted and planned for it to happen, and the Roman governor had given his official approval, commanding his troops to carry out the execution of Jesus. John has portrayed Jesus as the King of the Jews and purposefully juxtaposed Him with two of the most powerful men in Israel at the time: The chief priest and the Roman governor. These two men played significant roles in the death of Jesus, ensuring that His crucifixion was carried out. And John’s abbreviated treatment of the death of Jesus may simply be His way of diminishing or downplaying the power of men over the Son of God.

During his interrogation of Jesus, Pilate had arrogantly proclaimed, “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (John 19:10 ESV). Pilate was backed by the full power and authority of the Roman government. He had been appointed by Caesar and had thousands of well-trained and heavily armed Roman legionnaires at his disposal. He could issue a command and it would be carried out. But Jesus, unphased by Pilate’s boastful declaration, had calmly responded, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11 ESV).

In His trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus had been confronted by Caiaphas, the high priest, who had demanded that Jesus publicly state His claim to be the Messiah.

“I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”
– Matthew 26:63 NLT

Caiaphas was looking for a confession from Jesus, not some kind of confirmation. He harbored no suspicions that Jesus might truly be the Messiah. He was simply wanting Jesus to condemn Himself by reiterating His claim to be the Son of God – in public and in front of witnesses. This powerful and influential leader of Israel’s religious elite believed that he held the fate of Jesus in his hands. But Jesus had responded by stating, “...in the future you will see the Son of Man **seated in the place of power at God’s right hand** and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64 NLT).

Like Pilate, Caiaphas had no power over Jesus. And for John, the crucifixion seemed to represent man’s vain attempt to thwart the plans of God. Their treatment of Jesus had been cruel and unjust. They were putting to death an innocent man. But little did they know that they were actually fulfilling the will of God and the desires of Jesus. They were not the ones in control. While they believed they were taking the life of Jesus, He had made it clear that no one had that kind of authority over Him.

“No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.” – John 10:18 NLT

The death of Jesus was the will of God. It was being carried out by men, utilizing a man-made instrument of death, but it was all according to the sovereign and providential plan of God and the full consent of the Son of God. So, John seems to fast-forward through the gruesome details surrounding the crucifixion, focusing only on a few carefully chosen scenes. He is more interested in what happens next.

After recording how Jesus had personally commissioned him to care for His mother, John provides an interesting first-person impression of what he saw. He describes Jesus as “knowing that all was now finished” (John 19:28 ESV). Somehow, John ascertains that Jesus was reaching not only the end of His life but also the completion of His mission. And he reports hearing Jesus say: “I thirst” (John 19:28 ESV).

The one who had stated, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:14 ESV), was declaring His own thirst. He was nearing the completion of His earthly ministry, having suffered greatly at the hands of sinful men, and He found Himself suffering from intense spiritual thirst. John indicates that the words of Jesus were in fulfillment of Scripture. It is likely that he is referring to two passages found in the Psalms that seem to prophesy this very moment.

*I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,*

*and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death. – Psalm 22: 14-15 ESV*

*You know my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.
Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none.
They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. – Psalm 69:19-21 ESV*

But Jesus' declaration of thirst has even great implications because they tie back to an earlier statement He made: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34 ESV). Jesus was about to complete the work of His Father, and that work had been grueling, painful, and exhausting. It had left Him physically and spiritually depleted. Jesus had told James and John that they would not be able to drink from the cup that He would be forced to drink (Mark 10:38). This cup represented the wrath of God (Jeremiah 25:15-16). In His crucifixion, Jesus was taking on Himself the full weight of God's wrath against the sins of mankind. And, as He had told Peter, "shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:11 ESV).

Doing the work of His Father had left Jesus thirsting after righteousness. He was bearing the sins of mankind and, in doing so, feeling the displeasure of His Father for the first time in His life. And He longed to be restored to fellowship. Isaiah describes the extreme nature of His sacrifice.

*because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors. – Isaiah 53:12 ESV*

It is impossible for us to comprehend the burden that Jesus bore on our behalf. When Isaiah states that "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 ESV), we have a difficult time understanding the gravity and intensity of that weight.

And in response to Jesus' words, He was given a sponge dipped in sour wine. The one who had turned ordinary water into extraordinary wine was given sour wine to slake His spiritual thirst. He who had poured out His blood as a drink offering to satisfy the just demands of a holy God was given spoiled wine to satisfy His need for refreshment.

And then, John records the last words Jesus would utter from the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30 ESV). With His final breath, Jesus proclaimed the successful completion of His God-

ordained mission. He had done what He had come to do. Now, the rest was in the hands of His Heavenly Father.

In order to expedite death, the Roman soldiers intended to break the legs of the three men, making it impossible for them to push themselves up in order to breathe, and expediting their death. But Jesus was spared this indignity because He was already dead. Yet, as a precaution, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' body with a spear. Even in death, Jesus was subjected to indignity and disrespect. And John declares that all that he has written is true because he saw it with his own eye.

This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also may continue to believe. – John 19:35 NLT

John reveals the reason why he chose to report the things he did. The facts that the legs of Jesus remained unbroken and that His side was pierced are crucial to John. For him, they provide further proof of Jesus identity as the Son of God. He sees these two details as evidence of the deity of Jesus because they fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. John seems to have three primary passages in mind: Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; and Psalm 34:20. The first two deal with the divine prohibition against breaking the bones of the Passover lambs. In His death, Jesus performed the role of the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Paul ties Jesus directly to the Passover lamb, stating, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7 ESV). Psalm 34:20 describes how God protects the truly righteous man, preventing anyone from breaking his bones.

Even in His death, Jesus was fulfilling the prophecies of Scripture, providing further evidence that He truly was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And for John, the proofs for Jesus' identity are far from over.

Lifeless, Yet Priceless

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

Using His final breath, Jesus declared “It is finished,” and then He died. Only in His third decade of life, Jesus had been brutally tortured and killed, by means of one of the most inhumane forms of capital punishment ever devised: Crucifixion. From the perspective of His mother and what remained of His followers, all that remained of Jesus was His beaten, bruised, and lifeless body.

Three times in five verses, John refers to “the body of Jesus.” There is a sense of finality in these closing verses of chapter 19. One almost gets the impression that John is bringing his gospel to an abrupt and unexpected end. With Jesus dead, this must be the end of the story. And everything John records in these verses seems intended to portray the shocking end of Jesus’ life and the disappointing failure of His mission.

John describes the efforts of Joseph of Arimathea, who came to Pilate asking for permission to remove the body of Jesus from the cross for burial. John provides no insights into this man’s identity, other than that he was a disciple of Jesus. But in his gospel, Mark reveals that Joseph was “a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43 ESV). So, Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the religious governing body of the Jews who had condemned Jesus to death. But Luke adds that he “had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders” (Luke 23:51 NLT).

This dissenting member of the Sanhedrin risked not only his reputation but also his place in the religious community of Israel. The Sanhedrin had threatened anyone who showed allegiance to Jesus with ex-communication from the synagogue. But out of love for Jesus, Joseph was willing to put it all on the line. And he was not alone. He was joined by Nicodemus, another member of the high council. This is the same man who had made a light-night visit to Jesus and received a head-scratching lecture on the need to be born from above in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

These two unlikely characters are the ones who removed the lifeless body of Jesus from the cross and prepared it for burial. It should not be overlooked that these men were members of the very same council that had condemned Jesus to death. Matthew records that when Caiaphas the high priest had asked the members of the council for their verdict, they had

shouted, “Guilty! He deserves to die!” (Matthew 26:66 ESV). And then, Matthew describes the scene that followed:

Then they began to spit in Jesus’ face and beat him with their fists. And some slapped him, jeering, “Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who hit you that time?” – Matthew 26:67-68 ESV

Yet surprisingly, from out of this prideful and hate-filled mob emerged two men who showed their final respects for Jesus by ensuring He received a proper burial.

