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Bishopsgate

BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

# John's Gospel



## John 1:1–18

### God on Earth!

#### Context

John states plainly the overall purpose of his Gospel in 20:31: 'these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.'

The key themes of this Gospel, therefore, are these:

- An explanation of who Jesus is.
- An appeal to respond to Him.
- A description of the benefits of belonging to Him.

The first eighteen verses, known as 'The Prologue', act rather like an overture, introducing these themes and raising many of the other major recurring ideas. And so the context of the Prologue, it could be said, is provided by the next twenty-one chapters!

#### Structure

- 1:1–4        The nature of the Word.
- 1:5–13      The work of the Father:
  - 5-11      Revelation.
  - 11–13     Regeneration.
- 1:14–18    The achievement of the Word: God made known!

#### Old Testament ideas

##### The Word:

OT background teaches us that God creates and rules by His word, reveals Himself by His word, and rescues and delivers by His word (Gen: 1; Deut. 5:24; Ps. 107:20). 'In short, God's "Word" in the OT is His powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of the "Word" makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God's ultimate self-disclosure, the person of His own Son.' (See Carson, pp. 115–16.)

##### Life:

Ever since Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden and from the Tree of Life at the Fall, the issue of life and death has been a major OT theme - just as God said it would be (Gen. 2:17). Isaiah speaks of the 'shroud (of death) that enfolds all people' (Isa. 25:6ff) and looks forward to a day when death will be swallowed up forever.

##### Dwelling:

The literal translation of this word 'dwelling' is 'tabernacled' or 'pitched His tent'. Prior to the building of the temple, God 'dwelt among His people' in the tabernacle in the wilderness. Exodus 29:45–6 is a key OT passage expressing a key OT idea. God dwelling among His people was a fulfilment of His promise to Abraham in Genesis 17. What was said of the tabernacle in the wilderness became true of the temple in Jerusalem: God dwelt with His people as their Ruler and Rescuer. But the expectations and hopes of the OT all met with disappointment, as the temple was overrun and the exile took place. Now, says John, the Word has 'made His dwelling among us'. The OT promise has become a reality as the 'Word became flesh' (v. 14).

##### Glory:

When Moses asks to see God's glory (Exod. 33:18), God passes in front of Moses and proclaims Himself to be compassionate and gracious, and also just and righteous (Exod. 34:4–7). In claiming to have 'seen His glory, the glory of the one and only... full of grace and truth', John is claiming to have seen what Moses saw, but more! He has seen the compassion and the justice of God in human flesh... the astonishing thing is that the place where John saw God's glory visibly displayed in history was in a man, Jesus of Nazareth.

## Text notes

### 1–4 THE NATURE OF THE WORD

The first five verses introduce the Word to us, telling us who He is and where He came from. He is divine (v. 1) - everything that God the Father is, His Word is also; He is eternal (v. 2) - there was never a 'when' when He was not; He is the Creator of all things - there is nothing that was not made by Him, the source of our being (v.3); and He is the source of spiritual life (v. 4). In the context of verses 1-3, this seems to be the 'life' that God gives at creation. On reading the rest of the gospel, however, the reader realises that this claim to be the source of life has deeper meaning: the Word is able to provide the 'life' that, throughout the OT, people had been seeking – the context of verses 9-13 and the rest of the uses of the word 'life' in John (e.g. 3:16, 36; 5:24) support this fuller understanding of 'life' here in verse 4. Both points are therefore true: the means by which God gives life to His world and new life to His people is His Son.

Many of these themes will be picked up and enlarged upon later. However, for now, we need to note that the Word is part of the Godhead – He is eternal, the Creator, the life-giver, in intimate union with God. He was God, and yet was with God; the Word by Himself does not make the Godhead (that is, we are already identifying that this Word is both divine and yet distinct from the Father - it was through texts like this that the earliest Christians came up with the doctrine of the Trinity: there is one God who exists in three persons). The relationship between God the Father and God the Son will be dealt with later (see ch. 5). For now it is enough that we allow the full impact of the Word's identity to sink in to our minds.

(Notice the staircase structure by which a prominent term in one line is taken up again in the next: Word in 1a and 1b; God in 1b and 1c; 'came into being' in 3a and 3b; life in 4a and 4b; light in 4b and 5a; life in 5a and 5b.)

### 5–13 THE WORK OF THE FATHER

#### 5–11 Revelation

The theme of revelation and response is introduced with a shattering and shocking negative. In spite of the nature of the Word, who has been shining since the creation of the world, the dark world has failed to understand Him. This explains why John needs to write his Gospel. Quite remarkably, the Light who came to bring life was unrecognised and so was rejected by His very own (referring to the Jews). Light (22 times) and life (37 times) recurring continually through the Gospel.

But humankind's rejection of the Light is seen in the context of God's grace, His grace in making the Light known (vv. 5–9) and His grace in bringing people into His family (vv. 12, 13). The sentence structure of verses 5–9 also serves to emphasise God's grace: verses 5 and 9 make a pair, as do verses 6 and 8, so that verse 7, which states God's purpose in sending the Baptist, is central. The Baptist had been sent to testify to the Light so that we might believe. This statement of God's merciful revelation makes the rejection all the more shocking.

The world failed to recognise Him and even 'His own' refused to receive (literally 'take hold of ') Him [by 13:1, Jesus has created a new group of people who can truly be known as 'His own']. 'World' here, as in the rest of John, refers to God's created order – especially human beings in rebellion against the Creator. Again, this is explained in far greater depth later in chapter 3 and beyond. For now, the scandal of the world's rejection of its Creator, ruler and sustainer should make an impact upon us.

The shock is that the world has rejected the true Light, who alone is able to bring life and therefore 'light' (see verse 5) to its darkness. By telling the reader about people's response to the Word, John prepares us for the shock of Jesus' rejection. However, the fact that 'the world' and 'His own' reject Him should not deter us from belief, for God's purpose in sending the Word is regeneration.

#### 12–13 Regeneration

With the arresting word 'but' John now focuses our attention on God's purpose in sending the Word, and in doing so further highlights God's grace and mercy. The word for 'right' is a very strong word (literally, it means 'authority') which implies absolute power and certainty. Those who believe and receive, therefore, are given the immediate and

absolute right to belong to God. This is not something that happens naturally, for naturally we do not understand the light; rather it is by God's action. Membership of God's family is not by genetic inheritance, nor by an individual working it out, not even by parents deciding. This fact is both an encouragement to those who are not 'His own' (i.e. non-Jews), since membership of God's family is dependent upon His action and not upon racial descent, and also a warning to those who are 'His own', that they should not take their membership of God's family for granted. God's initiative and God's grace are pre-eminent in this paragraph.

In this way, many of the contours of John's doctrine of salvation are introduced: the Gospel starts with the world in hostility to God, not 'receiving' His Son; despite this rebellion, God takes the initiative in launching his Son into the world - not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him (3:17-18). Salvation is entirely the work of God and not of man (3:1-8; 6:63). It is also worth noting that in these early stages of the Gospel, salvation is both legal ('He gave the right...') and relational ('... to be children of God') - it is more than mere 'forgiveness'; those who believe have life in Jesus' name.

#### **14-18 The achievement of the Word: God made known!**

There is a strong theme of witness in these verses, which emphasises the major issue of what the Word has achieved. He has become flesh and thus made God known. This 'making God known' is the fulfilment of all that the OT pointed to.

