



The Temple Teachings of Jesus



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Sources & Abbreviations

The Temple Teachings of Jesus

- Barclay** William Barclay, The Gospel of John (Westminster, 1956), 2 vols.
- Bruce** F. F. Bruce, The Gospel to John (Eerdmans, 1983).
- Burge** Gary Burge, John: The NIV Application Commentary, (Zondervan, 2000).
- Carson** D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John, (Inter-Varsity Press, 1986).
- Gundry** Robert H. Gundry, Commentary on the New Testament, (Hendrickson, 2010).
- Hendrickson** William Hendrickson, A Commentary on the Gospel of John (Banner of Truth, 1959).
- Michaels** J. R. Michaels, John (Hendrickson, 1989).
- Milne** Bruce Milne, The Message of John (Inter-Varsity Press, 1993).
- Newbigin** Lesslie Newbigin, The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel, (Hansel Press, 1982).
- Tasker** R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. John (Eerdmans, 1960).
- Tenney** Merrill Tenney, The Gospel of John The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 9 (Zondervan, 1981).

All Scripture passages are taken from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

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Study 1

Destroy This Temple

John 2:12-22

Of the annual feasts on the Jewish calendar, none was more important than Passover. This feast looked back to God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It was during the first Passover that Israel became Israel! The people moved from being enslaved toward entering the promised land (see Exodus 12). This section of John contains the first of three or possibly four Passovers we read of in the Fourth Gospel (2:13; 6:4; 11:55, with 5:1 as a potential reference to another Passover). In fact, as we will see, John presents Jesus as the Passover Lamb in the dramatic conclusion to his gospel!

Chapter 2 of John's gospel is divided evenly into two halves. The first half takes place in Galilee, northern Israel. Then, quite abruptly, in verse 13 we find Jesus in Jerusalem during this very somber and significant feast.

Before going on in this study, read John 2:12-22. Jot down a note or two of what stands out. What kinds of questions arise in your mind as you read this passage?

We are not told specifically where this happened, but most see this taking place in the huge outer-court of the temple complex, The Court of the Gentiles. Evidently, by the time of Jesus, this court had become a loud, noisy marketplace. And a corrupt marketplace as well. William Hendrickson explains.

...the court of the Gentiles [in the temple] had been changed into what must have resembled a stockyard. There was the stench and the filth, the bleating and the lowing of animals, destined for sacrifice. It is true, in the abstract, that each worshipper was allowed to bring to the temple an animal of his own selection. But let him try it! In all likelihood it would not be approved by the judges, the privileged vendors who filled the money-chests of Annas [the high priest]! Hence, to save trouble and

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disappointment, animals for sacrifice were bought right here in the outer court. . . Of course, the dealers in cattle and sheep would be tempted to charge exorbitant prices for such animals. They would exploit the worshippers. . . And then there were the money-changers, sitting cross-legged behind their little coin-covered tables. They gave the worshipper lawful, Jewish coin in exchange for foreign currency. It must be borne in mind that only Jewish coins were allowed to be offered in the temple, and every worshipper. . . had to pay the annual temple tribute of half a shekel (cf. Exodus 30:13). The money-changers would charge a certain fee for every exchange-transaction. (Hendrickson, p. 122)

Look carefully at 2:15. The passage says, *he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen*. Imagine this for a moment. Look for an artistic rendering of the temple area either online or in your Bible. How long do you think this took for Jesus to complete? Consider the authority Jesus must have wielded in his very person. He is destroying the businesses of many at high season. Yet, they allow him to do so! What is your reaction to this?

Over the next weeks we will be examining Jesus' teachings in the temple. Here, in two sentences, we find the first of many temple discourses (see vv. 16, 19). Again, before going on in this study, re-state Jesus' brief teaching. What does he say in these two sentences?



Matthew, Mark and Luke record a similar incident at the end of Jesus' ministry, right before his crucifixion. Read their accounts of Jesus' cleansing the temple. What similarities and differences do you find between John and the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke)?

- Matthew 21:12-17
- Mark 11:15-19
- Luke 19:45-48

Why is the *cleansing of the temple* so significant that it is included in all four gospels?

As we read John's account of Jesus cleansing of the temple we should note several details:

- First, John's gospel places the event at the beginning of our Lord's ministry as opposed to the last week of Jesus' ministry in Matthew, Mark and Luke.
- Second, in John Jesus is concerned over the fact that there are money changers in the temple and not that they are dishonest (as is the case in the other three gospels, cf. Luke 19:45-46).
- Third, in John Jesus drives out the animals; in the first three gospels he expels the money changers themselves.
- Fourth, in John Jesus connects his action with the sign of destroying and rebuilding the temple. In Matthew, Mark and Luke this sign is brought up at Jesus' trial.

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With these differences in mind it seems that John is giving us an account of the first of two temple cleansings, one at the beginning and the other at the end of Jesus' ministry. In John 2 we have two highly significant events. The changing of the water to wine is a hidden sign for the disciples. The cleansing of the temple is a public sign for the Jews given in their central place of worship.

But why did Jesus do it? Why is he concerned over the presence of those selling animals in the temple? Aren't they supposed to be there? Again, in John there is no suggestion that the money changers were dishonest. Were not animals necessary for the sacrificial system which was firmly in place during the time of Jesus?

At one level there is a messianic announcement here. The prophet Zechariah foretold of a day when the temple would be devoid of merchants or traders (Zechariah 14:21). Malachi 3:1-4 reads,

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

In cleansing the temple Jesus announces, "Messiah is here! The temple is cleansed!"

When the Jews ask for a sign of Jesus' authority Jesus could have said, *You just had your sign, I cleaned up the temple.* Instead he predicts, in a single sentence, both his own death and resurrection and the destruction of the temple built by Herod.¹

Newbiggin explores the rich irony of Jesus' words.

The Temple is the place of sacrifice, where God has provided the "mercy seat" at which sin is put away and men and women can come into the presence of God. But with the death of Jesus the one true sacrifice is offered and there is no more need for the blood of sheep and oxen. The Temple is the place of God's tabernacled where his glory dwells. But in Jesus the word of God has come to tabernacle among us and we have seen his glory (1:14). The flesh and blood of Jesus, this man, is the temple where God dwells in the fullness of grace and truth. The Jews will destroy the Temple,

¹ Herod's temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.



but Jesus will raise it up (not build another one as in the “false witness” quoted by the synoptics). The man’s body will be the true temple, built of living stones and always growing into fullness (Ephesians 2:19-21). (Newbigin, p. 33)

Newbigin goes on to point out the depth of meaning in Jesus’ action.

So the action of Jesus is more than an example of prophetic protest against corrupt religion. It is a sign of the end of religion. (Newbigin, p. 33)

John points out in verse 22 it is only after the resurrection that the disciples understand the fullness of this sign.

Think of this story in its larger context as the original readers must have done if we are correct in assuming John was written late in the first century. They knew the earthly temple had been destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D. John’s believing readers, we might suppose, had some familiarity with Paul who develops the notion of the people of God as the new temple. Read and discuss the following texts in light of John 2.

- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- Ephesians 2:19-22
- 1 Peter 2:4-5

What do John 2 and the above texts teach us about corporate worship?

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What do the above verses have to say about a casual approach to corporate church worship? What would Peter and Paul say to someone who decided to skip corporate worship in order to sit on the beach, read a good book, or participate in a favorite sporting event?

When Jesus cleanses the temple he is intent on protecting the Father's reputation; *How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!* Think through this statement with regard to the above passages. If Jesus was concerned for the purity of temple worship, what should our concern be for the purity of the church?

A Christian's body is *a temple of the Holy Spirit within* him or her (1 Corinthians 6:19). Practically speaking, what does this entail? What could a person do using his or her body to best house the Spirit of God? What are natural results of the Holy Spirit's indwelling?

Respond to the following statement by Bruce Milne.

A significant proportion of the Bible is devoted to the regulation of worship and we are sadly misled if we imagine that the quality of what we offer in worship services, or the devotion with which we participate, are matters of peripheral importance. If 'Jesus is Lord', he claims the temple as a primary sphere of his rule. Modern-day worship which is irreverent, superficial, distraction-filled, cold, lifeless, sloppy, self-indulgent,



hypocritical, ill-prepared or theologically inappropriate will likewise receive his censure, as will worship which detracts from the honour and glory of the living God through a concern for performance and self-display on the part of those leading it. (Milne, pp. 70-71)

Have you ever thought of SBCC as a temple of Jesus? Would he be pleased with our corporate worship? How do you structure your week and your Sunday to make a contribution to our worship together?

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Study 2

My Father Is Working

John 5:1-18

One of the dramatic plotlines in John is of belief and unbelief. The Gospel was written to prompt belief (20:30-31), but along the way we find the refusal to believe on the part of many which morphs from *reservation and hesitation about Jesus to outright and sometimes official opposition*. (Carson, p. 240)

Chapter 5 begins with the words, *After this...* which show a break in the chronology. Jesus is again in Jerusalem and will perform his third *sign*.¹ Here our Lord seeks out an individual who doesn't even know who Jesus is. The man makes no request of Jesus, demonstrates no faith, as in Cana (4:46ff.), and may even prefer his state of sickness over health.

Before going on in this study, read John 5:1-18. This is a very dramatic story which heightens the tensions between Jesus and the religious authorities. At the end of the passage Jesus utters a zinger which outrages the Jews. Enter in to this drama. What stands out? What is confusing to you?

This story is dripping with irony which we might miss as twenty-first century readers. Some of the details we might think of as simply the trappings of good story telling are anything but that. The incident takes place where? At a pool just outside the temple complex. Evidently there was a tradition that at certain times an angel would stir the waters of the pool, and the first one in was healed.

¹ Tenney, p. 61, writes, *...John was less interested in chronology than in following the trend of Jesus' conflict with unbelief.*

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But John draws our attention to the architecture around the pool itself. It has five roofed colonnades.

Commentators point to the significance of the number five in this passage. The Samaritan woman had five husbands in the previous chapter. The most revered section of the Jewish Bible was the Torah, the *five* books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

John's calling attention to this number suggests we should prepare for a symbolic allusion to what he stated outright in 1:17: *the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came on the scene through Jesus Christ...* (Gundry, p. 374)

Furthermore, we learn the man has been sitting by the pool for thirty-eight years! This is the exact number of years the Jews wandered in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 2:14). They wandered because of their disobedience after receiving the law!

So just as the Jewish water of purification at the wedding feast in Cana represented the inadequacy of the Mosaic law, here the water of the five-porched pool represents the inadequacy of the Mosaic law. (Gundry, p. 374)

Notice the surprising question Jesus asks the invalid in verse 5, *Do you want to get well? Do I want to get well? Of course I want to get well... I've spent my life by this pool!!...* But maybe not. The man may, after thirty-eight years of paralysis, have adapted to his state and accepted it.¹ His paralysis has possibly become an integral part of his identity. In any event, the man's answer shows resignation and despair. *No one will help me into the water.*²

Have you ever found yourself afraid of healing? Afraid of God's touch in your life? If you have experienced this, or watched someone else struggle in this area, describe this to your homegroup if it is appropriate.