So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. – John 19:40 ESV

John’s emphasis on the body of Jesus is crucial. All throughout his gospel, John has stressed the deity and humanity of Jesus. These two aspects of Jesus’ identity are inseparable and equally vital in John’s understanding of the Gospel. Jesus was the Word made flesh (John 1:14). He was the Son of God who came from heaven and became a man so that He might dwell among us and reveal the glory of God to us. According to John, Jesus had made God known through His incarnation (John 1:18). The apostle Paul declares that Jesus, by virtue of His humanity, was “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 NLT).

But there was far more to the miracle of the incarnation than simply making God known. Jesus also came to make God accessible. Paul describes that Jesus’ coming to earth “in a body like the bodies we sinners have,” had much more long-term and radical implications.

He [God] sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. – Romans 8:3 NLT

The physical body of Jesus had profound spiritual implications. It was His body that allowed Him to live as a man and to be “tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15 ESV). And it was His sinlessness that made Him the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind. The author of Hebrews goes on to describe the absolute necessity that Jesus be fully human so that He could serve as the substitutionary atonement for the sins of a guilty and condemned humanity.

*“You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.
But you have given me a body to offer.
You were not pleased with burnt offerings
or other offerings for sin.
Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God—
as is written about me in the Scriptures.’” – Hebrews 10:5-7 NLT*

For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. – Hebrews 10:10 NLT

The body of Jesus, while lifeless, was also priceless. And John's emphasis on the extravagant and expensive quantity of burial spices brought by Nicodemus is intended to drive home the infinite value of the body of Jesus. And Peter also emphasizes the priceless nature of Jesus' sacrifice.

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. – 1 Peter 1: 18-19 NLT

And Peter would go on to describe how Jesus paid the price for our sins with the offering of His own body on our behalf.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. – 1 Peter 2:24 ESV

And Peter was simply restating the prophetic words of Isaiah, who centuries earlier, described in stunning detail the atoning work of Jesus.

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. – Isaiah 53:5-6 ESV*

And John reveals that Joseph and Nicodemus treated the body of Jesus with the utmost respect and dignity, washing it and anointing it with burial spices, then wrapping it in linen cloths. Then he adds that they placed the body of Jesus in “a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid” (John 19:41 ESV). Matthew notes that the tomb belonged to Joseph and this point becomes significant because of the prophetic words of Isaiah.

*He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.
But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave. – Isaiah 53:9 NLT*

The sinless one was treated like a criminal. He died the death of a sinner even though He was without sin. He was “pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins...beaten so we could be whole...whipped so we could be healed” (Isaiah 53:5 NLT). He was “struck down for the rebellion of my people” (Isaiah 53:8 NLT).

And His body, though lifeless, would not undergo the indignity of decay and decomposition, because it was of immeasurable worth and value. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, King David would prophetically speak on behalf of Jesus when he wrote:

*No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice.
My body rests in safety.
For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.
You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever. – Psalm 16:9-11 NLT*

Years later, the apostle Paul would preach a sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, in which he stated:

“For God had promised to raise him from the dead, not leaving him to rot in the grave. He said, ‘I will give you the sacred blessings I promised to David.’ Another psalm explains it more fully: ‘You will not allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.’ This is not a reference to David, for after David had done the will of God in his own generation, he died and was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed. No, it was a reference to someone else—someone whom God raised and whose body did not decay.” – Acts 13:34-37 NLT

The body of Jesus, while just like the body we sinners have, did not suffer the same post-death fate that all human bodies do. And while John’s description of Jesus’ burial has a sense of finality to it, he is simply preparing his readers for what comes next. He subtly hints that there is more to come when he mentions that all of this took place on “the Jewish day of Preparation” (John 19:42 ESV). This is a reference to Friday, the day before the Sabbath. Joseph and Nicodemus were under pressure to make sure the body of Jesus was interred before the Sabbath began and all forms of work would have been prohibited. But his reference to the day of preparation has far more in mind than the mandatory observance of the Sabbath. He is preparing his readers for something even greater.

Empty Hopes and An Empty Tomb

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

Joseph and Nicodemus, two members of the Jewish high council, had discretely removed the body of Jesus from the cross and carefully cleaned it, anointed it with burial spices, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and placed it in a tomb. And there it remained for three days, while the disciples remained in a state of mourning.

Their friend and teacher was gone. The one whom they had believed to be their long-awaited Messiah was no longer with them. And as they gathered together during those dark days, they must have discussed the words that Jesus had spoken to them.

"Listen," he said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die. Then they will hand him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip, and crucified. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead." – Matthew 20:18-19 NLT

Everything had happened just as He said it would – down to the last detail. And this had not been the first time they had heard Jesus make prophetic statements concerning His death. Earlier in his gospel, Matthew records another occasion when Jesus divulged to His disciples the fate that lay in store for Him.

Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. – Matthew 16:21 NLT

And Peter had responded with outrage, even rebuking Jesus for saying such things.

"Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!" – Matthew 16:22 NLT

The outcome Jesus had described was unacceptable to Peter. He was unwilling to entertain thoughts of the death of his friend, teacher, and Messiah. The fact that Jesus had also declared He would rise again on the third day seems to have escaped Peter. And Jesus' response reveals the true nature of Peter's refusal to accept what was clearly God's will.

“Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.” – Matthew 16:23 NLT

Peter and his companions had always wrestled with viewing Jesus from their limited earthly perspective. They believed Him to be the Messiah, but those beliefs were weighed down with all kinds of faulty interpretations and personal expectations. They had high hopes that Jesus was going to reverse the centuries of abuse and subjugation that their people had been forced to suffer under Gentile nations like the Romans. And because they had been among the first to follow Jesus, these men had lofty expectations that they would be rewarded with positions in His administration when He set up His Kingdom.

But now that Jesus was dead, Peter, John, and the rest of the disciples were in hiding. We have no idea what they were doing or the nature of the conversations they were having during those three days. But all of the gospel writers tell us that it was the female followers of Jesus who made the first attempt to visit His tomb. Mark reveals that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph had seen where Joseph and Nicodemus had buried the body of Jesus (Mark 15:47). And Luke adds that, because the Sabbath was about to begin, “they returned and prepared aromatic spices and perfumes” (Luke 23:56 ESV). They had every intention of returning after the Sabbath in order to anoint the body of Jesus.

Luke reports that “on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared” (Luke 24:1 ESV). Matthew provides the identities of these women:

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. – Matthew 28:1 ESV

Mark adds the name of Salome to the list of women who visited the tomb that morning (Mark 16:1). But regardless of how many women went to the tomb, Luke makes it clear that none of them had gone there looking for a resurrected Jesus. The burial spices they carried provide evidence that they fully expected to find a dead body, not a living one.

In his typical, abbreviated style, John only mentions Mary Magdalene. This might be because she was the one who would return to the disciples and share the good news regarding Jesus' resurrection. He also leaves out any mention of the earthquake and the appearance of the angel that Matthew includes. And he chose not to include the words spoken by the angel.

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into

the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” – Luke 24:5-7 ESV

It may be that John felt that all of these details had been adequately covered by the other gospel writers and were unnecessary for him to include. But John’s account seems to provide some missing details to the resurrection chronology. According to his version of the morning’s events, Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb with the other women, but she was the first one to arrive. She found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. John adds that he and Peter were the first two disciples to whom Mary Magdalene revealed this news.