Verse 14 is a bombshell verse! This Word has 'tabernacled' amongst us: the promises made in Gen. 17, and partially fulfilled in both the tabernacle and the temple, have been realised. The thing that bewildered many Jews in Jesus' day, and continues to bewilder many Muslims today is that the locus of God's 'dwelling' is not a building, but a person (see OT notes) - God's glory has been seen in a human. The nature of this Word made flesh is that He is full of grace and truth. This means that the apostle has witnessed the glory, grace and truth of God that Moses only glimpsed. And so from the fullness of Jesus' grace (v. 16) the apostles have received blessing that even exceeds the blessing given to Moses, for the grace and truth that the law pointed to has arrived in Jesus Christ (v. 17).

The Baptist's witness (we will see later in John that the Baptist hands over the baton of 'witnessing' to Jesus, first to the disciples, and then to all God's people) 'He was before me' (v. 15), emphasises this fulfilment theme by reminding us of the Word's eternal nature (cf. vv. 1-5). The passage reaches its conclusion in verse 18 where John draws the threads together and explains that, for the first time in the history of the universe, God has been fully revealed by the one who is in intimate union with Him. Note the negative. No-one has ever seen God - there is no claim to have seen God face to face in any other religion (see Exodus 33:19-23). Now He is knowable through 'the one and only who ... has made Him known.' It is precisely because Jesus has been in heaven (3:10-15), has come from heaven (16:28), and indeed reigns in heaven (1:1-3) that He is able to make God known.

#### **Key themes**

The central point that John wants to get across, as he explains his reasons for writing, is that God has now made Himself known by the entry of Jesus Christ, His eternal Word, into the world. His purpose is to bring life to men and women, but their natural response is to reject Him. In this way, the arrival of Jesus in the world is inherently divisive - His very presence splits humanity (as well as history) into two.

**The nature of the Word:** Jesus is both God and man. As God He is distinguishable as a separate part of the Godhead. He is the one who is eternal, who made us and now sustains us, and who enables us to see divine reality. As man He is fully human - 'He became flesh'. None of this has been developed yet - the Prologue is designed to state truth in such a monumental and appetite-whetting way that we cannot wait to read more of the man to whom the Baptist bears witness (we still do not even know his name).

#### **The nature of human response:**

- Since God has mercifully and graciously provided clear testimony as to who Jesus is, through the Baptist and the apostles, Jesus should be listened to!
- Yet, despite His nature and His ability to give the 'life' that the OT cries out for, the 'Word' has largely been

- rejected by the world, and even by His own people, the Jews.
- A positive response to Jesus is possible only through divine action, but it leads to membership of God's family and the receiving of grace, truth and the blessings of eternal life.

### **Application**

Many of us still secretly carry around mental images of Jesus as 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' – the young man holding a lamb in His arms, with a dove on His shoulder and standing in a field of flowers – Jesus the New Age Traveller! This passage should make us aware of how awesome He is; shocked that He is largely rejected by His creation; conscious of our own inability to recognise Him and of our natural rebelliousness against Him; alert to the eternal effect of our decisions regarding Him; humbled in the knowledge that it is God's work to bring us to recognise Him; confident that what we read in John about Jesus is reliable, and hungry to know this God who has revealed Himself in human flesh in human history.

The question of our response to this Jesus has therefore already been introduced: are we those who have 'received Him' and 'believed in His name', or are we those who have not 'understood Him'? Indeed, what does it even mean to 'believe' in Him? John wants us to be eager to read on.

### **The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that, as promised, God has made Himself known in the divine person of His Son, with the express purpose of calling together His children... or: to be in awe and want to know more!

## John 1:19–51

### 'We have found the Messiah!'

#### Context

The claim in John's Prologue, that 'the one and only has made Him known', leaves the reader thinking, 'Can this really be so? Show me!' In this passage we see Jesus coming to a waiting people as the Messiah promised in the OT. The links to the pre-existent Word are unmistakable – 'the Word became flesh'. We were told in the Prologue that the Word had come 'to His own'; in this passage, Jesus is presented in explicitly Jewish categories - how could His own have failed to receive this Jesus?

#### Structure

1:19–34	I have seen! Look!' The Baptist prepares the way.
1:35–51	'We have found!' The disciples follow ... much more awaits.

#### Old Testament ideas

The OT background is more than usually important in this passage, where John's aim is to show Jesus arriving as the long-awaited Messiah. In the study, it will not be possible to engage with the detail of all of these ideas, but there is some mileage in laying their breadth before the group - we are to be persuaded that Jesus was unmistakably the Messiah that had been promised.

#### 'Make straight the way for the Lord':

Chapters 40–66 of Isaiah are full of promises to the exiled people of God that their period of exile will not go on for ever. There will be a time of rescue when God will come and lead His people home. God the Rescuer will come in the form of a triumphant conqueror who is also a suffering servant. When He comes His glory will be revealed and He will establish a great new Jerusalem at the centre of a new heaven and a new earth. This glorious future, promised to God's people by Isaiah, had never been fully realised.

When John the Baptist comes and announces himself as 'the voice calling in the desert', he is heralding the fulfilment of God's rescue plan through the arrival of God's Rescuer. For we know that the very next person to arrive on the scene after 'the voice' is God Himself (Isaiah 40:3). John's point, therefore, is not just about salvation history - the kingdom has come; it is Christological - God Himself has come to earth in the person of Jesus. In John a right understanding of Jesus always precedes salvation: it is when I believe that the Messiah is Jesus that I receive a share in the life of God's kingdom (20:30-31); again, it is when I believe that Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father, that He is the way and the truth and the life that I come to the Father (14:5-10).

#### The Lamb of God:

There are a number of suggestions as to precisely which OT idea this phrase refers to. The most likely answer is that John the Baptist has in mind both the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 and the 'servant' of Isaiah 53 (perhaps the latter passage is primary in his mind).

The Passover lamb was a substitutionary sacrifice which averted the judgement of God from His people on the night when they were redeemed from slavery in Egypt: the blood of the slaughtered lamb was to be put on the door-frame of the Israelites' houses, so that as the LORD went through the land to strike down the Egyptian firstborn, He would see the blood and 'pass over' those houses.

The 'Servant' of Isaiah 53 is described as dying an atoning death 'like a lamb' (v. 7). His death is a 'guilt offering' (v. 10). He takes the punishment on behalf of guilty sinners in order to deal with the problem of sin. His death brings peace (between sinners and an utterly holy God), healing (from sin), the removal of iniquity (vv. 5–6), and especially 'righteousness' (v. 10). Jesus is identified by the Baptist as the one who will deal once and for all with the problem of sin.

**The Spirit came down:**

In the book of Judges and the two books of Samuel there are descriptions of God's Spirit coming down on Israel's judges and kings (Judg. 3:9–10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Sam. 10:6; 16:13). The difference with this king, Jesus, is that the Spirit remains on Him (v. 32). In Isaiah 42:1 we see that God's Servant will also have the Spirit 'resting on Him'. Thus the coming of the Spirit on Jesus points to the fulfilment of these two great OT themes: He is the king who will rule forever and the servant who will die for sin. Again, it is likely that the Isaiah reference is dominant in John's mind.

**He will baptise with the Holy Spirit:**

The prophets promised a time when God's people would have their sin dealt with and would be moved to follow His decrees. At this time they would be able to be God's people with God in their midst – the covenant people of God (e.g. Jeremiah 31:31-34). The coming of God's Spirit would make this possible (Ezek. 36:27).