¹ Becoming well might also have affected his income. Milne quotes Finlay, *An eastern beggar often loses a good living by being cured.* (Milne, p. 95)

² Verses 3b-4 are not in the best manuscripts of the Bible. These words were probably added later to clarify.



How would you encourage someone who is struggling with the possibility (probability) of God's intervention—which would heal, but might significantly alter some area or even the direction of his or her life?

Jesus speaks and two things happen. The man is healed and the Jews are incensed. *Hey. Whoa, wait just a minute. What are you doing carrying your bed on the Sabbath? That's against the law!* (v. 10)

We are shocked to see their outrage, but Sabbath-keeping was monumental for devout Jews. This was the law that set them apart from their corrupt neighbors.

The law of the sabbatical rest was perhaps the most important of all the bulwarks by which Judaism was protected from erosion by the encompassing paganism. (Newbigin, p. 64)

Accordingly the Jews argued (and wrote laws) about minute areas of life. They specified thirty-nine categories of work which broke Sabbath keeping.

[T]he Rabbis of Jesus' day solemnly argued that a man was sinning if he carried a needle in his robe on the Sabbath. They even argued as to whether he could wear his artificial teeth or his wooden leg. (Barclay, p. 178)

Imagine, to wear artificial teeth or a wooden leg was to carry a load and thus to *work*, and thus to violate Sabbath law!

When questioned, the healed man immediately points the blame to Jesus. *He healed me! He is the one who told me to work on the Sabbath by carrying my bed!*

Read verse 14. In time, Jesus finds the man in the temple. What does Jesus say?

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Bob Gundry explains. Respond to the following quotation:

The healing represents salvation, and salvation means being saved from sin, not only from its penalty but also from its power over your life and conduct.... “Lest something worse happen to you”—worse than thirty-eight years of being an invalid. That sounds pretty bad. What is this worse something? Well, if the healing represents salvation, eternal life, the worse thing must be damnation, eternal death—and eternity of existence in separation from God, to live in communion with God, so that to exist apart from him is absolute ruination. (Gundry, p. 374)

With the above in mind we can say that Jesus has done for each of us who know him what the waters of the pool could not do. He has told us to pick up our bed and walk. Describe what this has looked like in your life. Describe the spiritual and physical healing you have experienced because Jesus sought you out and spoke his word to you.

In short order, it is not the invalid who is on the hot seat, but Jesus. The Jews *were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.*

The invalid appealed to the authority of *the man who healed me*.... But when Jesus is challenged (persecuted) his appeal is utterly shocking. He appeals to the authority of the Father (v.17). *My Father is working until now, and I am working.*¹ Ugh!! Thud!!

First-century Jews pondered whether or not God himself kept the Sabbath. But they knew that whether God was a Sabbath breaker or not, he kept working on the seventh day, otherwise how would the universe function? Jesus agrees with this logic. God works on the Sabbath! And so does Jesus!

¹ Barclay cites a Rabbinic saying, *The sun shines; the rivers flow; the processes of birth and death go on, on the Sabbath as on any other day; and that is the work of God.* Jews held that God ceased on the seventh day only from the “act” of creation. His higher works of judgment, mercy, compassion and love still continued. (cf. Barclay, p. 179)



What does Jesus imply with his answer? What happens? Read 5:18!

Sometimes Jews would refer to God as *our Father*... But this is different. Jesus refers to Yahweh as *my Father*. Jesus is making himself equal with God! He is *challenging the fundamental distinction between the holy, infinite God and finite, fallen human beings*. For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him. (Carson, p. 249)

The drama is far from over. Jesus' temple teaching will reach new heights in the rest of the chapter.

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Study 3

The Son Can Do Nothing

John 5:19-47

John 5:17 contains one of the more incriminating statements of Jesus in the temple. *My Father is working until now and I am working.*

Jesus' interrogators understood exactly what our Lord meant. He was claiming equality with God! The rest of John 5 is a sermon from Jesus to his adversaries. This is one of the great temple teachings of Jesus in John's gospel.

Before going on in this study read John 5:19-47. Examine the passage carefully. It will be challenging. Make a list of all the things Jesus says about himself in these verses. Make a second list of questions that arise in your reading.

After reading this passage, and making our notes, we are likely to say, *Wow. What is this about?!!!* Indeed, some of this passage is dense and, at first glance, inaccessible. Commentator Bruce Milne is helpful. He points out that in the first section, verses 19-30, Jesus focuses on his unique relation to the Father. Jesus claims equality with God, not as a rival god, in competition with Yahweh, but rather,

...it is an equality expressed as a unity in which the Son is so utterly submitted to the Father that the two are one in the works that they do; *the son can do nothing by himself* (v. 19). Jesus places no limit on his dependence on the Father.

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Milne goes on to quote C. K. Barrett,

The Father is God sending and commanding, the Son is God sent and obedient.
(Milne, p. 98)

With the above in mind, we find Jesus making two astounding claims in this passage.

1. The Son will raise the dead at the end of the age (vv. 21, 25, 28ff.).
2. The Son will be the judge of all people at the end of the age (vv. 22, 27, 29-30).

Both of these are the *prerogatives of deity*, demonstrating his sovereignty. The passage doesn't tell us, but what do you think the response was from those who wanted to question Jesus about a Sabbath healing?

What does God want us to see in this teaching? What do you learn about God from verses 19-29? Consider, especially, v. 21. What does this tell you about your salvation?

Now look over 5:19-30 again. This time consider what they tell you about the Father's relation to the Son and the Son's submission and dependence upon the Father? Notice and ponder the inner working of the divine Trinity.



As you work through this passage, consider Tenney's comment on verse 19. How does this help clarify?

The Son is dependent on the Father. He does not act independently apart from the Father's will and purpose. Throughout this Gospel Jesus continually asserted that his work was to do the will of the Father (4:34; 5:30; 8:28; 12:50; 15:10). Equality of nature, identity of objective, and subordination of will are interrelated in Christ. John presents him as the Son, not as the slave of God, yet as the perfect agent of the divine purpose and the complete revelation of the divine nature. (Tenney, p. 64)

List the following:

The Father's Relation to the Son

The Son's Relation to the Father

When we call the first person of the Trinity the *Father* and when we call Jesus the *Son* we are employing figures of speech which help us understand their essential nature and their relationship to one another. Muslims are correct when they say that the Father did not have a baby and name the child *Son*. No. Here we are looking at two members of the eternal Triune God, the one God who is three persons, Father—Son—Holy Spirit.

Some Christians of our time are having a difficult time with the image of God as *Father*. Why is this?

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What is the proper response to such a difficulty? Should we drop language which refers to God as *Father*?

Consider the following by Douglas Wilson:

[God's] masculinity is *not* a function of Him being male. God the Father is not male, but He is still ultimately masculine.¹

Wilson goes on to quote C. S. Lewis,

"Since God is in fact not a biological being and has no sex, what can it matter whether we say He or She, Father or Mother, Son or Daughter?" But Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him.²

Then Wilson explains,

When we call him Father, we are not saying (or implying) that He is male in any way...

So we do not call God Father because we have projected our notions of male-based fatherhood up into the heavens. We call Him Father because traces of His masculinity have been bestowed on us. A father down here partakes of the Fatherhood in some mysterious way. The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians that "all fatherhood derives its name" from God the Father (Ephesians 3:14-16).³

In John 5, Jesus repeatedly refers to his Father. What does this mean to you? What does it mean to you to call God Father? How could this give you great comfort?

1, 2, 3 Douglas Wilson, *Father Hunger* (Thomas Nelson, 2012), p. 38.



It is easy to grow accustomed to the gospels and the teaching of Jesus. Verses 24-30 are shocking! Here a Palestinian Jew claims he will judge the masses of humanity. Consider the words of C. S. Lewis.

In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivaled by any character in history. . . You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. (Mere Christianity, pp. 55-56)

This passage presents the unity of the Father and the Son within the Trinity. As believers we live with this mystery—one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jot down a few notes and think through this as a homegroup. Encourage one another to marvel at our great God!

In verses 31-40 Jesus continues his teaching to his detractors. He mentions three witnesses to himself. Who (or what) are they?

1. The witness of John the Baptist (5:33-35).
2. The witness of Jesus' miracles (5:36).
3. The witness of the Father's voice in the Scriptures (5:37-46).

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Again, these verses are a mine deep enough that we could never plumb its depth. Nevertheless, re-read these verses. Describe each witness to Jesus. What is their significance? How do these witnesses add to your knowledge of Jesus and bolster your confidence that he is your Lord?

Read verses 39-47. Jesus is far from a passive defender in these verses. What accusations does he make about his opponents?

What does Jesus mean when he says, *Your accuser is Moses?* (v. 45)

Jewish religion tended to focus on the outward, what is seen and done, to the neglect of the inward. The New Testament looks inwardly, at belief, faith and then what comes out of the heart.

What are the witnesses which exist for Christians? Compare your lists as a homegroup. What accusations might Jesus make about the church, SBCC, or you?



Practically speaking, what must a believer do to be faithful to the witnesses God has provided? If there is one particular thing that stands out to you personally, share this with your homegroup. Encourage one another towards deeper discipleship.

As a group, revisit this question in a few weeks!

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Study 4

I Come From Him

John 7:1-31

When we open this chapter, Jesus is up north in Galilee. John 7:1 indicates Jesus is going to stay away from southern Israel because it is too dangerous. The irony of the narrative is that almost immediately Jesus goes south! He goes to Jerusalem and, as far as John tells the story, we don't find Jesus back in Galilee until he has been crucified and has risen from the dead (21:1ff). The darkness is closing in around the *light of the world*.

From now on we find frequent references to the Jews' attempt to kill Jesus (cf. 7:13, 19, 25, 30, 32, 44; 8:37, 59). *John's Gospel is less interested in where Jesus traveled and lived most of his life than in his visits to Jerusalem.* (Michaels, p. 124) Jerusalem is the *storm-centre of the Messiah's ministry, where He vindicates His claims before consummating His work outside its walls.* (Tasker, p. 101)

Keep the following outline in mind during the next few weeks of our study:

- I. The Journey to Jerusalem (7:1-13)
- II. Feast of Tabernacles: Sermon One (7:14-39)
Postscript: (7:40-52)
- III. Interlude: The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53 – 8:11)
- IV. Feast of Tabernacles: Sermon Two (8:12-59)
Postscript: (9:1-41)
- V. Feast of Tabernacles: Sermon Three (10:1-21)

Chapter 7 begins with Jesus' brothers taunting him. *If you would be king, go to Jerusalem. It is there you can make a name for yourself...* Jesus refuses their temptation, *It's not the right time* (v. 6). Jesus, throughout John's gospel, is in control of his destiny. His *hour* will come not according to the whims of his opponents, but according to the will of God (12:23, 28; 17:1, etc.).

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Nevertheless, after his brothers go to the feast, Jesus follows *in private*.