...she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” – John 20:2 ESV

At this point, she was unaware that Jesus was alive. Meanwhile, the other women had made it to the tomb, only to make the same shocking discovery.

And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” – Mark 16:4-7 ESV

As these women ran to tell the good news to the disciples, Peter and John were already on their way to the tomb. The report that the tomb was empty, and the body of Jesus was gone had shocked them out of their state of mourning and energized them into action.

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. – John 20:3-7 NLT

It is important to remember that John, the one writing this gospel, was “the other disciple.” He admits that he was the first to arrive at the tomb because he outran Peter. John peered into the tomb but refused to go inside. Yet, the always impulsive Peter, arriving a few seconds later, barged into the tomb, only to discover the discarded burial cloth. The body was gone, just as Mary Magdalene had said.

But John adds a personal word of testimony.

...the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed... – John 20:8 ESV

Emboldened by Peter's actions, John entered the tomb to have a closer look. And what he saw convinced him that Jesus was alive. He believed. And he admits that, until that moment, the disciples had not understood what the Scriptures revealed about the death and resurrection of the Messiah. The words of King David, recorded in Psalm 16, were a prophetic statement regarding the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

*For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.
You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever. – Psalm 16:10-11 NLT*

And John admits that he and his companions had never understood these Old Testament passages to be applicable to Jesus. Not only that, they had not comprehended Jesus' own words concerning His death and resurrection. But now, John saw and believed.

But he seems to speak only for himself. He doesn't indicate whether Peter believed. Luke tells us only that, upon seeing the empty tomb, Peter "went home marveling at what had happened" (Luke 24:12 ESV). And John gives the impression that there was a bit of lingering unbelief among the disciples. He simply states that "the disciples went back to their homes" (John 20:10 ESV).

John and Peter left the tomb as they had found it: Empty and abandoned. But they had yet to see the resurrected Jesus. The same was not true of the women. As they had made their way from the tomb, with the words of the angel echoing in their ears, "Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!'" (Matthew 28:9 ESV). And Matthew adds that "they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me'" (Matthew 28:9-10 ESV).

The good news was about to get better. Soon, John would not be the only one of the 11 who believed. The rest of his confused and disheartened brothers would soon find themselves face to face with their risen Lord and Savior.

One More Thing to Do

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

John indicates that he and Peter left the empty tomb and “went back to their homes” (John 20:10 ESV). The Greek phrase *eis ta idia* can also be translated as “to their own.” and since it is unlikely that either of these men had private homes in Jerusalem, it seems more plausible that John is saying that they rejoined the other disciples. But he also indicates that Mary Magdalene lingered at the graveside. She had returned with the two disciples after she had told them about the empty tomb and the missing body of Jesus.

Left by herself, Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb weeping. She was overcome with sadness and grief at this second blow to her hopes and dreams. Not only was Jesus dead, but now His body was missing as well. Could things get any worse? But she decided to take one last look into the empty tomb.

And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. — John 20:12 ESV

Imagine the shock and surprise she must have felt at this unexpected sight. While John describes these two individuals as angels, there is no indication that Mary Magdalene recognized them as divine beings. When one of them asked the reason for her tears, she responded rather matter-of-factly, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” (John 20:13 ESV). Her answer reveals her lingering sorrow over the loss of her friend, the one who had miraculously cast seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). Jesus had freed her from demonic possession, and she had hoped that He was Israel’s Messiah, who would free them from their subjugation to Rome.

But how does John’s narrative fit in with that of Mark’s? In his gospel, Mark indicates that Mary went to the tomb with Mary the mother of James and Salome, in order to anoint the body of Jesus with spices (Mark 16:1). Finding the stone that sealed the tomb had been rolled away, they entered, and “saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed” (Mark 16:5 NET).

This “young man,” who was actually an angel, told them, “Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been raised! He is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples, even Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you” (Mark 16:6-7 NET). Despite the angel’s words, “they went out and ran from the tomb, terror and bewilderment had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (Mark 16:8 NET).

But what about Mary Magdalene? Why does John describe her as being at the tomb alone and encountering two angels, not one? It would seem that Mary Magdalene and the other two women had traveled together to the tomb that morning, but that she was the first to arrive and find the tomb empty. She immediately left and ran to tell Peter and John. In the meantime, the other two women arrived and encountered one of the two angels. In shock and terror, they ran from the scene but told no one what they had heard and seen. But Mary Magdalene had later returned with Peter and John. When the two men had entered the tomb, they had seen nothing but the discarded burial cloth. But when Mary Magdalene had entered on her own, she had been greeted by the two angels.

Most likely, she believed these two men to be groundskeepers or gardeners, so John indicates that, having found the tomb empty, she turned to leave. And when she did, she found herself staring into the face of the risen Jesus. But she failed to recognize Him. John provides no explanation for her inability to recognize Jesus. Perhaps she was suffering from shock. But she would not be the only one who would encounter the risen Jesus and fail to recognize Him. Luke describes two unnamed followers of Jesus who were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, having just witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. They were discussing all that had happened in Jerusalem when, suddenly, they found themselves joined by a “stranger.”

Jesus himself approached and began to accompany them (but their eyes were kept from recognizing him). – Luke 24:15-16 NET

They too failed to recognize Jesus. And the text seems to indicate that they were miraculously prevented from doing so. This could have been the case with Mary as well. But whatever the reason for her lack of recognition, when this third man spoke to her, she just assumed he was a gardener. He asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” and she sadly responded, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away” (John 20:15 ESV).

She had come to the tomb expecting to find the lifeless body of her friend and healer, and she had found nothing. At no point does she show any signs that she believed Jesus might be alive. There are no indications that she considered His resurrection as a possible explanation for the empty tomb. She was still hoping to find a body. And her failure to believe what Jesus had said about rising again is made all the more glaring by the fact that He was standing right in front of her.

But when He addressed her by name, everything changed.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher"). – John 20:16 NLT

She was not even looking at Him when He spoke. She was too busy grieving over her loss and wondering what she was going to do next. But as soon as she heard Jesus speak her name, she turned abruptly and immediately recognized the one whom she had thought to be dead. Her grief was replaced by overwhelming joy and she impulsively wrapped her arms around Jesus, refusing to let Him go. But Jesus lovingly rebuked her, saying, "Don't cling to me, for I haven't yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17 NLT).

For Mary Magdalene, the sudden reappearance of Jesus was more than she could have ever dreamed or imagined. He was alive! In a split second, her sorrow had been turned to joy. It must have been similar to the overwhelming sense of freedom and relief she had felt when Jesus released her from the control of the seven demons. But Jesus wanted Mary Magdalene to know that His reappearance would be short-lived. He would not be staying. And He knew that the vice-like grip with which she held Him revealed her desire that He never leave her again.

But there was more for Him to do. He had risen from the dead so that He might return to His Father's side. His work was done. He had finished what He had come to do. And He had told the disciples that His departure would be necessary and for their own good.

"But now I am going away to the one who sent me...But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you." – John 16:6, 7 NLT

And Jesus gave Mary Magdalene an important assignment. She was to find the disciples and give them a message.

"But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" – John 20:18 NLT

Notice the nature of Jesus' message for the disciples. He didn't instruct her to tell them that He was risen or alive. He wanted her to let them know that He was ascending to His Father, whom He described as "my God and your God." Jesus was returning to His rightful place at His Father's side. This was something Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples was going to happen.