**Christ/Messiah/Son of God:**

These are titles for God's anointed ruler and king, whose coming is foretold in the OT. He is the one through whom God will rule His people forever. (See 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; Isaiah 9:6–7.) The readers of John's Gospel were not only Jews; but having discovered that Jesus is unmistakably divine in verses 1-18, we now learn that He is also unmistakably the Messiah of Israel - it is always a defining moment when someone reaches that conclusion in John.

**The one Moses wrote about / The Prophet:**

Through Moses God had promised to send His people another 'prophet like you' (Moses). 'The Prophet' in verse 21 refers to this expected figure. (See Deut. 18:18–20.) Jesus will speak the very words of God (3:34) for he is the true teacher of Israel (3:10).

**Jacob's dream:**

With the words 'and the angels of God ascending and descending', Jesus' hearers would have been reminded of the account in Genesis 28:12 of Jacob's dream. God's covenant with Jacob, in that dream, marked him as the one through whom, and through whose offspring, 'all peoples on earth will be blessed'. In making a parallel between Jacob and Himself, Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah, the one through whom God will bless all peoples on earth.

**The Son of Man:**

This is an OT title that Jesus often uses to refer to Himself. In the OT the Son of Man is the one who will be God's everlasting ruler of all (Dan. 7:13–14).

**Text notes****19–34 'I HAVE SEEN! LOOK!'**

The Baptist's witness is summarised in verse 34. He is here to identify the Son of God for us. The point is made by inclusio: John's 'testimony' is described in v. 19 and ends with the Baptist talking about his own 'testimony' in v34.

**19–23 He is the coming one.** John caused quite a stir, and a special delegation of priests and Levites was sent from Jerusalem to find out who he was. This is important to us because it shows us both that the Baptist was recognised as someone special and that the Jewish rulers themselves were expecting a messianic figure. They are concerned about the Baptist's identity. In reply he quotes Isaiah 40:3, preparing them, and us, for the arrival of one far greater. Notice that John is very quick to deflect attention away from himself - even though he enjoys a position of remarkable privilege in salvation history, his primary message is about who he is not!

**24–28 He is here! He is greater.** It is unclear whether this is a second interview (NIV), or a continuation of the first (ESV) - but it does not matter much. Either way, this delegation (they had 'been sent') are concerned about the meaning of John's baptism. John does not answer the question immediately but again points away from himself to one far greater who 'is here' already.

**29–34 This is God's Son.** The whole purpose of the Baptist's ministry is to reveal God's pre-existent Lamb (1:7, 15). He announces to John's readers both the identity (the Lamb of God, the Son of God) and the ministry of Jesus (He has come to deal with the problem of sin). The divine word and the divine sign (v.33) has thus enabled the Baptist to appreciate what the rest of John's gospel is designed to teach us. His repeated statement 'I myself did not know Him ...' reminds us of God's determination to make Himself known, and also assures us that this really is God's Son because God Himself witnesses to Him. The Spirit has come on Jesus both as servant and as king, and so He will fulfil all that is anticipated by these two OT 'types' as He deals with His people's sin.

To understand what is meant by Jesus baptising with the Holy Spirit, it is essential to understand the OT context - the principal way that Jesus will baptise with the Spirit is as He regenerates dead sinners (3.5; 6.63). Then, later in the Gospel (14:16, 26) John records Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will come to His disciples, the promise that was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2 is anticipated in John 20:22).

### **35–51 'WE HAVE FOUND!'**

The point of this passage is to take us from the witness of John to the call of Jesus. Jesus is the one John promised, and therefore those who have followed John should move their allegiance to Jesus. The sections are marked by references to 'the next day' (v. 29, 35, 43).

**35–42 Look at Him! You must follow!** A second time the Baptist announces Jesus by pointing to His sacrificial ministry. (This is important: some say that John does not have much of a theology of the cross; but here in the introduction to the Gospel, in a passage that is deliberately designed to be foundational to all that follows, we are being told again that Jesus' ministry will be to deal with the problem of sin by dying as a sacrificial, substitutionary Lamb.) Andrew listens to the Baptist and follows Jesus. His response is to announce the discovery of the Messiah. In coming to Jesus Peter finds one whose ministry supersedes the Baptist's ministry, for Jesus' divine knowledge enables Him to know Peter so thoroughly that He knows what he will become.

**43–50 Follow me! You will see!** Jesus now takes centre stage. Once again the focus is on His identity. He is 'the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote'; He is 'the Son of God ... the king of Israel', and the 'stairway' to heaven (v. 51 refers to Jacob's dream, in Genesis 28:12; see OT notes). The point is that the disciples are now able to identify Him for themselves when He calls them. They are then able to pass on the invitation: 'Come and see' and 'We have found.'

The Baptist has now faded from view and Jesus is prominent, which is just the way that the Baptist would like it! The striking difference between Jesus and the Baptist is again evident in Jesus' call to Philip – 'Follow me!' – and His knowledge of Nathanael. Jesus knows him through and through, and knows exactly what Nathanael was doing. Nathanael is convinced by Philip's witness and Jesus' divine knowledge. He is a true Israelite, recognising the true king of Israel – 1:12, 31. The Baptist's function (1:6–8) has now been achieved.

**Verse 51.** This verse provides us with a link into the rest of the book. The 'you' is plural, so it is the disciples who are promised the sight of 'greater things'. When Jacob had his dream (see Gen. 28:12) the substance of the revelation was that God's covenant with Abraham was now being made with Jacob also. God had promised Abraham that He would reverse the effects of the Fall through Abraham's offspring. All peoples would be blessed through him, God would be with him and would establish him and his people in the land. For Jacob it was only a dream! Now the disciples are being told that they will see the reality for themselves. Instead of the angels ascending and descending on a stairway to Jacob, they are to ascend and descend on Jesus. He (the Son of Man) will supersede Jacob as the centre and source of God's purposes for His covenant people - He is the one through whom all the nations will be blessed.

As we move into chapters 2 and 3 we shall see Jesus saying that He is the 'house of God', whereas Jacob had said 'this is the house of God', and Jesus claiming that He is the way to heaven, whereas Jacob had said 'this is the gateway to heaven'. Our response should be the same as Jacob's, but instead of 'How awesome is this place' we

should say, 'How awesome is this person'.

### Key themes

There is just one central issue in this passage: the coming of Jesus, the fulfilment of all God's promises to rescue and draw together a people who will be His very own. Jesus has arrived! John, in his narrative, loses no time in presenting his readers with key facts about Jesus.

- He is the long-awaited Lamb who will deal with sin once and for all.
- He is the long-promised King/Christ/Son who will rule God's people forever.
- He is the central and enabling figure in the fulfilment of God's promise to pour out His Spirit, so that God's people may remain His people forever.
- He is identified to the Baptist by God and to the disciples by the Baptist. The Baptist prepares the disciples who recognise Him and turn to follow Him.
- He demonstrates His divinity by displaying complete knowledge of the disciples He calls.
- He promises far greater things for those who follow Him, which suggests that all God's OT promises will find their fulfilment in Him.