The *feast* in these chapters is the Feast of Tabernacles (or Feast of Booths) held in late September or early October.¹ This feast, one of the three most important annual feasts, began five days after the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).² Historians agree this was the most popular of the feasts. It was basically a week-long party which celebrated, non-stop, the miraculous provision Yahweh had made for his people as they wandered through the desert after the exodus.³ Each family would, literally, build a small house (booth) outside of Jerusalem and live in it for the week. These humble dwellings were to remind the people that they were once a nomadic people who had now been granted the land of Israel as a permanent home. Joy and thanksgiving, therefore, marked this feast from beginning to end. Originally, the feast lasted seven days, but an eighth day was added so that the participants could rest after all the festivities of the previous week.⁴

With the above in mind read John 7:1-31. Make a few notes and jot down any question your initial reading of this passage brings to mind.

Now look over these verses again. Why is Jesus so controversial? What is it about him that causes such a ruckus?

1 The Old Testament background for the feast is found in Leviticus 23:33-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13-15.

2 The other two were the Passover, which celebrated the deliverance of Israel during the exodus and Pentecost, which celebrated the giving of the law in the desert. It was mandatory that all the people of Israel attend these three feasts.

3 The feast also had associations with the fall harvest.

4 The eighth day was added as a time of singing the Hallel (Psalms 113-118). Jesus will make his startling offer *on the last day of the feast (7:37)*. Is this the seventh or the added eighth day?



Read verses 1-9. The half-brothers of Jesus want him to do the Lord's work, but not in the Lord's way. They encourage their older brother to do something sensational, *show yourself to the world*. (v. 4) The *world*, in John is a loaded term. It is the *world* that cannot receive Jesus (John 1:9-10). In fact, ...in one sense, Jesus has no intention of showing himself to the *world*. (See John 14:22.)

Carson continues:

Yet in another sense, the reader who presses on to the rest of this Gospel discovers that it is in Jerusalem where Jesus reveals himself most dramatically—not in the spectacular miracles the brothers want but in the ignominy of the cross, the very cross by which Jesus draws all men to himself (12:32) and become the Saviour of the world (4:42). (Carson, p. 307)

Review verses 14-31. By mid-week in the Feast of Tabernacles we find Jesus in the temple. What is the central thrust of his teaching in these verses? Why is his teaching controversial?

Notice the irony of the complaint in verse 15, *Wait just a minute! Jesus hasn't even been to seminary...* What is Jesus' response to this allegation that he is untrained as a theologian?

Note that in verse 17 Jesus answers his questioners by saying that only those who have a will to do God's can understand his teaching to be from God. What does it mean to do God's will? Compare John 6:29. How is this seen in your life?

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Respond to the following quotation.

This is not a call to salvation by good works. It is the call to total commitment in obedient and loving faith. There is no other way by which God's revelation of himself can be received. (Newbigin, p. 95)

The statement in verse 19 might surprise us. Why does Jesus bring up the law of Moses? Actually this takes us right back to Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem. Review and consider the dialogue we observed in John 5:1-18. There Jesus was in trouble because he healed on the Sabbath. Jesus turned the table on his opponents and used the law of Moses to indict them! Here he does the same thing. *You have the law of Moses, yet you do not keep it!*

How were they not keeping the law? They are trying to kill Jesus and the law says, *Do not kill.*

In verse 20 the crowd's taunt is likely a common phrase. *You are demon-possessed* is equivalent to our saying, *You're crazy.*

To which of his miracles is Jesus referring in verse 21?

These three verses 22-24 make reference to circumcision. Michaels helps clarify why this becomes part of the discussion.



Jesus' argument makes sense because of an assumption among Jewish teachers that circumcision accomplished the perfection of man (Mishnah *Nedarim* 3:11: Abraham was not called perfect until he was circumcised).¹ They too, argued from the lesser to the greater that if circumcision "which attaches to only one of the 248 members of the human body², suspends the Sabbath, how much more shall [the saving of] the whole body suspend the Sabbath" (Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 85b). The difference is that the rabbis confined the principle to immediately life-threatening situations, while Jesus applied it on behalf of anyone in need of help or healing (cf., e.g., Matthew 12:1-8, 9-14; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6). (Michaels, p. 130)

As the people discuss what they are seeing and hearing (verse 27), they reflect back to one strand of Jewish messianic expectation which held that the origin of the Messiah would be a mystery. Jesus neither affirms nor refutes this belief.

Read again 7:28-29. Jesus' interaction with the Jews in this section reaches something of a crescendo. Read these verses carefully. Make a list of the claims Jesus makes and discuss them with your homegroup.

Why are Jesus' comments in verses 28-29 inflammatory? Why did the Jews attempt his arrest? Why are they unable to arrest him (v. 30)?

1 How interesting, and tragic, that the rabbis would reason this way. Clearly Genesis, and later Paul, makes a point of the fact that Abraham was *declared righteous before* he was circumcised because of his faith (cf. Romans 4:9ff, Genesis 15:6, 22).

2 Jewish anatomy held that a man's body had 248 parts. Had they never read *Gray's Anatomy*?

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As Jesus is interrogated in the midst of his teaching in the outer court of the temple he is very specific. And very offensive. *You know me, and you know where I come from? Hardly,* implies the teacher. *I come from him and he as sent me* (v. 29). F.F. Bruce lends insight,

The language is simple and unambiguous; the claim is august. Jesus asserts afresh his unique relation to the Father, and his hearers cannot miss the implication of his words. (Bruce, p. 178)

What are the two reactions to Jesus' claims in verses 30-31?

What do you make of verse 30? We are not told how Jesus prevented his capture. What do you think?

The issue in this section of John is belief versus unbelief. Those who believe are convinced by the *sign* Jesus performed by healing the man at the pool. They believe Jesus when he says, *I came from him*. What brought you to believe that Jesus came from God? What did God use to compel belief in your life? Share with your homegroup.



In the 21st century milieu, there is a bias against authority. Generally speaking, non-believers consider themselves to be their own authority—there is no one to whom they answer. John chapter 7 reveals Jesus' authority. What is the interplay between authority and belief? When a person becomes a Christian, what, specifically, in his or her life must change?

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Notes



Study 5

Out Of His Heart Will Flow Living

Waters

John 7:32-39

Jesus is still at the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem in our passage. As we noticed in our last study, things are heating up for Jesus. Our Lord has both impressed and offended his listeners. *Where did this man get this teaching? He has never studied!!!, and, You have a demon!*

Before going on in this study guide, read John 7:32-39 in light of the entire seventh chapter of John. What stands out? What questions do you have of Jesus' teaching?

In verse 32, we meet the chief priests for the first time in John's gospel.

They consisted of the current high priest, past high priests, and other high-ranking priests and members of priestly families. (Gundry, p. 391)

The Pharisees, in a sense, are the opposite of the chief priests. The latter are deeply entrenched in the religious system of the Jerusalem temple. The Pharisees, on the other hand, are separatists. They believe the priesthood had been corrupted and wanted nothing to do with it. Such is the animosity to Jesus, it brought adversaries together.

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Read carefully what Jesus says to his arresting officers in verses 33-34. Explain what he means. What does he mean when he says, *Where I am you cannot come*. Jesus is speaking of his going to heaven. His interrogators cannot go there. This sentence contains a dire warning. What is it? How should this motivate us in our Christian lives? How should this inform our evangelism?

The climax of Jesus' teaching in John 7 comes in verse 37. *If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink*. The irony is deep.

One of the features of the Feast of Tabernacles was a concern for rain, for water. Part of the liturgy of the week involved collecting water. Water was ceremonially poured out in the temple as a symbol of God's provision in the past. This feast was a time to pray for rain. The people believed that if it rained during the feast, a good season of rain would follow.¹

Each morning of the festival contained a procession to the spring of Gihon near the temple. A priest would fill a pitcher with water and then proceed back to the temple. The priest would circle the altar as the people sang Psalm 118:25. *Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!* On the seventh day of the feast this ceremony would take place seven times!

It was at this solemn moment in the ceremonies on the seventh day that the teacher from Galilee stood up in the temple court to proclaim solemnly that he was the source of living water. . . . Their prayers for water had been answered in a way they did not expect; the feast that contained within itself the promise of the Messiah had been fulfilled. (Brown, 1, p. 327)

¹ Brown points out, *Even today, as bitterly as the Jordanian Arabs hate the Israelis, they watch carefully to see if rain falls during the Israeli celebration of Tabernacles as a sign of the weather to come*. (Brown, 1, p. 327)



But what is Jesus saying?

Notice the response to Jesus' offer (vv. 40-41), *This is the Messiah!* Undoubtedly some connected Jesus' offer with an Old Testament prophecy.

On that day [when Messiah comes], living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea... (Zechariah 14:8)¹

Jesus, obviously, offers himself as the real thing. The temple with its ceremonies was just a shadow (Hebrews 10:1ff.). Think about your life. How is Jesus a source of living water in your day-to-day living? How does he quench your thirst? Think concretely. List four or five areas of your life where Jesus has provided refreshment.

See verse 37. What does it mean to come to Jesus and drink? Consider Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well in John 4. Consider especially the words of our Lord in 4:10, 13-14.

Verses 38-39 are open to some degree of interpretation depending on how one sees the syntax of this section.

The ESV reads,

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'

¹ cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12.

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However, the sentence could be broken after the *me* in verse 38. In this case the text would read,

*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me.
And let him drink, who believes in me.*

As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit...

In the first case the streams of living water flow from within the believer (as a consequence of the Holy Spirit in his or her life).

In the second case the streams of living water flow from Jesus.

What do you think? Why? Look at the context to help you make your decision.

Notice John's explanatory comment... *for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified* (v. 39). Newbigin explains,

The crowds participating in the festival will have watched day after day the procession of worshippers carrying water up to the Temple where it was poured out as a sign of the [future] promises of Zechariah and Ezekiel. The symbolism of abundant water pouring forth from the Temple to bring life to the dead lands of the desert and the Dead Sea beyond (Ezekiel 47) vividly expressed the longing for the outpouring of the life-giving Spirit of God which would mark the age to come. (Newbigin, p. 100)

Regardless of how we read John 7:37-38, Jesus is indeed the one who inaugurates the promised age of the Holy Spirit. He is the source of this life-giving water.



What do we learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit from these verses?

Share with your group your experience of this *living water*. How has the Holy Spirit touched your life? How do the *waters* of the Holy Spirit flow from you?

Think through this chapter. Note the various responses to Jesus. How many responses can you find? What are the various responses to Jesus we see in our own time and place? How do your unbelieving friends view Jesus?

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Notes



Study 6

Neither Do I Condemn You

John 8:1-11

John 8:1-11 contains an irresistible incident in the life of Jesus that may not belong in the Bible. The manuscript evidence for these verses is so weak that some of our Bibles may not even have them in their pages. The ESV gives us our text prefaced with a note, *Some manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11*... The verses are contained in a footnote in the Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible places them at the end of the Gospel under the heading, *An Incident at the Temple*.¹ Nevertheless, readers and students of the Fourth Gospel find the story compelling. Michael Green says the story is *unmistakably Johannine*,² but F. F. Bruce points out the lack of manuscript evidence for these verses.

They are missing from a wide variety of early Greek manuscripts from the earliest forms of the Syriac and Coptic Gospels, from several Armenian, Old Georgian and Old Latin manuscripts, and from the Gothic Bible.