"I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me." – John 7:33 NLT

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father." – John 14:12 NLT

“Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am.” – John 14:28 NLT

“But now I am going away to the one who sent me...” – John 16:5 NLT

“Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more.” – John 16:10 NLT

“Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father.” – John 16:28 NLT

As vital as the crucifixion and resurrection were to God’s redemptive plan, the ascension of Jesus was absolutely crucial. With Jesus’ departure, the Spirit of God would come to take up residence within each and every one of His followers. They would receive “power from on high” (Luke 24:49 ESV), enabling them to “do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father” (John 14:12 NLT).

And Mary Magdalene faithfully followed His instructions, finding the disciples and telling them that Jesus was alive and well, and passing on to them the news that He would soon be ascending to the Father.

The Breath of Life

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

John has already described how he had been impacted by his experience of entering the empty tomb with Peter. As has been his habit throughout his gospel, John referred to himself in the third person.

...the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed. – John 20:8 ESV

Unlike Mary Magdalene, John had not yet had the joy of seeing Jesus with his own eyes, but he still believed that He had risen from the dead. Some of the disciples had struggled to believe when the women had returned from the tomb with the message from the angel regarding Jesus' resurrection.

...these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. – Luke 24:11 NLT

In his hurry to recount the moment when he and his fellow disciples finally saw the resurrected Jesus, John skips over a lot of details that the other gospel writers include. John fast-forwards from early Sunday morning to later that evening when the disciples had gathered together in one place. He sets the scene by indicating that they had the doors locked "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19 ESV). This is a reference to the Jewish religious leaders who had conspired to have Jesus put to death. John and his fellow disciples knew that they were marked men because of their association with Jesus. So, they had been keeping a low profile ever since the crucifixion had taken place.

His reference to the locked doors also helped to set up what happened next. Despite the inaccessible nature of the room in which they were meeting, suddenly Jesus was standing in their presence. John simply states that "Jesus came and stood among them" (John 20:19 ESV).

Luke provides a bit more context. He and Mark both cover the encounter between Jesus and the two disciples who had been on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had been returning home after having witnessed the devastating events surrounding Jesus' death. Suddenly, these two disheartened disciples were joined by another individual who asked them what they were discussing. They recounted all that had happened in Jerusalem, even sharing the news from earlier that morning.

“Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.” – Luke 24:22-24 NLT

It was not until later in the day, as they shared a meal with their unknown traveling companion, that Jesus revealed Himself to them.

Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! – Luke 24:31 NLT

Rather than continue home to Emmaus, they returned to Jerusalem in search of the disciples so that they might share their exciting news. And they wasted no time. Luke records that “within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them” (Luke 24:33 NLT). But Mark adds another vital detail to the unfolding scene: “no one believed them” (Mark 16:13 NLT). The testimony of these two eyewitnesses was rejected by the disciples.

But despite the doubt and disbelief that filled the room, Luke records that “Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them” (Luke 24:36 NLT). All John records is that Jesus appeared and spoke to them, saying, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19 ESV). But Mark and Luke both reveal that Jesus had a bit more to say to them.

He rebuked them for their stubborn unbelief because they refused to believe those who had seen him after he had been raised from the dead. – Mark 16:14 NLT

Luke adds that “the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!” (Luke 24:37 NLT). And Luke provides the exact nature of Jesus’ rebuke.

“Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. – Luke 24:38-40 NLT

And Luke reveals that even after all the evidence Jesus provided, “they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder” (Luke 24:41 NLT). John simply states, “the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20 ESV). He paints a much more flattering image of the disciples than do Mark and Luke. But this makes sense when you consider that neither of these men had been in the room that night because they were not disciples. Their recounting of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus were based on interviews with those who had been there. John was writing from first-hand experience. He shared his own personal recollections of what he saw and heard.

And rather than focusing on Jesus' rebuke of His unbelieving disciples, John chose to highlight His commissioning of them. John had believed from the moment he had entered the empty tomb. He had not shared the doubt and disbelief of his fellow disciples. So, he was thrilled when he heard Jesus say, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21 ESV). John didn't need to see the hands and feet of Jesus to believe. The empty tomb had been enough for him. And now, he was thrilled to hear that their mission was far from over. Jesus had more for them to do.

Luke and Mark add additional details that give a more well-rounded picture of what took place that night. Luke reveals that Jesus provided the disciples with an in-depth overview of Old Testament Scriptures and how they pointed to Him.

"When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things." – Luke 24:44-48 NLT

Mark provides even more information that helps complete the scene.

"Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned." – Mark 16:15-16 NLT

Despite their disbelief and fear, this ragtag group of disciples was being given a divine mandate to carry on the work of Jesus in His absence. They were being trusted to take the message of the Gospel to the world, and Jesus reminded them that their ability to carry out their commission would not be left up to them.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." – John 20:22 ESV

There is much debate as to what is actually being described here. Was Jesus imparting the Holy Spirit to His disciples? This seems unlikely because they would not receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit until Jesus had ascended back to heaven. It would only be after His glorification that the Spirit would be sent. That's why Jesus later instructed them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." – Acts 1:8 ESV

Also, there is no indication that the disciples experienced any significant change as a result of what Jesus said and did that night. It appears to have been a symbolic act, designed to remind the disciples of the ultimate source of their coming power. The Spirit would be a personal gift from Jesus to His disciples. And when Jesus “breathed on them,” He was mirroring the gift of life given by God in the garden of Eden.

...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. – Genesis 2:7 ESV

John understood the significance of this act. He is the one who wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made**” (John 1:1-3 ESV).

John also wrote that “In him was life” (John 1:4 ESV). Jesus was the source of all life. And in breathing on His disciples, Jesus was letting them know that they were already recipients of the “breath of life” – eternal life – that would be sealed by the coming of the Holy Spirit. With His death, Jesus had provided these men with His righteousness. They had been cleansed and purified by His blood and were now fully acceptable in God’s eyes. They were also worthy of receiving the coming Holy Spirit. It would not be the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that made them holy. They were already holy because of what Jesus had just accomplished on the cross. By breathing on them, Jesus was assuring them that they were acceptable before God. They were clean vessels, worthy of containing the presence of God’s Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul reminds us of what Jesus accomplished for us through His death on the cross.

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. – Romans 3:21-22 NLT

These doubting men were being commissioned by Jesus. He knew their weaknesses and He understood their reticence. But He was letting them know that it was He who was the author of all life, and He was imparting to them His very breath as a sign of His life-giving power.

But John adds one more important note regarding the events of that evening. He records something else that Jesus told them.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” – John 20:23 ESV

Their commission was accompanied by incredible responsibilities. With the sharing of the Good News, they would be offering people the choice between forgiveness and condemnation. It was the same message that Jesus had given to Nicodemus.

“God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son.” – John 3:17-18 NLT

Now, that message would be theirs. And, like Jesus, they would find some willing to receive the message and the forgiveness of sins that accompanied it. But there would be others who “hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed” (John 3:20 NLT). Some will receive forgiveness while others will find themselves condemned by virtue of their unbelief.

Do Not Disbelieve, But Believe

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

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

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. – John 20:24-31 ESV

From beginning to end, the Gospel of John is filled with admonitions regarding belief. In the very first chapter, John records the initial encounter between Jesus and Nathanael, who would become one of His disciples. When Jesus spoke to Nathanael as if He knew him, Nathanael had been surprised. And when Jesus said, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:48 ESV), Nathanael believed what Philip had told him about Jesus: “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (John 1:45 ESV). And he expressed his belief by exclaiming, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49 ESV).