### Application

**To them then:** The Baptist's words about Jesus persuaded the disciples that Jesus really was the long-awaited Messiah, and also convinced them that Jesus' central purpose in 'becoming flesh' was to be the Lamb of God. The Baptist was an authentic and humble spokesman who authentically identified the Messiah using a whole range of OT criteria. Jesus' call to the disciples assured them that the Baptist's witness was true. They are convinced by Jesus' divine knowledge and turn to follow the one for whom the whole Jewish race had been waiting. They are left with a promise of far greater things to come, for those who follow Him.

**To us now:** The application to us must follow the same lines as to 'them'. We should listen to the Baptist and open our eyes to see the identity and purpose of this long-awaited Messiah. We should see the disciples responding to Jesus' call and learn from them that the Baptist's witness is valid, that the Messiah really has arrived. The application of the passage is not to learn a lesson in personal evangelism but to come to the same conclusion as the disciples did on first encountering Jesus. Jesus' promise that they would see 'greater things' concerning Himself should make us eager to read on.

### The aim

The aim of this study is that we should acknowledge the coming of God to His world, as He promised He would do, and understand His purpose of opening the way to heaven through His sacrificial ministry. We will then be eager to see what 'greater things' about Jesus will be shown in the rest of the book.

Or:

To see that Jesus is not just God on earth (verses 1-18) but also the Messiah promised in the OT who will open the way to heaven through His death - we are to be in awe and want to know more!

## John 2:1–4:54

The first two signs recorded in the Gospel, in 2:1–11 and 4:43–54, act as a pair of brackets, one at the beginning and one at the end of this section of material; they indicate that everything within the section hangs together. John structures the whole Gospel in this way, recording two further pairs of signs which, as here, introduce and conclude a section of material. Therefore, as we read each section we should be on the look out for the major themes that will be introduced by the first sign and summed up by the second.

Closer study of the two miracles confirms that they are like brackets: both take place in Cana in Galilee, as John points out (4:46), and they are carefully numbered (2:11 and 4:54). Then, the two miracles have a similar feature – in one Jesus holds back His mother, in the other He rebukes the official; and also a similar outcome – at the wedding Jesus' disciples put their faith in Him, and at the official's house, the whole household believes. Finally, the purpose of the signs appears to be similar: the first sign shows that the Messiah really has come, and the second is proof that the Samaritans were correct in recognising Jesus as the Messiah.

Having established that John did intend to provide this structure, we now need to find out how the selected material fits into the section. The following incidents and explanations occur in these three chapters:

2:1–11	Jesus in Cana in Galilee: Sign 1 – the Messiah is here!
2:12–25	Jesus in Jerusalem: clearing the temple – an uncomfortable but genuine Messiah. How will you respond?
3:1–21	How is it possible to enter the kingdom of God? Only when God sovereignly works to give someone life through faith in the work of God's Messiah who has come down to earth.
3:22–36	Jesus in Judea: the Baptist authenticates Jesus' claims and ministry.
4:1–42	Jesus in Samaria: the gift of the Messiah is offered to all people; He really is the Messiah who will unite Jew and Samaritan as promised.
4:43–54	Jesus in Cana in Galilee: Sign 2 – the Messiah is here! How will we respond?

The themes of the chapters are as follows:

- Ch. 2 The Messiah is here!
- Ch. 3 How does anyone enter the kingdom of God? Through belief in the Messiah's work.
- Ch. 4 Who enters the kingdom of God? Anyone who believes in the Messiah.

### Recurring themes

- The arrival and authentication of the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus fulfils the prophecies about wine flowing in abundance and the cleansing of the temple. He is the one who has come down from heaven and who, through the Spirit, makes regeneration possible. He is the Lord of the harvest who unites Jew and Samaritan. He is the bridegroom who sacrificially serves His people.
- Along with the arrival of the Messiah, these chapters announce the inauguration of His kingdom. It is a wonderful kingdom that is marked by an abundance of high quality wine, and by the gift of deeply satisfying living water.
- The need for a response of genuine faith that accepts both the Father's word in scripture and Jesus' word as He teaches. Such genuine faith grows and develops through hearing and trusting Jesus' word - Jesus' mother seems to trust His word (2:5), as do the disciples (2:22) and the official (4.50). (Jesus discloses Himself through His word time and again through the section (2:19-21; 3:11, 12, 29, 32-34; 4:26, 29, 41-42.) Even though the response to Jesus in this section is predominantly positive, it is clear that He is not the comfortable Messiah the Jews were expecting. But this response of genuine faith in Him is necessary to new birth and entry into the kingdom. This response, rather than nationality or respectability, is the key to membership.

All these themes appear in the accounts of the signs and are further developed within the section.

**Application**

Having established the themes and purpose of the section, it is important that our application is in line with John's intention. He wants to expand and deepen our understanding of what it means to recognise Jesus as the Christ. We should therefore find ourselves responding as Jacob did, when he saw heaven opened: 'How awesome is this place!' (cf. 1:51). And we should be asking ourselves whether our response of faith is genuine or somehow inadequate, like the Jews' (2:24). Jesus is the 'place' where heaven is opened – have we entered?

Further, these chapters sharpen our understanding of what it means to be in God's kingdom. His kingdom is not a place of funeral misery, it is a place of festal celebration and rich satisfaction. Who would not want to be a part of a death-defeating and life-giving kingdom?

**Signs in John**

The purpose of the signs is explained well by Carson (p. 175): 'signs [are] significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith'. They are never 'simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses'. The intention is that the reader of the Gospel should see the sign and listen to the explanatory words of Jesus, and so come to genuine faith.

## John 2:1–25

### God's King is here. Glory! Judgement!

#### Context

The verses at the end of the last passage, 1:50–51, gave us the promise of 'greater things' to be revealed. The Son of Man is to be the centre and fulfilment of God's covenant promises to His people. He is to be the new focus of Jacob's response, 'This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' (Genesis 28:17). In the next part of John's narrative, chapter 3:1–26, we shall see how someone may enter into God's kingdom – Jesus is the gateway to heaven. But first, this passage shows us what it means to say that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah (see 20:30–31) – He is the 'house of God!' This is not as comfortable as it might sound, and for the first time we are given a hint that the Christ for whom the authorities in Jerusalem were obviously waiting (1:19ff) will not conform to their expectations.

The Prologue announced that it was those who 'believe' in the name of the Word that are given the right to become children of God. But what is the nature of such belief? This chapter shows us that not all 'belief' is the same – some is not quite as good as it seems.

#### Structure

The Messianic age is here!

2:1–11            Glory! A credible Messiah! (The first sign: water turned into wine.)

2:12–25        Judgement! A revolutionary Messiah!

#### Old Testament ideas

##### Wine in abundance:

The prophets who spoke to the people of Israel in exile held out to them a vision. They described a day in the future when God would bring His people back from captivity and restore them to the land He had given to their forefathers. At this time God's people would be gathered together, God Himself would dwell with them, and they would live in joyful obedience to Him in a land filled with peace and plenty. 'That day', as the prophets referred to it, was to be the messianic age (see Amos 9:13–15 and Jer. 31:1ff), and one of the marks of abundance would be a large quantity (Amos 9:13) of very high quality (Isaiah 25.6-8) wine. As with Isaiah's promises that we looked at last week (Isa. 40–66), these promises of a messianic age had clearly not yet been fulfilled. The water changed into wine at Cana gives a glimpse of the arrival of 'that day'.