Nevertheless, Bruce goes on to write a commentary on these verses! He explains,

They constitute a fact, a fragment of authentic gospel material not originally included in any of the four Gospels. (Bruce, p. 413)

F. B. Meyer writes,

This passage has been the subject of more eager debate than any other in the Gospels. It is omitted by many ancient [manuscripts]; it is rejected by several of the Fathers; it bears in its fabric, in the original, traces of the tremendous storm through which it has passed. And yet there is no possibility of accounting for its existence, save on the supposition that the incident really took place. It reveals in our Saviour's character a wisdom so profound, a tenderness to sinners so delicate, a hatred of sin so intense, an insight into human hearts so searching, that it is impossible to suppose the mind of man could have conceived, or the hand of man invented, this most pathetic story. (F. B. Meyer, *Gospel of John*, p. 122)

¹ Some manuscripts place this story after John 7:36, and others place the story after Luke 21:38.

² Lecture notes, Regent College, October, 1993.

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Read this brief story in John 8:1-11. What do you think? Does it bear the marks of authenticity?

The scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus and attempt to put him in a bind. They cite the Old Testament law that prescribed punishment for adulterers. What specific law do they have in mind?

- Deuteronomy 22:23-24 prescribes stoning for a betrothed virgin who is sexually unfaithful to her fiancé. In this case both sexual partners were to be put to death.
- Deuteronomy 22:22 and Leviticus 20:10 prescribe death for unfaithful wives and their accomplices.

Why do you think the Old Testament is (was) so strict about the sin of adultery? What was at stake for Israelite society?

Does the crowd in John 8 share this same concern?



Why do the older people leave the scene first? How long would you have stayed?

Why is the story so popular? What do we learn about Jesus from this brief narrative?

As we should expect in John's gospel, the story contains irony. Jesus' detractors have set a trap for their opponent and they are the ones who fall into it. Jesus comes to town from his camp on the Mount of Olives (just over a mile from Jerusalem). As he arrives in the temple court for another day's teaching he is put to the test by the scribes and Pharisees. *What about this woman we just caught in the act of adultery? The law says we should stone her. What do you say?* The absence of the man involved implies both a double standard (*Boys will be boys. . .*) and that the Jews are more interested in trapping Jesus than in pursuing justice. As we have seen in Deuteronomy 22, the law prescribes death for both the woman and her lover.

If Jesus says, *Let the woman go. . .*, he would prove himself to be a heretic, a false teacher. His healing on the Sabbath had already aroused suspicions. This would be proof. *Jesus is against Moses!*

If, on the other hand, Jesus takes the hard line and says, *Yes, she should be stoned*, he becomes a revolutionary zealot fighting against Rome. The Romans reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves.¹

Jesus' response is brilliant! As he stoops down and writes in the ground. He imitates, perhaps, the action of a Roman judge who would first write his verdict and then read it. Jesus writes even as the questions continue (vv. 6-7).

¹ This is why Jesus has to be tried before Herod and Pilate, both Roman authorities, before his crucifixion.

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With the above in mind, what do you think Jesus was writing? What were the questions which kept coming?

Why do the woman's accusers begin to leave the scene? F. F. Bruce brings out the rich depth of the incident and of Jesus' response.

We may recall Jesus' own words about the lustful look which constitutes adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28), but more was involved in his ruling than that. The law dealt more severely with women than with men. For a betrothed or married woman to have sexual relations with a man other than her bridegroom or husband was a capital offense; for a married man to have such relations with another woman than his wife was relatively venial, provided the woman was not betrothed or married to another man. It was possible for men to maintain public respectability in spite of certain irregular incidents in their lives; Jesus' ruling therefore came as a challenge to the conscience of each man who heard him.

In other words, Jesus reverses the centuries old *double standard* of sexual purity. Bruce goes on,

The embarrassment was no longer his, but theirs. His ruling about adultery, like his ruling elsewhere about divorce, amounts to a redressing of the unfavourable balance in favour of the underprivileged sex. But by his appeal to the consciences of the witnesses, he takes the question off the judicial plane altogether and raises it to the moral level where it properly belongs, in accordance with his regular attitude and teaching. (Bruce, p. 416)

Much has been made of the first part of this verse 11. What does Jesus mean when he says, *Then neither do I condemn you. . .?* Does this mean we should never pass judgment on one another's behavior?



In what way are we to emulate Jesus as he is portrayed in this story?

As in the first century, ours is a time of casual sexual promiscuity. Those who come to know and love Jesus are often wounded warriors of the so-called *sexual revolution*. What does this text say of the grace of God? What does it say of God's expectations of us? What do the following texts add to John 8:1-8:11?

- 1 Corinthians 6:12-19
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

What would you say to someone who says, *God is a gracious God. I know sex outside of marriage falls short of God's expectations, but he would never condemn me! Look what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery. . .?*

When we reflect on this story we usually emphasize Jesus' protection of the woman. Did Jesus also protect the angry crowd? What were the people thinking when they left?

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It is interesting to observe that everyone in John's story is thoroughly sinful. The crowd uses the Bible in an attempt to put someone to death (and to trap the *Light of the world*). The sinful woman is, apparently, guilty of sexual infidelity. Yet, the crowd is self-righteous while the woman, we imagine, hangs her head in shame as she stands alone before the sinless Lord. With whom do you identify?

Ponder how this passage affirms, reflects, or challenges your own sexual brokenness and conduct. Who do you have in your life who can encourage you, and ultimately hold you accountable to changes you, as a believer, need to make?

Notes



Study 7

John 8:12-20

I am the Light of the World

When we come to 8:12-20 we are still in the context of the great Feast of Tabernacles. This feast contained two great ceremonies, the pouring of the water and the Festival of Lights. The water ceremony looked back to God's miraculous provision in the desert. The Festival of Lights remembered Yahweh's guidance of Israel through the desert in the form of a pillar of fire. Each night during the feast there was the lighting of the four golden candlesticks in the Court of Women in the temple. Each of the candlesticks had four golden bowls in which wicks were floating. It was said that all of Jerusalem was in the glow of these lights. One ancient account of the feast says,

He who has not seen the joy of the place of water-drawing has never in his life seen joy.

D. A. Carson explains this comment,

'Men of piety and good works' danced through the night, holding burning torches in their hands and singing songs and praises. The [Temple] orchestras cut loose, and some sources attest that this went on every night of the Feast of Tabernacles, with the light from the temple area shedding its glow all over Jerusalem. In this context Jesus declares to the people, *I am the light of the world*. (Carson, p. 337)

With this in mind read John 8:12-20. Continue reading the rest of Jesus' teaching (vv. 21-59).

In verses 12-20, what stands out? What questions come to mind as you read this passage?

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In verse 12, we find the second of Jesus' famous *I am* statements in John's gospel. Consider:

- I am the bread of life (6:35)
- I am the light of the world (8:12)
- I am the door (10:7)
- I am the good shepherd (10:14)
- I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
- I am the way (14:6)
- I am the vine (15:1)

Think about light and the nature of light. What comes to your mind when Jesus claims to be *the light of the world*?

After collecting your own thoughts on this, consider the following Old Testament passages. How do you think Jesus' listeners in Jerusalem would have heard this claim?

- Exodus 13:21-22
- Exodus 14:19-25
- Psalm 27:1
- Psalm 119:105
- Proverbs 6:23
- Isaiah 49:6



Why did the Pharisees object so strongly to Jesus' claim? Undoubtedly they understood the messianic allusions in both of Jesus' pronouncements.

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. (Zechariah 14:4-8)

How would you personalize this claim of Jesus? List ways that Jesus as the light of the world has impacted your life. Discuss these in your homegroup.

Look at verses 13-17. Jewish law did not allow a person to testify on his or her own behalf. It was thought that self-interests would taint one's perspective. How does Jesus answer the charge that this was his own self-testimony?

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Verse 17 alludes to Numbers 35:30 which required two witnesses in a murder trial (see also Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15). Who are the two witnesses to the truth of Jesus' assertion?

Consider our passage in light of John 3:19-21. There we feel the heat that inevitably accompanies light. *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world...* What does this passage add to your understanding of John 8:12-20?

Respond personally to the following quotation:

The authorities, secure in their well-ordered world, reject something which would break that world open. They ask Jesus to produce his witness. "Where is your Father?" No doubt it is a question which malicious gossip could fasten on. But the real irony is different from anything that the questioners can understand. The only answer to the man who sincerely asks, "Where is God?" is to say "Look at Jesus." And Jesus is standing right there. (Newbigin, pp. 104-105)

How has Jesus upset your *secure and ordered* world? Again, what does it mean to you when Jesus says, *I am the light of the world*? Write a sentence (or two or three) articulating how Jesus has, as *the light*, impacted you. Read your answers to one another as a homegroup.



Study 8

The Truth Will Set You Free

John 8:21-38

John 8:21-38 is a passage on the origins and nature of Jesus' authority, where Jesus speaks the famous words, *you will know the truth and the truth will set you free*. At a first reading this passage can seem difficult to understand. Read the passage slowly. Try more than one translation. Take a few notes as to what is confusing and what is obvious.

Our passage is connected to last week's study (John 8:12-20). Verse 21 begins by reminding us that, *he said to them again*. The themes from John 8:12-20 are being continued and expanded in verses 21-38. Begin by thinking about the big picture in these verses.

- Where does Jesus say he comes from? (v. 23, 26, 29)
- Where does Jesus say he is going? (v. 21-22, 28)
- Who is the Father? (v. 26-27, 38)
- Who is Jesus? (v. 23-26, 38, 54-55)

There is a great deal in John 8 about Jesus' relationship to God the Father. What statements or allusions does Jesus make in our passage for this study (8:21-38) about his unique relationship to God the Father? (See also 8:16.)

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Jesus is contrasting his authority and teaching with the teaching and authority of the Pharisees. The two are very different. Look for five ways that Jesus characterizes the Pharisees.

- Verse 14
- Verse 15
- Verses 19, 24
- Verse 21
- Verse 23

According to verses 23-24 why is it that Jesus' opponents can't recognize who he is or understand his teaching? How does this help your perspective on a friend's lack of faith and inability to understand Christ and the teachings in the Bible?

As we have seen in many of the Temple discourses of Jesus, his main antagonists were the religious people, Pharisees and scribes in particular. There is a tremendous irony that it is not so much the godless but rather the ostensibly spiritual crowd that Jesus found himself in conflict with. Respond to the statement below.

The deepest paradox of John 8 is that Jesus suffers religious persecution. These are not godless masses whose pursuit of paganism has deemed Jesus inconvenient... The Judaism embraced by Jesus' opponents was a deeply spiritual religion that earnestly sought its Messiah, prayed fervently to God, followed the Scriptures, and worshipped regularly. Those whose hearts were inclined to hear God's voice in the world quickly recognized this voice in Jesus and followed him. Yet those who were entrenched in the traditions of their religious world, whose spiritual passions betrayed them and closed their eyes and ears, were singularly unable to find anything redeeming in Jesus' life work. The paradigm of the passage is then set: Jesus steps into a religiously devout environment and immediately splits his audience. Those who



follow him become passionate believers. Those who stand opposed, who defend their traditions with zeal, suddenly become zealous opponents, enemies of God's work in the world. This passage warns the custodians of tradition that their defense of these spiritual habits and rituals may well be their undoing. (Burge, p. 267)

How is it possible for religious traditions to stand in the way of a faithful relationship with Jesus? What can you do to avoid this problem in your life?