But Jesus responded to Nathanael’s declaration of faith with a mild rebuke:

“Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” – John 1:50 ESV

Belief would become a central theme of Jesus’ ministry and message. For the next three years, He would teach, preach, perform miracles, and tell parables, in order to help His disciples grow in their understanding of who He was and the purpose behind His coming. But Jesus did not reserve His lessons on belief for the disciples alone. When He had His light-night encounter with Nicodemus, the Pharisee, Jesus had told him, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 ESV).

In a later conversation with an adulterous Samaritan woman, Jesus shared with her that He was the Messiah and she had believed His words. She even ran and told her neighbors, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29 ESV). And John reports, “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony”

(John 4:39 ESV). But then they had met Jesus for themselves, their belief solidified as they became fully convinced of His identity and mission.

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." – John 4:42 ESV

Chapter after chapter, John has provided illustrations and proof of the deity of Jesus. He has displayed the authority of Jesus over demons, disease, and even the natural elements. He has recorded the words of Jesus boldly claiming to be the bread from heaven and the source of living water. He has repeatedly emphasized Jesus' unique relationship with God the Father, declaring their unity and the God-ordained nature of Jesus' mission. John has made it clear that Jesus was sent by God and was faithfully accomplishing the will of God.

But the religious leaders refused to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, choosing instead to accuse Him of blasphemy. And Jesus had responded to their attacks by declaring that His miraculous works provided more than enough evidence to prove His claim.

"...why do you call it blasphemy when I say, 'I am the Son of God'? After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world. Don't believe me unless I carry out my Father's work. But if I do his work, believe in the evidence of the miraculous works I have done, even if you don't believe me. Then you will know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father." – John 10:36-38 NLT

And now, after His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus began to appear to His still disbelieving and doubtful disciples. Even though He had told them He would rise again from the dead, they had refused to believe. And when the women had gone to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus, they had been shocked to find an empty tomb and two angels, who told them, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day" (Luke 24:5-7 NLT).

Luke tells us that they ran to tell the disciples the exciting news they had received. But their words were received by the disciples with doubt and derision.

It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. – Luke 24:10-11 NLT

When Jesus later appeared to them, "he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen him resurrected" (Mark 16:14 NLT).

“Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” – Luke 24:38-39 NLT

His resurrection should have been the final proof of His identity. Jesus had told Nathanael that he would see “greater things” and now they were all witnessing the greatest evidence that Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And the proof was in His nail-scarred hands and feet. He was not a ghost or an apparition. He was the resurrected, fully restored, and miraculously revived Son of God. And He still the Word of God in human flesh. He challenged them to touch and examine Him. And then He ate a meal with them.

Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched. – Luke 24:41-43 NLT

The author of Hebrews records a statement that Jesus made.

...when Christ came into the world, he said to God,

“You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.

But you have given me a body to offer.

You were not pleased with burnt offerings

or other offerings for sin.

Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God—

as is written about me in the Scriptures.’” – Hebrews 10:5-7 NLT

Jesus had become a man so that He might offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone or pay for the sins of humanity. It was through the selfless sacrifice of His unblemished life that the just judgment of God was satisfied and all those who believed in Jesus would become set apart as the children of God.

For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. – Hebrews 10:10 NLT

But to enjoy our new status as the children of God we must believe in the Son of God.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. – John 1:12-13 NLT

Which brings us to today’s passage. Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples, had been absent when Jesus had made His unexpected appearance to His doubt-filled and fear-ridden followers as they cowered behind locked doors. And when his fellow disciples excitedly informed Thomas that they had seen Jesus, he responded with sarcastic and stubborn disbelief.

“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” – John 20:25 ESV

His incredulous statement recalls the words of Jesus: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (John 4:48 ESV). Thomas’ demand for tangible, touchable proof gives evidence of his own lingering doubt. He really did not expect to have his demands met, because he did not believe Jesus to be alive. But he was in for a big surprise. Eight days later, Jesus made a second impromptu appearance to His disciples as they gathered behind locked doors yet again. This time, Thomas was with them. And Jesus made a beeline to His doubting disciple, inviting him to dispel any further disbelief.

“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” – John 20:27 ESV

Jesus was graciously granting Thomas’ request. But Thomas had seen enough. He required no further proof. In a split second, his doubt turned to belief, and he declared, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28 ESV). With that statement, Thomas expressed his firm belief in the deity of Jesus. Whether he realized it or not, Thomas was committing blasphemy. He was declaring a man to be God. Here he was hiding behind locked doors out of fear of the religious leaders and yet, upon seeing Jesus in His resurrected state, Thomas was willing to risk everything to declare His belief that Jesus was exactly who He had always claimed to be.

And Jesus responded to Thomas with a powerful reminder that true belief requires no signs. While Thomas had been given the privilege of seeing the resurrected Messiah, millions upon millions of others would come to faith in Him without ever having had the joy of seeing Him.

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” – John 20:29 ESV

And John closes this chapter by addressing some of the very people to whom Jesus referred. He has written his gospel so that those who have never seen Jesus with their eyes, might be encouraged to believe by reading about all that Jesus said and did.

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

It all comes down to believing. Thomas demanded evidence before he would believe. And John, anticipating the doubts of those who would later hear about Jesus, provides them with an entire gospel filled with proofs and personal insights into the deity and humanity of Jesus.

Jesus Revealed Himself

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

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. – John 21:1-4 ESV

This concluding chapter of John's gospel has bothered biblical scholars for centuries. Many have viewed chapter 21 as out of place and incongruent with the rest of the book. It does seem rather odd that John provides a conclusion to his gospel with the two closing verses of chapter 20, only to recount yet another appearance by Jesus to His disciples. This has led some to suggest that this chapter was added later, either by John or one of his disciples.

But just because the final chapter appears somewhat out of sync with the rest of the narrative does not prove its inauthenticity. John's entire gospel is unique in its style and content. He chose not to follow the pattern established by the Synoptic gospels, but instead, charted a distinctly different course in his effort to reveal the deity and humanity of Jesus. And he summarized his efforts by telling his audience:

...these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. – John 20:30-31 ESV

For 20 chapters, John provided evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. And his purpose in doing so was so that his readers would continue to believe the Gospel message concerning Jesus' incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.

But long before John began his defense of Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, he opened his gospel with a prologue, in which he introduced Jesus as the Word.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. – John 1:1-2 ESV

With these opening verses, John meant to clearly establish the deity of Jesus. He was the creator-God, the eternal one who existed from the beginning with God the Father and was instrumental in creation of all life, including mankind. But John added that the eternal Word chose to manifest Himself in human form.

...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14 ESV

The Word became flesh. God became a man. That is the theme of John's entire gospel: Jesus the God-man. And he supports that theme for 21 chapters, including the final chapter of the book.

It is important to note that John concluded his prologue with the statement:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. – John 1:18 ESV

With His incarnation, Jesus made the invisible God visible (Colossians 1:15). The purely spiritual Son of God took on the physical body of a man so that humanity might perceive deity "in the flesh." And for over three years, Jesus lived side-by-side with the very ones He had created. He lived with them and as one of them. He ate, drank, walked, talked, slept, cried, grew hungry, loved, and exhibited godliness as no man had ever done before. And the apostle Paul reminds us of the divine purpose behind the incarnation of Jesus.

He [God] sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. – Romans 8:3 NLT

And with the opening verses of chapter 21, John reveals the resurrected Son of God making one more appearance to His disciples. He had accomplished His Father's will and sacrificed His life on the cross as payment for the sins of mankind. And three days later God raised His Son from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. The dead human body of Jesus was miraculously restored to life and rejoined with His spirit. And He made repeated appearances to His doubting and fearful disciples, assuring them that He had risen from the dead just as He said He would.