##### The temple:

The purpose of the temple was to symbolise God's dwelling with His people. The temple also symbolised His inaccessibility to His people, and the sacrificial system was a constant reminder of this. Sacrifices spoke of the need for the atonement of sin if God were to dwell among His people. In addition the temple was the focal point for all God's people, both as the place of sacrifice – there was no other – and as the prime centre for teaching. In short, it was the place where God resided among His people, ruled over them, and acted to rescue them.

At national festivals such as the Passover the whole Jewish nation was supposed to come up to Jerusalem and to the temple (Deut. 12). All that the temple was meant to symbolise, however, had been turned into a hypocritical sham by the priests who served at the temple. They were notorious. But there was nothing new in this. The prophets, centuries before, had constantly criticised the priests for their repetitive ritual that lacked any real repentance. In contrast to this desperate situation, the prophets looked forward to a day when the 'messenger of the covenant' would come to His temple and clear it, in an act of judgement that would restore real worship (see Mal. 3:1–5 and also Zech, 14:20-21). When Jesus announces His body as the new temple in verses 20-21, he is making a remarkable claim: the place where God now resides among His people (1:14), rules over His people (1:34, 41), and acts to rescue His people (1:12-13) is Jesus.

**Psalm 69:**

This psalm is important in John's Gospel; three of its verses (4, 9 and 21) are picked up by John as being fulfilled by Jesus. The psalm sees King David as a figure who is opposed and rejected by his enemies on account of his zeal for God's house. This zeal finds its expression in true worship, defined as the honouring of God's name rather than the mere sacrifice of animals. The enemies referred to in Psalm 69 have as their counterpart, in this passage, the Jews who are presently in Jerusalem, celebrating the Passover and recalling God's judgement and rescue: the fact that they are at the same time opposing Jesus, God's rescuer, adds a striking irony to this passage (see text notes).

**Resurrection:**

2 Samuel 7:13 and Psalm 16:10 both tell us that God's anointed king, the Messiah, will reign on His throne forever. Resurrection is key to this. So Jesus' prediction of His own resurrection is a further claim to be that anointed king.

**Bridegroom:**

In the Old Testament, God often referred to Himself as the bridegroom of His people (e.g. Isaiah 62:4-5). Indeed, human marriage was always designed to be a visible enactment of the intimate relationship between God and His people (Eph. 5:32). Israel, however, was far from being a faithful bride, and was often charged by the prophets with the crime of 'whoring' after other gods, like Baal (e.g. Hosea). Through those prophets, however, God promised a day when he would once again woo His people to Himself (Hosea 2:14-20), and delight over them as His bride (Isaiah 62:5). In taking to Himself the role of the bridegroom (by supplying the wine at the wedding), Jesus once again announces Himself as God on earth.

**Text notes****1-11 THE MESSIANIC AGE IS HERE! THE GLORY OF A CREDIBLE MESSIAH!****(The first sign: water turned into wine)**

It is all too easy to focus on the minor details of this passage and, in so doing, allow ourselves to be drawn into many classic traps of interpretation. The commentaries are full of possible 'meanings' for the 'stone water jars used for ceremonial washing', the fact that they were 'filled to the brim', and so on. These details may be interesting but, if we read the text carefully, it is clear (v. 11) that Jesus has one major purpose in performing this sign: 'Jesus manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him.' There is no comment on the significance of the jars; they may be significant, they may not. The central, most important questions we should be asking are 'How does this sign manifest Jesus' glory?' and 'How does this sign generate faith?' The signs manifest Jesus' glory in three ways:

**i) Jesus manifests His glory ... as the Creator.**

Who but God could do something like this? There are no spells, no incantations, and no prayers as Jesus, through the agency of some unwitting servants, creates this glorious wine.

**ii) Jesus manifests His glory ... as the Christ.**

John does not just want his readers to know that Jesus is divine (the Son of God in John is usually a divine title), but that He is the Christ promised by the OT. The previous chapter has certainly heightened our expectation: the titles given to Jesus encourage us to look for evidence that He is the Messiah, and at the end of the chapter there is the promise to the disciples that they would see 'greater things'. This sign cries out to anyone with an understanding of the OT that the messianic age is now here ... glorious wine is here in abundance (see OT notes). It is striking how often the language of the kingdom is sensory and exciting - the kingdom of God is not merely a proposition to be understood but a life to be enjoyed. This point is all the more clear when we understand that the wine is not an end in itself. Lots of great wine is a good thing (!), but it is even better to be invited into a kingdom that is like a wedding banquet, at which the host swallows up the shroud of death and wipes away every tear (Isaiah 25.6-8).

But in another sense the messianic age is not here. A brief scan of the OT promises concerning this age makes it clear that they predict a world that we do not yet experience in all its fullness. Verse 4 encourages us to ask the question as to why this is so, and also helps us find the answer: Jesus performs a sign which suggests that this age has arrived, but there is a sense in which, as He says, His 'hour' has not yet come.

Throughout the Gospel we shall find references to Jesus' 'hour'. They point to Jesus' death on the cross as His 'hour' (12:23), or else beyond His death and resurrection to an 'hour' way off in the future (5:28). Coming back to this passage with such references in mind, we see how the 'hour' has arrived and yet is still to come. This should prevent us from being disappointed that we do not now experience the messianic age completely; it should also keep us looking forward to the arrival of that 'hour'. It also teaches us that the only means by which Jesus will be able to offer the blessings of the new age to His people is through His death.

### iii) Jesus manifests His glory ... as the bridegroom

See OT notes. In taking to Himself the role of bridegroom, Jesus announces Himself as God on earth - here to win a people to Himself. This theme will recur through this section (3:29), and serves to highlight Isaiah 25:6-8 as the key background for John's understanding of the kingdom which arrives in the coming of Jesus. It also teaches us something of how God's people are to relate to Him: they are not just creatures who submit to a Creator, but a bride who loves Him as her husband.

The master of the feast did not know where the wine had come from (v. 9). In John, many will display ignorance about the new age that Jesus has come to establish, and about Jesus Himself (3:8, 11; 4:11; 7:27-28; 8:14; 9:29-30; 19.9).

## 12-25 THE MESSIANIC AGE IS HERE! JUDGEMENT BY A REVOLUTIONARY MESSIAH!

In these verses Jesus clears the temple and then, in dialogue with the Jews, promises to rise from the dead. The violent action and the amazing promise are both fulfilments of scriptures that relate to God's Messiah-King (see OT notes). The disciples recognise the first fulfilment at the time (v. 17) and the second at a much later stage (v. 22). With these two verses John provides the 'interpretative key' for understanding Jesus' action in the temple: Jesus is the Messiah, who has come to judge false Jewish religion and who will rise again. The 'scripture' referred to in verse 22 must be OT references to the Messiah living forever, such as Psalm 16:10.

**12-17** The Messiah is seen judging and clearing the establishment that was central in the old era, but which was patently failing to achieve the purpose for which it existed. This action in itself showed that Jesus was the expected Messiah (v. 17), though His arrival proved uncomfortable and challenging. We are beginning to see why, even though Jesus came to His own, they did not receive Him (1:11). The Jews of Jesus' day were far from God when He arrived on the scene - it is no wonder that they did not want the light of God in their midst (3:19-21). Notice too the sheer physicality of the act, and also that Jesus makes yet another astonishing claim along the way, calling God, 'My Father.'