What traditions, rituals, or habits could become deterrents to someone's personal relationship to Christ? Think through your own spiritual practices. Are you growing in Christ or simply acting religious?

In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), there are three instances where Jesus specifically talks about his approaching death in Jerusalem (see Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). In John's gospel, we find three times that Jesus talks about his imminent death by using the phrase, *lifting up the Son of Man* (3:14, 8:28, 12:33-34). And in many other passages Jesus alludes to his death. In our passage, Jesus explicitly points to his death in verse 28. What does Jesus say will be the result of his death? How did this intended result take place for the first disciples?

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Jesus' teaching was undoubtedly compelling, authoritative and very different from what the people were used to hearing. *And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes* (Mark 1:22). John 8:30 provides a very brief parenthetical update on how some were responding to his teaching. *As he was saying these things, many believed in him.* What was the nature of this faith about Jesus? At this point in the ministry of Jesus (before the cross and resurrection) what did people believe or have faith in? What does this passage tell you about how a person comes to faith *in him*?

Come to your home group prepared to share a brief version of your own story of conversion.

In verses 31-38 we find a discussion of spiritual freedom. Jesus makes the astounding claim to those with newfound faith that, *If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (v. 31-32). This is such a shock to his listeners that Jesus must explain himself. What is the nature of the spiritual freedom Jesus describes?

Describe your experience of spiritual freedom. How has the Son set you free?



One way to understand spiritual freedom is to compare and contrast this freedom to the slavery that accompanies sin. How did sin make you a slave before you became a Christian? How have you seen sin creep into your life and re-enslave you after becoming a Christian? How can or do you avoid this?

Respond to and discuss the statement below.

For Jesus, then, the ultimate bondage is not enslavement to a political or economic system, but a vicious slavery to moral failure, to rebellion against the God who has made us. The despotic master is not Caesar, but shameful self-centeredness, an evil and enslaving devotion to created things at the expense of worship of the creator. (Carson, p. 350)

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

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Notes



Study 9

You Are of Your Father the Devil

John 8:39-47

In John 8:39-47 Jesus continues his contentious interaction with the Pharisees. This is not casual conversation but rather a biting indictment of the religious leaders' inability or refusal to understand Jesus and his unique relationship to God the Father. You can imagine the volume increasing as the tension escalates. The climax of the interaction for this study is when Jesus plainly says, *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desire* (v. 44). Ouch!

Read John 8:39-47. Remember to read it in light of the larger context of John 8:12-59. We are in the middle of a long discourse that will reach its culmination in our next study. As always, jot down a few thoughts as to what is confusing and what makes sense.

In this passage three *fathers* are mentioned. Comment on what the passage says about each *father* – how does Jesus designate and explain each?

- Father Abraham
- God the Father
- Your father, the devil

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Consider why fatherhood is so important. The Jews clung tenaciously to Abraham as their father. Abraham and the perceived benefits of his fatherhood come up repeatedly in this chapter. Why were the Jews so impressed with and fixated on their bloodline which they traced to Abraham?

Abraham, alongside Moses and King David, is the giant of the Old Testament. Refresh your memory as to why Abraham was so important to the Jews and their worship of God. Read Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6, and 17:1-14. What promises were made to Abraham?

Abraham also became very important to Christian faith. In Romans 4, Paul uses him as his prime example of what it means to find justification with God through faith alone.

Try to put yourself in the position of these Jews. Undoubtedly, their pride must have been deeply wounded. They must have been thinking, *How can you say Abraham is not our father!* Re-read verse 39. Why exactly does Jesus say Abraham is not their father?



Now read Romans 2:27-29. How does this help you understand what Jesus says in John 8:39?

An important spiritual warning springs from this passage. To what extent do our spiritual (Christian) traditions and lineage impede our hearing of God's voice? How can the good traditions in our backgrounds or current rituals or habits insulate us from listening to what God wants to say to us today?

Think about some of the subtle or not so subtle ways our thinking process works. For some, it is easy to reason in a way that promotes spiritual deafness.

- I come from a long line of committed Presbyterians.
- I have been to every SBCC church retreat.
- I have done my homegroup study every week for 15 years.
- My grandfather was a missionary in Africa.
- I was in a Sunday school and youth program for all my early years.
- I have always been a faithful giver of money (more than 10%, if you must know!)
- All my extra time goes into the ministry I do. There is no time for anything else.
- Having gone to a very good Christian college prepared me spiritually.
- I only read the Bible from the correct translation.

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Have you ever found yourself reasoning like this? Reflect on your own Christian habits and behaviors. Which of these may have crept into your life at one time or another or are there now? How can we avoid the spiritual deafness Jesus talks about in verse 43?

J.C. Ryle was an evangelical Anglican and the first Bishop of Liverpool. Ryle lived and served in the 19th century. Respond to Ryle's comment on our passage.

Let us settle firmly in our minds that connection with a good Church and good ancestors is no proof whatever that we ourselves are in a way to be saved. We need something more than this. We must be joined to Christ himself by a living faith. We must know something experientially of the work of the Spirit in our hearts. "*Church principles,*" or "*sound Churchmanship,*" are fine words and excellent party cries. But they will not deliver our souls from the wrath to come, or give us boldness in the day of judgment. (Ryle, p. 104)

Jesus' use of language is offensive to the Pharisees and is meant to shock. Jesus, at least here in this dialogue, is anything but gentle. When Jesus says, *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desire* (v. 44), there is no room for ambiguity! Try to put yourself in the position of the religious leaders hearing this crushing indictment. What would they have been feeling? Why do you think that Jesus so often used such inflammatory language toward them?



It is common for contemporary people to separate the worship of God from the worship of Jesus. Some are attracted to Jesus, but find the idea of all-powerful God who is Father, either difficult or even abhorrent. Others do not have a problem with the concept of God, but find the idea that a human Jewish rabbi named Jesus, who tromped around Palestine in the first century and had a special relationship to God (or was God), impossible to swallow. Consider Jesus' words to these religious Jews.

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me (v. 42).

What would you say to someone who wanted to separate God from Jesus? If you have had this experience, why do you think it happened and how did you respond?

Jesus refers to the devil as both a *murderer* and a *liar* (v. 44). In calling the devil a *murderer*, Jesus is most likely thinking of the fall in Genesis 3 and how Adam and Eve were robbed of spiritual life by the success of the temptation. The devil also lied in the Garden. When God commanded them to not eat of the *tree of knowledge* he warned them, *You will surely die* (Genesis 2:17). The devil, though, quickly retorted, *You will not surely die* (Genesis 3:4). At some level, Jesus is pointing out that the devil factors into the spiritual blindness and deafness of the Pharisees.

How have you experienced the attack of Satan in your Christian life? In what ways have you sensed his desire to murder your faith and lie to you about Jesus?

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Think broadly, not only about your own life, but about the culture at large. How do you see the devil being a *liar and the father of lies* (v. 44)? Make a list of some of the spiritual lies that the evil one uses. Compare lists in your homegroup as a way to inform and warn one another.

Discuss Peter's exhortation of how Christians can be more aware the attacks of the devil.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Peter 8-9).

Gather your thoughts from your study of John 8:39-47. What are one or two principles that you can apply to your faith this week? Be prepared to share these with your homegroup.



Notes



Study 10

Before Abraham Was, I Am

John 8:48-59

Think back through your family history. Who is one person who—through personality or action, for good or ill—has had a significant influence on your family?

We are each a product of a family tree. All of us have come from somewhere and have a history. The same is true of the Jews, who proudly trace their history as a people back to the calling of Abraham in Genesis 12. Last week, we saw that Jesus reinterpreted what it means to be *children of Abraham* and those listening to him were incensed. In the ensuing passage, Jesus refers again to the beloved patriarch and finds himself on the receiving end of even greater anger.

Read John 8:48-59 and make a note of anything that stands out, any questions that arise, or anything that strikes you anew.

Though we last looked at this conversation last week, the fact that this passage begins with *the Jews answered him* reveals that the discussion in 8:48-59 simply furthers what came before.

The Jews are clearly insulted by what Jesus suggested in verse 39, that they are not children of Abraham, but rather children of the devil (8:44). They respond in the strongest possible terms: by suggesting that Jesus was both *a Samaritan* and under demonic influence.

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Michaels helps fill in the picture:

These are actually not two distinct charges but one, and Jesus will answer them as one (v. 49). Behind them is the supposition that Samaritans are, if not literally, at least figuratively, demon-possessed, by virtue of their centuries-old reputation of worshiping many Gods (see 2 Kings 17:24-41).... Even down to John's day and later, among Christians as well as Jews, Samaria was associated with heresies labeled as demonic. At the very least, the epithets "Samaritan" and "having a demon" mutually reinforce each other in the minds of Jesus' accusers. (Michaels, p. 523)

Look at verses 49-50. How does Jesus respond to these slanderous charges? What, from Jesus' perspective, seems to be the crux of the issue?

The Bible could rightly be called a *story of glory*. The theme of God's glory permeates all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Here, Jesus claims that God seeks his own glory. What do the following passages tell us about God's glory?¹

- Isaiah 48:9-11
- Ezekiel 36:20-23
- John 17:1-5
- 1 Peter 2:9-11

¹ This is a very partial list of biblical texts that highlight God's concern for his own glory in Scripture. For more, visit <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/biblical-texts-to-show-gods-zeal-for-his-own-glory>.



Respond to these various passages. Is God's interest in his own glory new to you, troubling to you, comforting to you, challenging for you, or exciting to you? Explain your answer.

For the Jews, Abraham is the most celebrated and treasured of the patriarchs, the source of their family tree and history. It was considered a great honor to be a child of Abraham, the one with whom God initiated the covenant that formed the nation of Israel. What, then, is the unstated offense of verse 51 that prompts the outrage of verses 52-53?

On the one hand, we can agree with Jesus' audience in verse 53 because we know that Abraham and the prophets, in fact, died. So, then, what does Jesus mean that those who keep his word *will never see death*?

In response to their scorn, Jesus again returns to the theme of glory in verses 54-55. Beginning in verse 39, Jesus has been drawing a connection between right glory or belief and right action. Quickly scan the whole of this conversation with the Jews and summarize that connection.

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Jesus concludes with his most inflammatory statements about Abraham in verses 56-58. To claim that Abraham was looking forward to Christ is one thing, but to claim that Abraham—dead for roughly 2,000 years by the time of Jesus—actually witnessed Christ’s ministry is something altogether different and the Jews know it. They respond with incredulity and, perhaps, mockery.

Jesus answers their derision with a bold statement that draws from the story of Moses. Read Exodus 3:13-14. What is Jesus claiming here that so enrages his listeners?

The Jews understand Christ’s claim very well, as evidenced by their attempt to stone him.¹ They believe Jesus is guilty of blasphemy.

Trace, briefly, the history of your own response to Christ. Who do you understand him to be today?

In what ways does your life reflect a commitment to God’s glory? How can a church body, corporately, bring glory to God?