It helps if we understand chapter 21 to be the epilogue to John's gospel. With it, he provides a fitting bookend that completes his narrative. In verse one, John states, "After this...." This is most likely a reference to the content found in chapter 20, but it also includes all that John has recorded in the rest of his gospel. It is a summarizing statement.

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. – John 21:1 ESV

The Greek word that is translated as "revealed" is *phaneroō* and it is used throughout John's gospel. It means "to make manifest, to show one's self, to reveal, or make known." John used it repeatedly to refer to Jesus revealing His deity and glory.

*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and **manifested** [*phaneroō*] his glory. And his disciples believed in him.* – John 2:11 ESV

*“I have **manifested** [phaneroō] your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.” – John 17:6 ESV*

Now, in the final chapter, John uses the same word to describe Jesus revealing or manifesting Himself to His disciples one last time. What is significant is that Jesus is the Word made flesh, but His flesh has been resurrected. While it looks the same and still bears the holes made by the nails and the scar created by the spear that pierced His side, it has been dramatically altered. In His resurrected state, Jesus was able to pass through walls and enter locked rooms. His body had been glorified and made fit for eternity. And the apostle Paul assures us that, one day, we will have a glorified body just like Jesus had.

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. – 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NLT

Our earthly bodies are not made for eternity. They are temporary dwelling places that have limited shelf lives. They are susceptible to sickness and disease. They are designed to wear out, grow old, and, eventually, to stop working. But in one of his later letters, John provides us with the good news that a day is coming when we will be like Jesus. We too will be given glorified bodies that are designed to last for eternity.

Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. – 1 John 3:2 NLT

But in chapter 21, John recounts the scene when Jesus, the resurrected, glorified Son of God, revealed Himself to seven of His disciples, who were still stuck in their temporal, earth-bound bodies. The Word of God, who was in the beginning with God and was God, was going to manifest His glory one more time. He was going to reveal Himself in a practical and personal way that was meant to reinforce for His disciples the ongoing reality of His identity as the God-man. Nothing had changed. He was still God in the flesh. Fully human and fully divine.

And this scene is burned into the mind of John because he was one of the disciples who witnessed it. He was accompanied by his brother James, as well as Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, and two other unnamed disciples. Influenced by the ever-impulsive Peter, they had decided to spend the day fishing. One might ask what they were doing in Galilee. According to the angel who spoke to the women at the tomb, that was exactly where they were supposed to go.

“But go, tell his disciples, even Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.” –Mark 16:7 NLT

But while they waited for Jesus to show up, they decided to occupy their time with some fishing. This doesn't indicate that they were giving up on their new vocation as ambassadors of the gospel, but that they were simply bored. Most of them had been professional fishermen when Jesus had called them, and they were doing what came naturally – fishing.

This is reminiscent of another scene recorded by Matthew. It too involved the Word made flesh, the Sea of Galilee, and a few men who were occupied with fishing.

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” – Matthew 4:18-19 ESV

More than three years later, John describes Jesus walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee as Peter and his companions were fishing. But John adds the not-so-subtle insight: “They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing” (John 21:3 ESV). Despite their combined years of fishing experience, they were totally unsuccessful. And it seems likely that John had in mind the words that Jesus had earlier spoken to His disciples.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” – John 15:4-5 NLT

Jesus was alive. He had been resurrected and had even revealed Himself to them. But now they found themselves alone and operating on their own initiative and according to their own agenda. And their efforts proved fruitless. They had spent the entire night casting for fish but had come up empty handed.

And then John adds the one line that dramatically alters the entire scenario.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. – John 21:4 ESV

As the rays of the sun began to penetrate the darkness of the night, the Light of the world (John 8:12) appeared on the scene and would soon illuminate the hearts and minds of the distracted and unsuccessful disciples.

More Than You Need

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

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. – John 21:5-14 ESV

The sun was just coming up as the weary disciples began to pull in their net after an unsuccessful night of fishing. They had returned to the Sea of Galilee just as Jesus had told them to but, apparently bored with waiting, seven of them had decided to try their hand at fishing. But as they prepared to return empty-handed, they heard someone call out to them. Whether it was due to a combination of their distance from shore and the poor morning light, they were unable to make out the identity of the stranger who shouted to them from the shoreline.

But it seems likely that they were a bit put out by His impertinent and somewhat invasive question: “Children, do you have any fish?” (John 21:5 ESV). And you can hear the tone of irritation in their curt response: “No.”

Peter and his companions were worn out and probably a bit put out by their failure to catch a single, solitary fish. These men were professionals and they had probably used every trick of the trade they could think of – but all to no avail. Now, this nosy bystander was unknowingly rubbing salt in the wound, leaving what little pride they had left completely destroyed.

John makes it clear that they failed to recognize Jesus. Again, it could have been because of their distance from shore and the poor lighting conditions. But, like the two disciples who encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus, these men could have been suffering from a case of divine disablement.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. – Luke 24:14-15 ESV

Whatever the case, the disciples had no idea that it was Jesus who was speaking to them. So, when this “stranger” suggested that they cast their net on the other side of the boat, they must have felt a strong urge to tell him to mind his own business. And yet, surprisingly, they did just as the man suggested. It could be that they did so out of respect. When the man had called out to them, he had called them “children.” The Greek word is *paidion*, and it was typically used to refer to a young child. It was a term of affection. So, perhaps they understood their well-meaning friend to be an older gentleman to whom they wanted to show honor by heeding his advice.

So, when he shouted out, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some” (John 21:6 ESV), they immediately complied. Yet, it is doubtful that they harbored any suspicions that this time would be any different than all the others. They had no expectations that their efforts would prove successful. They simply wanted to cast their net, haul it back in, and call it a day. But they were in for a big surprise.

John, still writing in the third person just as he has done throughout his gospel, recounts what happened when he and his fellow disciples did as the man had suggested.

So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. – John 21:6 ESV

It was a miracle. And John was the first to recognize the nature of what had happened and the identity of who was behind it all. He immediately called out, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7 ESV). And in that split second of time, the eyes of every man in the boat shifted from the amazing sight of the net full of fish to the man standing on the shore. And forgetting all about the net, they began to row to shore. The always impulsive Peter, too excited to wait, jumped into the water and swam to meet Jesus. Suddenly, the Giver became more important than the gift. The net full of fish lost its appeal as they recognized their resurrected Lord and Savior.

When they finally made it to shore, they found Jesus standing by a charcoal fire grilling fish. It’s important to note that, in the Greek, the word for fish is in the singular tense. He is cooking one fish. And this entire scene should call to mind an earlier occasion that took place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and His disciples had encountered a large crowd of His followers and Mark recounts that Jesus “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34 ESV). Jesus, knowing that the people were tired and hungry, instructed His disciples to feed them. But they responded in disbelief, indicating that they did not have the resources to feed such a large crowd. And when Jesus asked them to gather what was available, they came back with fives loaves of bread and two fish. And Andrew, upon taking a look at the meager resources at their disposal, had responded, “what are they for so many?” (John 6:9 ESV).

The disciples were full of doubts. They looked at the circumstances, assessed their potential for success, and concluded that the numbers were not in their favor. But they were wrong. John

records that Jesus “took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted” (John 6:11 ESV).

Yet, as Peter and his companions stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, they were looking at a single fish roasting on a charcoal fire. And it seems likely that the famished Andrew once again thought to himself, “what is this for so many?” How were eight men going to satisfy their hunger with one measly fish? But Jesus refocused their attention on the net that still remained tied to the boat and lying in the water.

“Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” – John 21:10 ESV

John reveals that there were exactly 153 fish in that net. Many commentators have tried to come up with some hidden meaning behind that number, but it would seem that John is simply trying to compare and contrast the two stories. In the earlier case, the disciples had only been able to find two fish. But on this occasion, they had shown up with 153. And the difference between the two numbers is the handiwork of Jesus. He had been the one to instruct them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. So, the miraculous supply of fish had been His doing. But in graciously inviting them to bring what they had “caught,” Jesus was allowing them to contribute to the meal.

And what Jesus did next should not be overlooked.

*Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. – John 21:13
ESV*

There is little doubt that John had the feeding of the 5,000 in mind when he recorded this scene on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. What he describes is remarkably similar to what happened on that earlier occasion.

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. – John 6:11 ESV

They ate and were satisfied. Jesus had miraculously met their need by transforming what was insufficient into an overabundance. But in this story, we see Jesus providing an overabundance *before* He met the need. And He allowed them to be participants in the miracle of provision. They had cast the net. They had rowed the boat. And Peter had hauled it to shore. But there were far more fish than they could eat. The supply overwhelmed the demand.

This entire scene was intended as a lesson in the sufficiency of Jesus and the need for their complete dependency upon Him. It was reminiscent of His earlier words to them.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” – John 15:4-5 NLT

They were learning the invaluable lesson that the apostle Paul had learned.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. – Philippians 4:13 ESV

And Paul would add:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:19 ESV

As Jesus prepared to return to His Father’s side in heaven, He was letting His disciples know that they would become His ambassadors, carrying on His mission and conveying His message of Good News to the world. But they would need to rely upon Him. They would need to abide in Him. In just a matter of days, they would receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, who would provide them with the power of God so that they might do the will of God. They would have all the resources they needed to do all that Jesus would commission them to do.

A Dreaded and Difficult Conversation

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

The moment Peter had been dreading finally arrived. Ever since he had peered into the empty tomb, he had been racked with guilt over his repeated denials of Jesus. And the missing body of his friend had added insult to injury. But then Peter had been given a shocking reprieve when he encountered the resurrected Jesus. He must have experienced a growing sense of irrepressible joy at the realization that Jesus was alive, but his excitement was tempered by of that fateful night in the upper room. When Jesus had announced that one of the 12 would betray Him, Peter had boldly proclaimed, “I will lay down my life for you!” (John 13:37 ESV). But Jesus had responded with an equally bold statement of His own:

“Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.” – John 13:38 ESV

And that very same night, as Jesus was being interrogated by the high priest and the members of Sanhedrin, Peter fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy.

The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” – John 18:17 ESV

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” – John 18:25 ESV

One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed. – John 18:26-27 ESV

Three separate times, Peter had been asked about his personal relationship with Jesus. Three different individuals asked him to confirm his identity as a disciple or follower of Jesus, and three times he vehemently denied any knowledge of or relationship with Jesus.

Now, standing on the shore of the sea of Galilee, Peter's worst fear was realized. He found himself alone with Jesus. Peter had been avoiding the inevitable. The weight of his guilty conscience must have become unbearable, preventing him from fully experiencing the joy of being with Jesus. Every time Peter looked at Jesus' face or caught a fleeting glimpse of the nail prints in His hands and feet, a sense of shame and self-loathing must have welled up within him. It is difficult to imagine just how tortured Peter must have felt each time he looked on his resurrected Master and friend.

And now, Jesus approached him one on one. There is no way of knowing what was going through Peter's mind at that moment, but one would expect that Peter had been rehearsing the apology he would need for just such a moment. Yet, mercifully, Jesus broke the awkward silence by speaking first. And what Jesus had to say to Peter speaks volumes. One might have expected Jesus to say something like, "I told you so" or "Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" But instead, Jesus asked Peter a series of three questions.

*"Simon, son of John, **do you love me** more than these?"* – John 21:15 ESV

*"Simon, son of John, **do you love me?"*** – John 21:16 ESV

*"Simon, son of John, **do you love me?"*** – John 21:17 ESV

Actually, it was one question asked three different times. That night in the garden, Peter's inquisitors wanted him to confirm his relationship with Jesus, and three times he had denied having one. But now, Peter is being asked to publicly confess and confirm his love for Jesus. And this time, the one asking the questions is the very one Peter had denied.

Peter's brash and impulsive nature had finally caught up with him. Over the years he had been with Jesus, he had made a habit of speaking his mind and trying to set himself apart from the rest of the disciples. He was naturally competitive and driven to do whatever it took to stand out from the crowd. All three of the Synoptic gospels record his pride-filled response when Jesus had declared, "You will all fall away because of me this night" (Matthew 26:31 ESV). Peter had boldly proclaimed, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (John 26:33 ESV). He was declaring himself to be better than the rest. He was made of better stuff. But little did Peter know that his bold claim was going to be put to the test and he would end up failing miserably.

But at the heart of Jesus' questions is the issue of love. The very first iteration of Jesus' question compared Peter's love with that of the other disciples. When Jesus asked, "do you love me more than these?" He was not asking if Peter's love for the other disciples was greater than his love for Him. This was a question designed to expose whether Peter still harbored feelings of superiority and considered himself to be more committed to Jesus than his fellow disciples.

Remember, Peter had accused the rest of the disciples of a lack of commitment. He had predicted that they would all fall away at the first hint of trouble. But he was different. He would stay the course and remain by Jesus' side through thick or thin. Or so he had thought.

But standing face to face with Jesus, all Peter could say was "Lord; you know that I love you" (John 21:15 ESV). No comparison. No competition. He was not willing to speak for or compare himself with the other disciples. All he could do was confirm his own love for his friend.

Over the years, much emphasis has been placed on the two Greek words for "love" that appear in this passage. One is the word *agapaō* and the other is *phileō*. The first is said to be a description of divine love – a selfless, sacrificial love expressed by God to men. While the latter was more commonly used to refer to a lower, earthly form of love – the love between two human beings. And while there is some truth to this distinction, it is also true that these two words were often used interchangeably in the Greek language. Yet, John seems to establish a clear pattern in this passage. He records that Jesus repeatedly used the word *agapaō*, while Peter responded by using the word *phileō*. There is a subtle, yet important, point of clarification being made as Jesus discusses the nature of Peter's love. Does Peter love Jesus in the same way that Jesus loved him?

Jesus had laid down His life for Peter. He had personally demonstrated the very definition of love He had given to the disciples.

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." – John 15:13 ESV

Jesus had faithfully fulfilled His role as the Good Shepherd.

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them." – John 10:11-12 ESV

By his actions that night in the courtyard, Peter had proven himself to be a hired hand. The wolf had come, and he had fled. But now, Jesus was offering Peter an opportunity to prove his love. With each successive query, Jesus responded to Peter's answer with a directive.

"Feed my lambs." – John 21:15 ESV

"Tend my sheep." – John 21:16 ESV

"Feed my sheep." – John 21:17 ESV

In essence, Jesus was demanding that Peter prove his love for Him by loving those for whom He died. Jesus had told the disciples, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John

10:16 ESV). And now, Jesus was turning the care and feeding of the flock over to Peter and his companions. If Peter wanted to prove his love for Jesus, he was have to love and care for those whom Jesus gave His life.