**18-22** Instead of responding to the Messiah's judgement in humble repentance, the Jews demand a sign. Jesus promises that they will get the sign given in scripture, namely His resurrection (v. 19), for He is the everlasting king (see last OT note). The disciples recognise this, John tells us, after the resurrection has happened (v. 22 - it is astonishing that the words of Jesus can be mentioned alongside the words of scripture as the legitimate object of belief). This passage, therefore, is primarily about who Jesus is: He is the judging eternal Messiah. However, verses 18-22 contain deep irony and further challenge. The Jews fail to respond in repentance to the arrival of the Messiah, with the result, eventually, that they put Him to death. The irony is that their judgement on Him guarantees His final judgement on them, on their failed temple, and on their abuses of its sacrificial systems. Jesus' sacrifice of Himself - totally effective, and made once for all - makes their cherished temple obsolete in the new messianic age. The timing of this action enhances the irony: it is the time of the Passover (v. 13), when Jerusalem and the temple would have been full of Jews recalling God's judgement on His enemies and His rescue of His people. Far from judging His enemies, however, this uncomfortable Messiah has come in judgement on His own people! In passing, Jesus makes the staggering claim that the centre of God's dealings with humanity is no longer a building of bricks and mortar, but a person - Himself.

**23-25 Response.** Superficially, the two halves of this chapter look similar: Jesus does something impressive and people 'believe' in Him (2:11, 23). But closer inspection reveals that Jesus did not welcome the 'belief' of the Jews without reservation - the one who knows the heart of man held Himself back (2:23-25). Why? The disciples are

described as believing 'the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken' whereas the 'many' believed not in the words of Jesus, but because of the signs. John does not follow through the distinction at this stage, but it will become enormously significant as we proceed through John. Only those who believe gain life in Jesus' name, but the belief that God is looking for is not that we are superficially impressed by Jesus, but that we believe in and abide in His words.

### Key themes

- The Messiah is here! Jesus is the longed-for Messiah who demonstrates His complete control over His creation. John's primary point throughout these early chapters of the gospel is Christological. Before we talk about the nature of his kingdom, and before we talk about what it means to believe, we need to be talking about who Jesus is. Is He domesticated in my mind, or is He really the divine, loving ruler of creation?
- Because the Messiah is here, the glorious and longed-for messianic age has arrived. The messianic age may be a dull, academic subject in our mind, but that reveals the shallowness of our grasp of the concept - we are invited into Messiah's kingdom, but tears and death are not.
- Jesus, the Messiah foretold by the prophets, is here as judge of His people. His judgement will eventually result in His replacing the temple and its system of worship, which lay at the heart of the old era, with His own person, which lies at the heart of the new era.
- Responses to this Messiah: there are actually three responses to Jesus in the passage. The Jews begin to react against this revolutionary Messiah who challenges and judges – He is altogether too threatening. The disciples respond with a growing and developing faith. In between are the 'many' - they seem to have some sort of belief in Jesus, but will it last? (6:60-66)

### Application

**To them then:** The application of verses 1–11 is shown in the disciples' response of growing faith in verse 11. As Jesus revealed His glory, so the claims of 1:34, 49 and 51 became credible. The transformation of water into wine is a staggering event which only God could bring about! The disciples put their faith in God's king who has come to usher in a whole new era. They begin to see Him as the culmination of all God's planning. But Jesus does not fulfil the promises of the OT in quite the comfortable way that the Jews were expecting. His coming means challenge to the status quo and judgement on the Jews' corrupted worship. Eventually this judgement will lead to the temple being replaced by Jesus: He will become the 'place' of effective sacrifice and of meeting with God. He is at the very centre of the new era. There are only two possible responses to this uncomfortable king.

**To us now:** Our application must be along the lines mentioned above. First, we should discover who Jesus is and what He has come to do. He is not just some personalised god who comes to provide for my own felt needs. He is the king who has come to usher in a whole new era for God's people. But, secondly, His Messiahship is challenging. He does not fit comfortably with the Jews' expectations and will not fit comfortably with ours. The questions for us are as follows: will we continue to grow in faith as we learn from this uncomfortable Messiah? And, are we prepared to repent under His exposure – He knows what is in us – and recognise Him as the central figure in this new age?

What is my view of God's kingdom, and how do I relate to the King? It is gloriously true that God is the Creator who rules over us, but here we see that He is also the groom who rejoices over us. Do I think of Jesus in that way? Do I know that intimacy in my relationship with Him? Do I know the joy of the wedding feast as well as the victory of the courtroom, and the humility of the classroom?

### The aim

The aim of this study is to see that in Jesus, God's promised messianic age really has come. It is a time of glory, but also of judgement and challenge. How do we respond?

## John 3:1-36

### Entry into the kingdom of God

#### Context

In 1:51 Jesus promised His disciples that they would see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This clearly implied that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah (see notes on Jacob's dream on p. 11). He was, in a figurative sense, none other than 'the house of God ... the gate of heaven'.

2:1–25 presented the arrival of the messianic age and the Messiah: Jesus claimed that He would be the new 'house of God'. But chapter 2 left two questions unanswered: 'How does one enter the messianic age?' (or the kingdom of God, as Jesus describes it in 3:3), and, 'Who gets in?' This chapter gives the answer as to the 'how': it is only by God's action, as He regenerates people through His Spirit, that they come to believe in His lifted-up Son, the 'gate' to heaven. Chapter 4 gives the answer as to the 'who'.

#### Structure

The structure of the first half of the study (3:1-15) is determined by Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Nicodemus makes a pious statement (v. 2) and asks two questions which begin, 'How...?' (v4, 9). Each of Jesus' replies contains the 'sit up and pay attention to this' formula, 'Truly, truly, I say to you...' (vv. 3, 5, 11).

3:1-3	Rebirth is essential for entry into the kingdom of God.
3:4-8	Rebirth is God's work by His Spirit – He regenerates.
3:9-15	Rebirth is possible only through God's Son – believe in Him to have life.
3:16-21	Explanatory comment: 16-18 Why faith in God's Son is necessary. 19-21 Why people reject God's Son .
3:22-36	The Baptist authenticates Jesus' message.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### Kingdom of God:

This is another way of referring to the messianic age that we were looking at last week (see Isa. 9:1–7; 11:1–2). The prophets saw it coming at the end of history, presided over by David's Son. "To see the kingdom of God" was to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life' (Carson, p. 188).

##### Regeneration:

By the time of the exile the prophets had begun to teach that it was impossible to be one of God's people if the problem of one's sin had not been dealt with. Here, in verse 5, Jesus refers to Ezekiel 36 which teaches that sin is the problem facing God's people. The solution, in Ezekiel 36, comes when past sin is cleansed away by the sprinkling of water and, for the future, when God puts His Spirit in people's hearts, giving them a new desire to obey Him (Ezek. 36:25–27). Ezekiel is quite clear that God is the only one able to do all this, and also that He is doing it for His glory (36:32).

##### The snake in the desert:

When God's people rebelled against Him, he sent a plague of poisonous snakes upon them in an act of righteous judgement. Whoever was bitten by one of the snakes died. But in His mercy, God also provided a means of escape from under his judgement. Moses was to build a bronze snake and 'lift it up' on a pole. Whoever looked to the snake (a demonstration of trust in God's provision of rescue) was delivered from His wrath and lived (Num. 21:8–9). In the same way, whoever looks to God's only Son, lifted up on the cross, will not perish, but live.