¹ Stoning was the prescribed method for dealing with blasphemy and leading the people of God away to worship false deities. See Leviticus 24:16 and Deuteronomy 13:1-10.



What is an area in your life where you are working to bring right action into alignment with right belief? Be prepared to share with your homegroup about how they can pray with you about this.

Spend some time as a homegroup praying for one another. Pray that an increased passion for God's glory would motivate your lives as individual Christians, the local church, and the global Body of Christ. Pray for right belief to align with right action in order that the world may see the beauty of the gospel and the glory of our God who saves sinners and makes them into his children.

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Study 11

The Light of the World

John 9:1-41

In the 41 verses of John chapter 9 we find the most complete and unified story in John's gospel. Jesus is still at the Feast of Tabernacles and this is now the second time that John will record that he claims to be, *the light of the world* (8:12, 9:5). The occasion for the repeat of this astounding statement is the healing of a man who had been born blind. Miraculously, the man who was born in darkness now lives and sees the light. As the story unfolds, physical healing becomes a picture of spiritual healing. As you read John 9:1-41 notice how John enjoys using double meanings as the story progresses. Take notes as to what stands out to you in the story. What questions do you have?

Consider this simple outline of this story to help you organize your thoughts.

- I. John 9:1-7 – The healing at the pool of Siloam
- II. John 9:8-34 – The interrogation of the blind man now healed
- III. John 9:35-41 – Jesus re-enters the story to interpret the events

The gospels have numerous stories of Jesus healing blind people (Matthew 9:27-31, 11:5, 12:22, 15:30, 21:14; Mark 8:22-26, 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). Jesus was a healer and the healing of the blind was one of the most notable features of this ministry.

The method of Jesus' healings is not always the same. Here Jesus makes a mud cake out of his saliva and applies it to the man's eyes. Saliva was thought to have medicinal power at the time. While Jesus does not always do this when healing the blind, it is not unusual. Mark records two times where Jesus does the same thing (Mark 7:32-35, 8:22-25).

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The situation of the blind man provides an occasion for those witnessing it to ask a theological question. *Whose fault is this? Who is responsible for this suffering? Is this man's blindness a consequence of his parents' sin?* The question is an important one that people from all eras have asked. *Why do these things happen?* How does Jesus answer the question? How does the rest of the chapter help to answer the question? Are you satisfied with the answer?

Respond to the following quote.

While the Bible allows a general relationship between suffering and sin, due to the fall (cf. Genesis 3, Romans 5:12f.), it refuses to permit the principle to be individualized in every case. Sin has produced a suffering world, but an individual's personal suffering is not always attributable to his or her personal sin... This was the issue between Job and his friends, and the lesson of the book of Job is God's dismissal of that simplistic theology of suffering. It is here dismissed by Jesus. (Milne, p.137)

There is an unmistakable messianic component to this miracle and others where blindness was healed. The Old Testament prophets predicted that when Messiah came, he would heal people of blindness.

In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. (Isaiah 29:18)

Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (Isaiah 35:4-5)



When John the Baptist sent word to Jesus from prison asking if he really was the Messiah, Jesus responded,

... Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear... (Matthew 11:4)

How is this miracle laced with theological meaning?

For those witnessing this miracle there is not consensus on what happened or who Jesus is. Confusion seems to abound. Take a few notes listing the various responses of the *neighbors*, *parents* and the *Pharisees*.

Where is the humor and irony in this story?

Who believes and who remains in unbelief?

Why do some of the Jews persist in unbelief?

What do the man's parents have to say?

What role does the Sabbath play in this miracle?

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There is tremendous arrogance in the response of some Pharisees in verses 24-34. What role does the Pharisees' arrogance play in their refusal to listen, learn and see what is happening spiritually in the blind man's healing? List the ways in which they express their attitude of spiritual superiority.

It is easy to see the flaws of the Pharisees. But think about arrogance and your Christian life. Try to think of examples where your pride has made you unable to respond to God. Let this passage help you to reflect on the necessary role humility plays in the Christian life. Be ready to share with your homegroup how they can encourage and pray for you in this regard.

There is a tremendous irony in this story. The man who formerly lived in darkness can now see because of the light, and the religious leaders who have good eyes continue to live in spiritual darkness. Jesus did not simply give the blind man sight, he gave him life. Think about your own life and how Jesus healed your spiritual blindness. How has Jesus become not just the *light of the world*, but also the light of your life?



Does this story cause you to re-think your Christian life in any way? What are one or two principles from this story that you would like to apply to your life this week? How can you practically do this?

The story ends with the newly sighted man proclaiming, *'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him* (v. 38). We should have no less of a response!

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Study 12

I Am the Door

John 10:1-21

Many modern readers of John 10 are at a disadvantage because of a lack of familiarity with sheep and shepherding. First century listeners, however, would have found these words of Jesus and the images they represent very familiar. Shepherds were highly valued members of the Palestinian world. Their work was difficult and accompanied by harsh weather, the danger of predatory animals, and thieves looking for an easy meal. When Jesus describes himself as the *door* (NIV *gate*), we should picture a fold or pen that held one or more flocks of sheep. These sheep pens might back up to a rock outcropping, a wall, or a house, to limit the access to and exposure of sheep. The fence line would have one *door* or *gate* by which the sheep would exit in the morning to the voice of their shepherd.

Before reading John 10 remind yourself that Jesus is using a well-known image when he describes himself as the *good shepherd* of Israel. Again, his language and the images that would have been conjured up in the minds of his listeners would remind them of a rich Old Testament tradition that used sheep and shepherds to describe Israel's leaders and the people's relationship to God. In the Old Testament:

God is described as the shepherd of Israel (Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23, 78:52-53, 80:1)

He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:11)

Shepherding was used to describe, both good and bad, the spiritual and practical leadership of Israel. (Isaiah 56:9-12; Jeremiah 23:1-4, 25:32-38; Ezekiel 34:1-16; Zechariah 11)

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?" (Ezekiel 34:1)

Idolatrous kings of Israel were often called false shepherds. (1 Kings 22:17; Jeremiah 10:21)

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In the New Testament the apostle Peter picks up this theme and applies this image of shepherding to the elders of local churches and refers to Jesus as the *chief Shepherd*. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

With this background in mind, read John 10:1-21. As always, begin by taking a few notes as to what catches your attention and what is confusing.

Jesus' teaching is in the form of a parable or a *figure of speech* (v. 6). The four main figures are the *shepherd*, *sheep*, *hired hand*, and *thief or stranger*. What do we learn in these verses about each of these figures?

- shepherd
- sheep
- hired hand
- thief / stranger

Because of the parabolic form of Jesus' teaching, he uses his images somewhat interchangeably. The 16th century Swiss Reformer John Calvin encourages the reader of John 10 to not attempt to hold the metaphors in this chapter too tightly. In other words, it is best to work with the big picture of Jesus' teaching and not press the details.



Let us be content with the general view that Christ likens the Church to a sheepfold in which God assembles his peoples, and compares himself to the door since he is the only entrance to the Church. (Calvin, quoted in Milne, p. 145)

What is Jesus teaching in this passage about his role as shepherd?

There is also the responsibility of the sheep to hear the voice of Jesus (v. 3). What does it mean for you to *hear his voice*? What are the implications for your Christian life that Jesus *calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*? How does a believer go about experiencing Jesus as the *good shepherd*? Give specific examples of Jesus' shepherding in your life and how you have responded as his sheep.

Does it bother you that believers (you) are being compared to sheep? Certainly anyone who has spent much time around sheep is not impressed by their intelligence. At a minimum the picture of John 10, as anyone familiar with sheep would immediately pick up, portrays the complete dependence of sheep on their shepherd. What does it feel like to be dependent on God? Are you dependent on God?

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In verse 9, Jesus asserts plainly that he is the *door*. In verses 9-10, he presents three promises for those who enter by this *door*. What are these promises? How do they give you encouragement?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Pause for a moment to ponder the wealth of verse 10. What the ESV translates as *abundant life*, the NIV renders *life to the full*. The NLT is more colorful. *My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life*. In what ways, big or small, has knowing Jesus as your shepherd given you an *abundant, full, rich and satisfying* life? What would your life be like without Jesus?

Commenting on this *abundant life*, New Testament scholar Bob Gundry makes an important point that is highly practical for our experience of this *abundant life*. Respond to his statement.

It means not so much that the sheep have a lot of life (though they will, because it's eternal). It means that they'll *have* it a lot. The accent falls on their experiencing of life, we might even say their enjoyment of it. And this enjoyment is more than enough, because "abundantly" indicates surplus—a surplus of enjoyment. (Gundry, p. 405)



How does the unique intimacy and love between the Father and the Son provide the model for the relationship Jesus enjoys with his sheep? (See vv. 17-19)

Sometimes, for some of us— or possibly you right now —life does not feel abundantly rich and satisfying but rather, everything seems to be miserable and going wrong. In these times, what is important to remember? Jesus is still the good Shepherd and we are still his sheep. How might you encourage someone, or need encouragement from others, in this situation?

Five times in our passage Jesus says he will *lay down his life* for the sheep (vv. 11, 15, 17, 18). Look again, more carefully, at verses 17 and 18. What do we learn about Jesus *laying down his life*, his crucifixion and self-sacrifice? How does this make you feel, or give you confidence?

Our passage ends with once again those listening to the teachings of Jesus being divided. What are the responses of those listening? Why were the teachings of Jesus again so controversial and divisive?

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Gather your thoughts from this study of John 10:1-21. Identify one or two ways that you will apply what you have learned to living the Christian life this week.

Notes



Study 13

My Sheep Hear My Voice

John 10:22-42

Jesus, having already proclaimed in the beginning of John 10 that he is the *door* to the sheep pen and that he is the *good shepherd*, continues now in John 10:22-42 to use this metaphor of sheep and shepherding to further proclaim his unique relationship to God the Father. There is an increasing restlessness in the temple crowd as they plead for an unambiguous statement about Jesus' identity. They impatiently ask, *How long will you keep us in suspense* (v. 24). Given the explosive nature of the political drama that surrounded the coming of Messiah, it is not surprising that Jesus has been a little vague in describing his identity. There is, however, little ambiguity when Jesus plainly says, *I and the Father are one* (v. 30).

The setting is the *temple, in the colonnade of Solomon* during the *Feast of Dedication* (v. 23). The *temple* often refers to not only the sanctuary proper, but as in this case, the surrounding courts. Solomon's colonnade was a covered porch supported by columns that offered some protection from wind, rain, and sun. Since the temple was destroyed in 586BC, King Solomon could not have built it. This is the second temple that was rebuilt by the exiled Jews returning from Babylon with Ezra and Nehemiah. Nevertheless, this part of the temple complex was named after Solomon. The Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, took place in the winter months commemorating a relatively recent event.

Unlike other feasts, which had ancient biblical roots, this particular feast had its origin in comparatively recent history. In 167 BC, when the Syrian Emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes, was attempting to establish uniformity of worship throughout his empire, he desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by erecting an altar to Zeus. In a heroic struggle, Judas Maccabaeus led an ultimately successful revolt against the Syrians, and in December 164 BC the temple was reconsecrated in an eight-day celebration. This became an annual, joyous commemoration of the victory and the restored freedom of worship. (Milne, p. 151)

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With this background in mind, read John 10:22-42. What stands out to you in this acrimonious interaction Jesus has with the Jews in the temple? What questions come up as you read?