In His teaching on the Good Shepherd, Jesus had stated, “he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:4 ESV). In a sense, Jesus was turning over to Peter the responsibility of shepherding and leading His flock. Peter and the other disciples would become under-shepherds, commissioned by the Good Shepherd to feed and tend His sheep. These men could express no greater love for Jesus than to care for His sheep. Jesus was leaving and He was going to turn over the care and protection of His flock to His disciples.

And then Jesus reveals to Peter that his shepherding of the sheep will be costly. Peter too will end up laying down his life for the sheep. This impulsive, self-assertive man would one day find himself being led by others. But as a sheep to the slaughter. This somewhat poetic-sounding prophecy by Jesus was meant to reveal to Peter “by what kind of death he was to glorify God” (John 21:19 ESV).

“I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.” – John 21:18 NLT

Peter’s life was going to be dramatically different from this point forward. No longer would he live the self-willed, ego-driven life he had known up until that day. He would live a long life, but one that would be dedicated to the flock of Jesus Christ and end in him laying down his own life for the sheep – just as Jesus had. And according to the early church father, Eusebius, Peter was crucified in the mid-sixties A.D. during the purges of the Roman emperor, Nero.

But when Jesus had completed His one-on-one conversation with Peter, He ended it with the same words He had used when they first met: “Follow me.” But this time, Jesus wasn’t asking Peter to become His disciples. He was inviting Peter to follow His example of selfless, sacrificial love for the sheep. And one day, when Peter had fully followed Jesus’ example, he would follow Jesus to heaven.

“When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.” – John 14:3 NLT

What is That to You?

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

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

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. – John 21:20-25 ESV

Jesus has just called Peter to follow Him. But Peter received this somewhat innocuous invitation immediately after hearing the kind of death he would suffer for feeding and caring for Jesus’ sheep. For Peter, following Jesus was to come with a death sentence. And Peter seems to have understood exactly what Jesus had inferred when He said, “when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18 ESV).

John even clarifies that Jesus’ words were intended “to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God” (John 21:19 ESV). In the Roman-dominated culture in which they lived, the term “stretch out your hands” had become a euphemistic and more palatable way of referring to crucifixion. It was a word picture that described the victim’s arms being stretched out and tied to the upper beam of the cross (Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2:226-27).

Peter’s immediate response to this news reveals that he fully understood the import of what Jesus had said to him. As he and Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Peter turned and saw John following close behind. And the sight of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” seems to have filled Peter with jealousy. Peter was a natural-born competitor. He was always jockeying for position, trying to establish himself as the lead-dog among the rest of the disciples. Yet, John always seemed to be the teacher’s pet, the obvious favorite of Jesus, and this must have infuriated and frustrated the highly-competitive Peter.

So, like a petulant child, Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” (John 21:21 ESV). Peter’s unbridled and impetuous nature was on full display. He always had a difficult time controlling his impulses and words proved to be a particularly thorny problem. He habitually struggled to get his brain in gear before he put his lips in motion. Thinking before speaking was not his strong suit.

Peter, having heard the less-than-pleasant ending to his own life, wants to know what John's fate will be. What does God have in store for "the disciple whom Jesus loved?" Will he have his "hands stretched out?" Is John going to have to suffer death for following Jesus? It seems that Peter felt like he had been singled out. Perhaps he believed the death that Jesus had predicted he would suffer was a form of punishment for his earlier denial. Whatever the case, Peter had not asked his question out of concern for John. He was trying to determine whether the other disciples were going to suffer similar fates. And the tone of Jesus' response reveals that He understood the self-centered nature of Peter's question.

"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" – John 21:22 ESV

In a sense, Jesus told Peter, "that's none of your business." Jesus had just had a personal and intimate conversation with Peter, yet none of the other disciples were demanding to know what they had discussed. Jesus had plans for each of His disciples, but all Peter needed to know was what Jesus had in store for him. Obviously, Peter was not particularly pleased with how Jesus described the ending to his life's story. There's little doubt that Peter had always envisioned something much more positive and uplifting. But he was discovering the difficult truth that God's will was not obligated to mirror his own. In time, he would learn to pray as Jesus did in the garden, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Luke 22:42 NLT).

But for now, he was struggling with the twin demons of comparison and competition. He was jealous of John and his intimate relationship with Jesus. And his competitive nature made it difficult for him to accept the outcome Jesus had described. Peter didn't want to die a martyr, despite his earlier claim that he would lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:37). Peter was naturally attracted to glory and gain. He was prone to seek credit for everything that he did. His actions tended to be driven by reward and recognition. But this brings to mind the words spoken by Jesus in His sermon on the mount.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." –Matthew 6:1 ESV

Peter didn't need to worry about John. He needed to focus on the mission given to him by Jesus.

"Feed my lambs." – John 21:15 ESV

"Tend my sheep." – John 21:16 ESV

"Feed my sheep." – John 21:17 ESV

If Jesus willed for John to live a long and prosperous life, that was none of Peter's business. Even if John were divinely destined to live long enough to see the return of Jesus, that should

be of no concern to Peter. He had his marching orders. He knew exactly what Jesus required of him. But he was allowing jealousy and envy to blind him from the task at hand. And James warns what happens when believers allow these twin temptations to take over their lives.

But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. – James 3:14-16
NLT

John adds an interesting side note that reveals how easy it is to draw false conclusions from God's word. It seems that Jesus' words regarding John had been wrongly interpreted to mean that John would *never* die. This statement from the lips of Jesus had taken on a life of its own, spreading throughout the early church in the form of a rumor that John would outlive all the disciples, being miraculously kept alive until the return of Jesus.

So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die. – John 21:23 ESV

But John put that rumor to rest by restating and clarifying what Jesus had said. The key word in Jesus' statement had been the first one: "If..." Jesus had been making a propositional statement. It could have gone either way. If John lived until Jesus returned, it would have been God's will. If he didn't, that too would have been God's will. Jesus had not guaranteed one or the other. He had simply been encouraging Peter to keep his mind focused on the revealed will of God for *him*.

As John prepares to wrap up his gospel account, he restates that he is its author. He has been an eyewitness to all that he has written. While he has constantly referred to himself in the third person throughout his gospel, John had first-person knowledge of all that he has recorded. And because he is writing near the end of the 1st-Century, years after the events recorded in his gospel had taken place, he can boldly state that his testimony is true. They have been verified by time and the testimonies of others.

And John adds that his gospel was anything but comprehensive. He is not inferring that it is somehow incomplete or inadequate, but only that it would have been impossible to record all that Jesus had said and done during His earthly ministry. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John had carefully and purposefully chosen which details to include. And they all supported his overall thesis.

...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. – John 20:31 ESV

The lofty goal John had set out for his gospel had been to establish Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He began with his claim that Jesus was the Word of God made flesh. He

was the second person of the Trinity, the very Son of God who, by becoming a man, made the invisible God visible. Jesus manifested or revealed the Father by demonstrating the Father's love for mankind. And He did it by willingly taking the form of sinful man and dying as the sinless substitute required to satisfy the just demands of His Heavenly Father. Jesus became "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29 ESV).

And John painstakingly recorded the words and works of Jesus so that those who came to faith in Him long after His ascension would continue to believe in who He was and what He had come to do. The early church was under attack and believers were constantly being tempted to walk away from the faith. They struggled with doubts about Jesus' true identity because false teachers were constantly bringing into question either His divinity or His humanity. Some claimed Him to be God, but not a man. Others taught that He was a man, but not God. But John has spent 21 chapters defending the deity of Jesus while, at the same time, strenuously defending His humanity. Jesus was the God-man. And it was that one-of-a-kind dual nature that allowed Him to do what He came to do: Give His life as a ransom for many.