##### The Son of Man:

This is one of Jesus' most common descriptions of Himself. The OT depicts the Son of Man as the glorious heavenly figure who will rule forever (Dan. 7:13–14). Jesus adds to this, describing the Son of Man as the revealer of God

(3:13) and as the crucified one (3:14).

### **The bridegroom:**

(See notes on chapter 2.) The future restoration of God's people is pictured as a wedding banquet with God as the bridegroom, betrothing Himself to His bride and rejoicing over her (Isaiah 54:4–8; Hosea 2:19).

### **Text notes**

#### **3:1-3 REBIRTH IS ESSENTIAL FOR ENTRY INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Chapter 2 ended with two different sorts of believer. The disciples were believing the words that Jesus had spoken, while the crowds were 'believing' on the strength of the signs alone. In that context, Nicodemus appears on the scene and seems to be introduced to us as an example of 'inadequate belief': that is why he makes explicit reference to the signs of Jesus (v2), and why we are told that he came to Jesus at night. He is not just scared of the Jews - for all his religious credentials and piety, he remains in the spiritual darkness. This understanding of Nicodemus' spiritual state is confirmed by Jesus' reply. Whatever 'belief' Nicodemus has, he is not yet a member of the kingdom of God - he needs to be born again. Jesus' reply thereby identifies the issue that is central to this passage, i.e. how does anyone enter God's kingdom? The negative, in Jesus' words in verse 5, stresses the failure of sinful human beings to reach God's kingdom on their own. The whole of Israel's history has illustrated this failure and the prophets had finally prophesied a solution to it: God would eventually deal with sin.

It is striking that even Nicodemus should need to be born again: he is a Jew, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews; indeed, he is the true teacher of Israel - if anyone has spiritual credentials, it is Nicodemus. But spiritual heritage and credentials save no-one: there is no-one who does not need to be born again.

#### **4-8 REBIRTH IS GOD'S WORK BY HIS SPIRIT - HE REGENERATES**

Not for the last time in John, Jesus is talking to someone who completely fails to understand what He is saying: He is from above, all others are from below (3:31); we will need to look out for instances of people thinking that Jesus is speaking about physical and earthly matters when in fact He is speaking about spiritual and heavenly realities. Here, Nicodemus is confused, he does not understand how someone can re-enter their mother's womb. Jesus replies that participation in God's kingdom is only possible through God's regenerative work (notice the parallelism between verse 3 and verse 5: to be born again is to experience the washing that Ezekiel promised (see OT notes). Notice too that the 'you' in verse 7 is plural - Nicodemus represents all humanity and all Jews in particular). Spiritual life and membership of God's kingdom requires sin to be dealt with, by washing and by the indwelling of God's Spirit. Nicodemus should know that sinful human flesh can only give birth to flesh, and that the work of God is essential for dealing with the problem of sin in human beings. He should know what Jesus teaches in verse 8, that rebirth is entirely a matter of God acting through His Spirit. The illustration in verse 8 is therefore very apposite: just as no-one can control the wind, so too God's Spirit is beyond the control of man (cf. 1:3). We may not be able to control the work of the Spirit, but we can certainly see its effect - we see it every time someone is born again.

#### **9-15 REBIRTH IS POSSIBLE ONLY THROUGH GOD'S SON - BELIEVE IN HIM TO HAVE LIFE!**

Nicodemus is still confused as to how a person can be washed and given life. Jesus rebukes him and asserts His own authority as the true teacher of Israel: Jesus has authority as the Son of Man who alone has come from heaven. He is an eye-witness of what He is talking about. As He teaches He answers Nicodemus' question: this washing and rebirth is only possible through the Son of Man coming from heaven and being 'lifted up' (by God) on the cross.

'Lifted up', in John's writing, always combines two meanings, the physical lifting up of Jesus on the cross and His exaltation (see Carson, p. 201). To give Nicodemus a parallel to His own 'lifting up', Jesus refers to an incident in Israel's desert history, in Numbers 21:8-9. Just as the dying Israelites had needed simply to look at the bronze snake set up by Moses, as the only way of accepting God's solution to their plight, and so survive, so now 'whoever' believes in the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross, will have eternal life. Jesus is already anticipating His death; He is the gateway to heaven.

We are also learning more about the nature of the response that God wants: the object of our belief is to be the

Son of Man on the cross.

## 16–21 EXPLANATION: THE NECESSITY OF FAITH and THE REASON FOR

### REJECTION

**16–18 Why faith in God's Son is necessary.** Jesus has just told Nicodemus that believing in the Son of Man is the key into God's kingdom. This passage begins with the word 'for', indicating that the verses will explain why faith in God's solution is necessary. Negatively, it is necessary because Jesus entered a world that was already hostile to God and was already condemned - those who do not believe will perish. Positively, belief in God's Son is necessary because God does not enjoy the death of the wicked. He did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but because He wanted to provide a way for people to be saved - that is why He sent His only Son to die for the very people that had previously rejected Him, and that is why we must believe in Him. ('World', in John's writing, refers to rebellious humankind under God's judgement - see Carson, pp. 122–23, on 1:9.) The kind of faith that Jesus has been talking about in verses 9–15 is a trust in this specific and objective act of rescue by God. It is not some subjective inner feeling, but a real trust in the real work of a real person which has real consequences. (The 'gift' of God's Son in 3:16 is closely tied to the 'gift' of being a child of God in 1:12).

**19–22 Why people reject God's Son.** Given that God has acted in this way, it sounds preposterous that people should reject His offer of life. But John forces us to face the fact that many do; he contrasts the love of God for a rebellious world in need of salvation (v. 16) with the love of humans for darkness and flight (vv. 19ff). Our natural human response to God is to run from Him, and from His light, because we know that we are rebels and we want to remain rebellious. People do not reject the gospel because they belong to the wrong race or culture, or because they do not have enough evidence at hand to satisfy their intellect. The decision to reject the gospel is always a moral decision: we do not want the true nature of our own deeds to be exposed (verse 20), and so we reject the words of Jesus. This goes some way to explaining the attraction of the crowds' sign-based belief: the signs do not themselves force me to face the fact of my sin - believing in them is therefore more palatable. It is when my sin is exposed that I most want to lash out against Jesus - we hate Him because He says that our deeds are evil (7:7). Verse 21 makes it clear that those who do accept the gospel do so only by God's merciful intervention, which takes us back to the truth of verses 1–8 (cf. 1:13).

## 22–36 THE BAPTIST AUTHENTICATES JESUS' MESSAGE AND MOVES US ON...

Although the Baptist is mentioned again in 5:33–36 and 10:41, this is his last appearance in the narrative. He was announced as a witness in 1:6–8, gave testimony in 1:15 and 1:19–34 and now concludes his testimony about Jesus. Here, his ongoing ministry is interrupted by an argument about purification. The exact nature of the discussion is kept from us because we do not need to know it! What does matter is the role that the Baptist is fulfilling - both in person and in the context of John's Gospel. The issue is, 'Is it right that people are going to Jesus?' John gives a resounding, 'Yes'. The radical claims that Jesus has been making about Himself are authenticated by the Baptist - Jesus really is the bridegroom, the Son who has come down from heaven (in the original language it is clear that Jesus, just like the new birth in 3:3 is 'from above'). He is the one upon whom the Spirit rests (cf. 1:32–34), and therefore He is able to utter the very words of God (3:34). [Some have questioned whether verse 34 refers to God's gift of His Spirit to Jesus, or to His later gift of the Spirit to all believers. The context demands the former understanding - we are being encouraged to believe in the words of Jesus in order that we might gain life.] Entry into God's kingdom is dependent upon one's belief in Jesus. Therefore, whoever believes in Jesus has life, but whoever rejects Him stands under God's wrath (cf. the Baptist's role 1:6–8). These verses contain John's authentication of Jesus' teaching and, at the same time, summarise the major themes of the chapter.