Why do you think that Jesus was often cryptic as to his identity? Why do you think Jesus kept those he spoke to in *suspense* (v. 24)?

The debate in the colonnade of Solomon centers around two titles that apply to Jesus, *Christ* (NIV *Messiah*) (vv. 24-30) and *Son of God* (vv. 31-39). In the first case, where the Jews want to know plainly if Jesus believes he is the *Messiah*, what does Jesus say?

The climax to this part of the dialogue comes when Jesus utters the amazing words: *I and the Father are one* (v. 30). How does the crowd respond? Why?



Study Thirteen 83

Jesus' claim and the ensuing response is similar to John 8:58 where he said, *Before Abraham was, I am*. The crowds certainly understood what Jesus was saying and wanted to kill him because of it. Why is it that many in our own culture are confused as to who Jesus claimed to be? How would you answer a friend who said that Jesus never claimed to be God? What other statements of Jesus would you use to make yourself clear? (See John 14:9.)

In answer to whether he is the Christ, Jesus again returns to the pictures of sheep and shepherding. According to verse 26, why does Jesus say his critics do not believe?

Christians at times will ponder if it is possible to lose our salvation. Is it possible once a person is saved, born again, to become un-saved? What does Jesus promise to those in his flock in this regard? Compare verses 28 and 29. Who is it that holds us *in his hand*?

Ponder your security as one of God's flock. How should these verses comfort you when you may be feeling distant or detached from God?

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List the promises that apply to you as one of God's flock in verses 27-30. How do these amazing spiritual promises affect you? How do they practically influence how you will live as a Christian this week?

Jesus said, *My sheep hear my voice* (v. 27). How have you heard the *voice* of the shepherd? How are you hearing the *voice* of Jesus currently in your life?

Jesus defends his claim to be the *Son of God* (v. 36) by quoting a portion of Psalm 82. This well known Psalm was a critique of Israel's failure to respond to God (to hear the *voice* of the Shepherd). Read the section of the Psalm below. Ponder how this would further incite the Jews to want to arrest or kill Jesus. What comes to mind?

They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.' (Psalm 82:5-7)



Study Thirteen 85

Our passage ends in verses 40-41 with what is a major turning point in John's gospel.

Jesus' departure from Judea is as much a theological statement as it is geographical. He is moving away from area of conflict in Jerusalem and returning across the eastern deserts near the Jordan River, where John the Baptist had worked. He has concluded his public ministry among his people, and now it is time for him to *stay* [ESV *remained*] (10:40b) there until his hour does come. It is winter, and in a few months he will appear in Jerusalem at Passover to be glorified as God had planned. (Burge, p. 298)

In Jerusalem, the crowds have been trying to stone and arrest Jesus because of blasphemy. Ironically, it is not in Jerusalem where people find faith, but in the desert. *And many believed in him there* (v. 42). The apostle John had the heart of an evangelist and is writing his gospel so that people would believe (20:31). John wants his readers to know, that even in the midst of the strife and rejection that accompanied Jesus' ministry in the temple, many were finding faith in this Messiah.

What can we learn from this passage about why some people respond to Jesus and the gospel message and others do not? Why do some hear his voice and some are deaf?

Gather up your thoughts from John 10:22-42. What are one or two principles of the Christian life that you can apply to your life this week? Remind yourself that you have not really studied the Bible unless you make application of its truth to your life.

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Notes



Study 14

If It Dies, It Bears Much Fruit

John 12:20-26

Any good story features obvious turning points, places in the narrative where a development or action affects all that follows. The story of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of John is no exception, and John 12 records just such a turning point.

In John 12:12-19, we read of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with crowds proclaiming him as Messiah. The adoration of the people only further incites the hatred of the religious leaders (v. 19) and the final week of Jesus' pre-crucifixion life begins.

John 12:20-36 functions, literarily, as one unit but is so dense with Jesus' teaching that we will spend three weeks considering all that he has to say in these verses.

Read this passage and make a note of anything that stands out to you, is new to you, or that you have questions about.

This passage begins in verse 20 with a mention of *the feast*. We know from 12:1 that this is a reference to the Passover feast. This celebration looks back to the story of the Exodus, when God powerfully freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Turn to Exodus 12 and read the story of the Passover in verses 1-14 and 29-32.

Passover—also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread—was one of the three annual feasts that all faithful Jews were expected to attend in Jerusalem. (See Deuteronomy 16:16.) Yet, we see in this passage that it was not just Jews who were in Jerusalem, but also *some Greeks*. Their presence there gives credence to the concern of the Pharisees in 12:19, when they exclaimed, *Look, the world has gone after him*.

The term *Greeks* referred to Gentiles who were likely *God-fearers* like the centurion in Luke 7 and Cornelius in Acts 10. In short, they were respectful of Jewish belief and the moral customs of the Law, without submitting to circumcision as *proselytes*.

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Do you know people who fit such a description when it comes to the Christian faith: respectful and perhaps even curious, but not submissive to the claims of Christ? How do they speak about faith in general? Your faith? What do you think causes that curiosity?

How would or do you respond to such people?

Here, the Greeks approach the apostle Philip with curiosity about his rabbi and say, *Sir, we wish to see Jesus* (v. 21). In verse 22, we learn how the disciples respond—by going to Jesus himself.

The disciples had the advantage of taking these curious Greeks directly to Jesus. Our situation is slightly different than that. Though Christ is physically at the right hand of the Father, we have the Scriptures and the indwelling Holy Spirit to aid our evangelistic efforts. How confident do you feel in your ability to articulate the gospel? What are the basics of the gospel message?



Study Fourteen 89

Spend time as a homegroup discussing the content of our gospel hope. Work together to come up with something that you could present succinctly and clearly if asked about what you believe.

Jesus responds, in verse 23, in a rather surprising way. Instead of directly addressing the request to meet with these curious seekers, Jesus responds—somewhat cryptically—by saying, *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*. We will explore the significance of this statement and the theme of Christ's *hour* in the next study.

As a homegroup, explore together Jesus' metaphor in verse 24. What does he mean agriculturally? What do you think he means, spiritually?

What is the significance of Jesus speaking these words against the backdrop of the Passover feast?

Verses 25-26 lay out Jesus' high cost of discipleship. What does he mean here? How does loving one's life lead to losing it and, on the other hand, how does someone keep their life by hating it?

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The Bible is relentlessly pro-life, and not just in a *protecting the unborn* kind of way. We see in Scripture that life itself is a gift from God (Genesis 2:7; Acts 17:24-25). Jesus claims that he came that those who believe in him *may have life and have it abundantly* (John 10:10). On the other side of the coin, death is called *the last enemy* (1 Corinthians 15:26) that will be judged in the end (Revelation 20:14, 21:4) and whose overthrow will prompt the praise of God's people (1 Corinthians 15:55).

In light of all of this, Jesus clearly does not imply in verse 25 that his followers ought to hate their life in destructive, physical terms. How, then, does your Christian faith compel you to hate your life in order to *keep it for eternal life*?

In verse 26, Jesus tells his listeners, *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also*. Think practically about your faith in Jesus. What does it look like for you to serve, follow, and be where Jesus is? How can your homegroup pray for you and help encourage you in these efforts?

The path of discipleship is not likely to earn high praise from the watching world, but Jesus closes this teaching with a beautiful promise: *If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him*. Is the honor of the Father something that you think much about? How can it better serve as a motivation for faithful discipleship in your life?



Spend some time as a homegroup praying for one another as you attempt to walk the costly path of faithful Christian discipleship. Pray that your efforts to live holy lives would be motivated by a desire for God's praise and glory alone. Pray for one another that you would not fall prey to loving your life such that you would lose it. Pray that your holiness would be evident to others so that many, like the Greeks in this passage, would meet Jesus.

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Notes



Study 15

Father, Glorify Your Name

John 12:27-33

Power, glory, honor, strength, trouble. We've got a little *Sesame Street* game going on: one of these things is not like the other! Intuitively we know that trouble or distress do not seem to go with words like power, glory and honor. And yet, what we will find in our passage this week is that very thing: the coupling of agony and glory.

As was mentioned in the previous study, John 12:20-36 are really one scene - but for our purposes we have split them up into three weeks. As you will see, there are several themes that are woven through all 17 verses.

For that reason, read John 12:20-33, making note of anything that sticks out to you along the way.

To organize our passage we are going to look at four key words that will help us think through what we read.

Troubled (12:27)

Jesus turns from his teaching about the wheat (in last week's study) and jumps right into his main point. *Now is my soul troubled*. Depending on our translation, as readers in English we will most likely miss the connection to the previous section. Jesus has just finished discussing loving and hating, losing and keeping one's *life* (or psyche in Greek). He then turns and says, *Now is my psyche troubled*.

Why? Jesus is upset, he is distressed, he is agonizing over what is about to take place in Jerusalem. Before we move too quickly to his resolute determination to fulfill God's will, it would be good to pause and consider this *trouble* he was experiencing.

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Read one of the Gethsemane accounts in Matthew 26:36-56, Mark 14:32-42 or Luke 22:39-46. What similarities do you find in Jesus' prayer there compared to his prayer here? What differences?

What do you make of Jesus' soul being troubled? Why is it important to you?

In John 14:1 and 14:27, twice Jesus says to his disciples, *Do not let your hearts be troubled*. Respond to the following quote on this passage from Robert Gundry,

He bore our troubles so that we wouldn't have to bear them. And the adverb "now" at the beginning of 12:27 shows he has started to bear them right here, because his hour has arrived (12:23). (p. 420)

Hour (12:27)

The *hour* has long been anticipated in John. In 2:4, 7:30, and 8:20 we are told that Jesus' *hour had not yet come*. Then in 12:23 we finally find out, *the hour has come*. In verse 27, in his agony, Jesus asks if he should pray to be saved from the hour, but quickly answers his own question, *But for this purpose I have come to this hour*. Now the time has come for Jesus to fulfill his purpose in redemption.

The troubling of his soul, glorifying the Father, the death he was going to die – were all wrapped up in this hour. Three times in verses 27-33, Jesus says events are about to take place *now*. This moment is steeped in purpose.

Ponder for a moment, and rejoice in God's timing in redemption. Scripture teaches that – beyond just the events in John's narrative – God had ordained the timing of Christ's death.



Read and respond to the following passages:

- Romans 5:6
- Galatians 4:4-5
- Ephesians 1:7-10

Less significantly, but important to understand, God ordains events in our lives as well. Have you ever experienced an *hour* to which you felt God had called you for a particular purpose? What were the circumstances? How did you respond? Was your soul troubled?

Glorify (12:28)

This word comes up four times in just six verses, and is a key word in the Gospel, showing up twenty-three different times. Interestingly, it also is a key to seeing the Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son in the work of Christ. In 12:23, Jesus declares, *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*. Then in verse 27 he prays, *Father, glorify your name*.

The two are again linked most clearly in Jesus' prayer in John 17:1, when he prays, *Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you*. The work of Christ about to take place on the cross is said by John to both glorify Christ and the Father. Think theologically for a minute. We often are well rehearsed in what Christ's work does for us. How does Christ's work glorify God? Plan to discuss in your homegroup.

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Students of John's gospel marvel at this section. More than one commentator has called this the *deepest* section of the Gospel. We could ponder these verses for a lifetime for they explicitly tie the resurrection *and* the death of Jesus to the glory of God!

The link made by Jesus between glorification and crucifixion is fundamental to John's presentation of the Easter drama. The death and resurrection of Jesus are not divisible into a defeat at Calvary which was righted by the subsequent powerful, victorious act of the resurrection. Rather, *both* death and resurrection represent one inseparable event in which Jesus achieves the glory of God... the essence of the glorifying of God lies in the cross itself. (Milne, p. 186)

This connection between Christ's death and his glory is also seen in the double-entendre in verse 32, when we are told Christ will be *lifted up from the earth*. This is meant by Jesus to mean his crucifixion, and is explained as such by John in verse 33 and understood as such by the crowd in verse 34. But in both English and Greek *lift up* could also convey exaltation. Astonishingly, Jesus' death will also mean victory and glory, as it will bring *the judgment of the world* and *the ruler of this world* being *cast out*. This is the topsy-turvy economy of God. The way of the cross is the way of glory.

How have you experienced this profound reality in your own life? In what ways have you sought to glorify God by following Christ in self-sacrifice?

Last week, we discussed the related theme of hating our lives to keep them for eternal life and serving Christ to be honored by the Father. How have you tried to do this practically in the last week?

Be prepared to share as a homegroup our attempts to glorify God!



Draw (12:32)

Finally, we read in verse 32 the result of Christ's work. *And I ... will draw all people to myself.* The crucifixion brings glory to God by drawing people to Christ.

Read Philippians 2:5-11. What is the result of Christ's death?

Conversion stories are often told from our perspective and focus on us as the subject and God as the object. "...This is when I came to believe in Him." But this verse makes Christ the subject and us the direct object. Many Christians throughout the years have noticed this: just when they thought they were the ones looking for God, they get to the other side and realize God was drawing them all along.

Is this true for you? When or how were you *drawn* to Christ? Would you describe it that way?

We have spent a lot of time meditating on the climax of Jesus' teaching, and rejoicing in his God-glorifying death on our behalf. But we would be remiss if this did not also cause us to turn a compassionate eye towards those who do not yet know Christ.

Take a moment to consider those you know that have not yet been drawn to Christ, those who have not yet bowed their knee to him, or confessed that he is Lord. Stop and pray for them by name. Ask God to glorify His name in drawing them to Christ. Ask that their hearts would no longer be troubled but find rest, as Jesus' soul was troubled on their behalf.

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Study 16

The Light Is Among You

John 12:34-36

Darkness and light. There are few metaphors or images as evocative and universal as these. We all know the cold, terror or confusion of darkness; and we all know the warmth, joy, and safety of the light. Literature and films have often played off of these themes with incredible power. (Think Gandalf's arrival to Helm's Deep in Tolkien's *The Two Towers*).

We are now in our third and final week of looking at one scene in John 12:20-36. Hopefully, we have seen—and will see—that there are several themes that are woven through all 17 verses. But Jesus will end this scene with a final appeal to belief, employing this language of light and darkness.

Read all of John 12:20-36, making note of anything that sticks out to you along the way.

When we consider the context of all that has happened in chapter 12, the crowd's response to Jesus' capstone teaching on the glory of the cross is surprising and underwhelming. Consider a few of the plot points:

- A large crowd of the Jews comes to see Jesus and Lazarus who was recently raised from the dead (v. 9)
- The large crowd forms for the Triumphal Entry (vv. 12-19)
- Greeks (representing *the whole world* from v. 19) come looking for Jesus (v. 20)
- Jesus announces that his *hour has come... to be glorified* (v. 23)
- Jesus then teaches that glory is by way of the cross (vv. 24-28)
- God answers with a thunderous voice from heaven (vv. 28-29)
- Jesus then says *now* is the time that the world will be judged, powers cast out, Christ will be lifted up and people will be drawn to him. (vv. 30-32)

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With such a crescendo, verse 34 seems quite anticlimactic. As readers, we recognize that the crowd seems to be missing the point. The crowd's questions present three perceived conflicts:

*We have heard from (1) the Law that (2) the Christ (3) remains forever.
How can (1) you say that (2) the Son of Man (3) must be lifted up?*

Think about each of these contrasts. As believers, in some ways we know what the crowd doesn't know: each of their contrasts is misguided. Respond to each, explaining their possible struggle and how you resolve the tension:

What is the relationship between *the Law* and the words of Jesus?

What is the relationship between *the Christ* and *the Son of Man*?

What is the relationship between Christ *remaining forever* and being *lifted up*?

Putting it all together, their issue is with a crucified Messiah. The crowd does not understand much of what we talked about in last week's study!

In response, Jesus does not actually answer their questions (v. 35). As Robert Gundry writes, *They don't need explanation, they need exhortation* (p. 422). Read Jesus' response in verses 35-36, and try to summarize it in your own words. What is Jesus' exhortation?



Study Sixteen 101

The Apostle John loves this image of light and darkness. It appears several times in his recording of Jesus' teaching, and John employs it often in his epistles. Consider the parallels:

John 12:35-36	John 1:5-12	John 8:12	1 John 1:5-7
³⁵ So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer.	⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.	¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world.	⁵ God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.	⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.		⁷ If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.	¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.	Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness ...	⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."	¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ⁷ [John] came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.	... but will have the light of life."	

Consider John's use of this imagery. What insights into Jesus' response come from seeing these other passages?

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Positively, we can rejoice as believers in having the light. Respond to the following:

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.¹

Conversely, we know our sin makes us prone to crave darkness at times. Have you ever thought about the relationship between darkness and sin? Read John 3:19-21. Why are we tempted to still walk in darkness?

Jesus' response comes with a strong warning and a limited window for action. They only have a *little while longer* to believe and then they risk *the darkness overtak[ing]* them. But not only this, it also has immediate implications for their lives.

It is not an invitation to "believe" so that in the distant future we will be saved from judgment. *Judgment begins now. Salvation begins now.* The consequences of our decision begin to work themselves upon our lives in the present. It is like a person with a curable disease. The antibiotic begins to reverse the effects of the disease at once; without it, the doom of the infection grows daily. Jesus' urgent words are therefore grounded in this sort of drastic framework. To refuse the medicine is to succumb to the disease. To refuse to have faith is to be swallowed up by the darkness. (Burgess, pp. 359-360).

This limited window is a clear argument against those who would wait for a deathbed conversion, enjoying vice up until the last moment. Describe, in your own words, the urgency of Jesus' exhortation and the danger of refusing the light.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 140.



This is Jesus' final teaching to the public before he prepares for the cross privately with his disciples. His final word to the world before going to the cross is a call to belief.

Our Lord's final word is a most solemn warning. ...There is an urgency in this last appeal of Jesus from which the modern church does well to learn. ...The implications of turning away from the light of God are terrible in the extreme, and Jesus is concerned that people be clearly aware of them. ...We dare not fail to warn them that the redeemer is also a judge, that sin unrepented is sin condemned, and that it is, and will be when the King returns, 'a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a living God' (Hebrews 10:31). (Milne, p. 192)

Do we feel this urgency when we consider our unbelieving friends, coworkers, family members or neighbors? How should Jesus' exhortation impact our evangelism?

Once again, let's end in prayer: for ourselves and for the world. Let us pray that we might walk in the light!

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Study 17

His Command is Eternal Life

John 12:44-50

In John 12:44-50 Jesus' public ministry draws to a close and John's gospel comes to a major turning point. Fittingly, our passage is a summary of much of what we have studied these last 16 weeks in the temple discourses of Jesus. The themes in these verses are now familiar. It is also a final plea by Jesus for faith in his message and his person.

While our passage is once again an invitation to belief, it is prefaced by John's editorial comments in 12:36b-43. One of the crucial questions the nascent followers of Jesus must have been asking is, *If Jesus is the Messiah, why aren't all the Jews following and believing in him?* John's answer to that question comes in part in 12:36b-43. This entire passage (vv. 36b-50) is what D. A. Carson calls a *theology of unbelief*.¹

Read John 12:44-50. What stands out to you? Take notes as to what is unclear and confusing.

Notice the now familiar themes from the teachings of Jesus. Try to summarize what you have learned about these subjects the past 16 weeks. What questions remain concerning these statements?

- Jesus has been sent by the Father (vv. 44, 49)
- The Father is the only authority in Jesus' ministry and teachings (vv. 45, 49)

¹ Carson, p. 447.

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- Jesus is a light shining in the darkness (v. 46)
- Jesus came to bring salvation and eternal life (v. 47, 50)
- Faith (belief) is the requirement to follow Jesus (v. 44, 46)

At times we find Jesus quiet and subdued. But here we find that Jesus *cried out* (v. 44). At the end of Jesus' public ministry, his passion comes to a boiling point. In light of all the various responses to the teachings of Jesus, why is it that now Jesus urgently cries out? What does this teach us about the nature of faith and unbelief?

The struggle for faith was just as real in Jesus' time as it is in our own. Ponder the various responses to Jesus that we have witnessed in John's gospel.

- Betrayal by Judas Iscariot (12:4)
- Hatred and a plot to kill him (11:53)
- Asking questions and yet remaining in the darkness (12:34)
- Leaders afraid to go public with their belief (12:42-43)
- Those who believe and follow (10:42)



Study Seventeen 107

Throughout the temple teachings Jesus has consistently made himself and his word the issue. Men and women have been forced to choose which side they are on. Do they believe or not? With passion Jesus has argued for people to put their faith in him, *While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light* (12:36).

Think about your own journey of faith. Has faith in Christ been difficult or easy for you? What holds you back from believing in Jesus more?

Imagine you are talking to a friend who knows little about Jesus and the Bible and has no faith in God. Using language he or she would understand, how would you describe your faith in Jesus?

Think about your discipleship. What is the relationship between believing and a changed life where we do what Jesus commanded? Look again at verse 47 and 48.

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What does Jesus mean when he says, *for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world* (v. 47)? What is the relationship between the gospel message Jesus proclaimed and judgment for sin?

Consider this statement by D.A. Carson. How does the gospel message proclaim both forgiveness and judgment at the same time?

The idea is that the same message that proclaims life and forgiveness to the believer proclaims condemnation and wrath to the unbeliever, and this judgment on the world (v. 31) is now impending.¹

The commands of Jesus may be summarized as a promise of *eternal life* (v. 50). In John's gospel there are an amazing 16 statements that speak of eternal life and faith in Jesus (3:15, 16, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3). What is *eternal life*? When does eternal life begin? What difference does *eternal life* make to you?

¹ Carson, p. 452.



Study Seventeen 109

The point of studying the Bible is not to simply amass information but to have a new and changed life that is alive to God. Think back over these past months and your study of the temple discourses of Jesus. How has Jesus' teaching changed you? Which portions have taken hold? Where do you still need to be changed?

Fast-forward a year in your life. What do you think, or hope, will stick with you from this study a year from now?

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