### Key themes

The key question is: How does a person enter into God's eternal kingdom?

### God's action:

- Jesus declares that no-one can enter unless they are born again.

- Rebirth is only possible through God's sovereign initiative and His Spirit's work of regeneration.
- Regeneration solves the problem of sin.
- God's initiative is focused in the gift of His Son to be 'lifted up' on the cross.
- Rebirth alone gives entry into the kingdom of God; people cannot force their way in. No matter how well-qualified they may be religiously, rebirth is always necessary.

#### **Humanity's response:**

- The only legitimate response is one of simple trust in what God has done on our behalf.
- The reason people reject God's action is because human beings are deeply rebellious and wish to remain that way.
- Receiving the word of Jesus is again highlighted as central to faith (3:32). The theme will recur again at 5:25; 10:1, 3, 4, 16, 27 and 18:37.
- This is mind-blowing, but is it really true? Yes, because Jesus says so: He came from heaven, He is Israel's true teacher. Therefore, a really good Jew, who does everything the Law tells him, will come to Jesus for eternal life.

#### **Application**

**To them then:** Never mind that Nicodemus is high up in the Jewish religious establishment: he too is a moral being who has rebelled against God, and he too needs to depend absolutely on God's loving rescue plan, centred as it is on the death of Jesus. Throughout the chapter there are reasons for accepting that what Jesus is saying really is true. It ties in with the lessons that the Israelites learned in the desert, and it is validated by John the Baptist. In addition there is Jesus' claim to be the true teacher of Israel, the Son of Man who has come from heaven.

**To us now:** No matter how 'religious' we are, our membership of God's kingdom, our possession of eternal life, depends entirely upon God's loving action in sending Jesus to die on the cross. We are no different from anyone else, we are rebels who need to be cleansed and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. Rebirth is essential, and we need to trust in the Son of Man lifted up. If we have realised this, it is entirely due to God's work, through His Spirit, in opening our eyes to spiritual realities. There is no Christian alive who does not have the Holy Spirit, for his or her regeneration has been 'done through God' (v. 21) and because of God's love. This should both humble us and focus our faith on God's loving rescue. Those who reject Jesus (however religious, intellectual or apathetic their reasons) do so because they are rebels. Jesus, and faith in Him, is the fulcrum on which balances the eternal destiny of every single person. Do I really believe this about the world? Do I believe that the world loves the darkness of its own evil? Do I believe that belief in the death of God's Son is the only way that people may be saved? There are many in the church today who minimise the problem of sin and therefore fail to understand the exclusivity of the cross. This passage should bolster our belief in core gospel truth and motivate us to go on believing in Jesus and His words - true belief.

#### **The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus is the gateway to heaven. Entry into God's eternal kingdom is possible only on the basis of faith in the death of Jesus, which deals with the problem of sin. God's Spirit generates this faith.

## John 4:1–54

### The Saviour of the world!

#### Context

In chapter 2 John showed us that the messianic age really had arrived. In chapter 3 this was confirmed as Jesus explained to Nicodemus how a person could enter His kingdom. Now, in chapter 4, the question shifts from how to who. Who belongs? So far Jesus has been dealing only with Jews. So is He just a Jewish Messiah? There have already been several hints that the nations will also benefit from Jesus: note the 'all' of 1:12, and the 'whoever' of 3:15, 16 and 36, as well as the fulfilment of the promises to Jacob that we saw in chapter 1. So far, however, all we know is that the faith of many, including Nicodemus, is confused and that numbers of people will reject Him. This chapter, in which Jesus begins to reap 'a harvest' among the Samaritans, confirms once more the arrival of the messianic age and also identifies the beneficiaries of this age.

#### Structure

The passage falls into five sections. Verses 1-6 set the scene, verses 7-26 are made up of Jesus' dialogue with the woman, 27-30 transition as disciples arrive and the woman departs, and then Jesus speaks with his disciples in 31-38; finally Jesus encounters the Samaritans in 39-42.

4:1–26	'I who speak to you am He!' Jesus is the Messiah, God's king.
1–15	Jesus is the Christ: God gives eternal life through Him – a person, not a place.
16–26	Jesus is the Christ: God seeks true worship of Him – a person, not a place.
4:27–42	Harvest time! Jesus gives an explanation of why He is going to the Samaritans: He really is the Saviour of the whole world and the Samaritans really are expressing a true response.
4:43–54	The second sign: the healing of the official's son. This confirms the arrival of the messianic age and reminds us that this age is for Jews too – although not all Jews exercise growing faith.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### one nation, one king, one sanctuary:

Carson provides an excellent summary of the Samaritan issue (p. 216). The prophets had promised a day when the bitter rivals, Samaria and Judah, would be reunited under one king. Ezekiel 37:15–28 provides a clear picture of all that was promised: Judah and all Israelites associated with him, and Joseph and all Israelites associated with him, would be made into one nation under one king (v. 22), saved from backsliding into idolatry, cleansed, and restored to a relationship with God (v. 23), with God dwelling amongst them in His sanctuary (vv. 26–28). None of these promises had yet been fulfilled. But every part of the prophecy by Ezekiel finds an echo in this passage.

##### Living water:

Jesus' words about living water resonate with another passage in Ezekiel, in which the prophet is shown the living water that flows out from the temple, after the return of God's glory to the temple (Ezekiel 47:1–12; 48:1–12). Perhaps even more relevantly, living water is also a picture of eternal life and the pouring out of God's Spirit in the day of God's salvation (Isaiah 44:3; 55:1–3).

##### Saviour of the whole world:

In Is. 42:6 the servant of the LORD is seen as 'a light to the Gentiles'. In Is. 49:6 God announces that it is 'too light' a thing for His servant to rescue just Israel - through Him, God's salvation will 'reach to the end of the earth'. The idea of God rescuing people from many nations is not new: the in-gathering of the nations will be part of the messianic age (Is. 2:2–4), and the fulfilment of the promise that God made to Abraham in Gen. 12.

##### Betrothal at a well:

- In Genesis 24:1-67 Abraham's servant, Eliezer, obtains Rebecca for Isaac.
- In Genesis 29:1-14 Jacob encounters Rachel.
- In Exodus 2:15-22 Moses gains Zipporah as a wife.

Typically, a groom (or representative) arrives in a foreign land, meets a woman at a well, discusses water with her which is then asked for or offered. The woman then hurries off to report the stranger's arrival before the bridegroom is invited to the future father-in-law's home where betrothal is arranged over a meal.

Jesus' encounter in John 4 mirrors many of the details of this betrothal scene. Is He a bridegroom that has come to win a bride for Himself? Yes! In John 2:1-11, he took the role of bridegroom to Himself by supplying the wine at a wedding feast, and then in 3:29 John announces Him as bridegroom. This narrative reinforces the theme of John 2:1-4:54 that Jesus is God the Bridegroom (Isaiah 54:1-6; 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2-3, 32; Ezek. 16 and 23; Hos. 2:2-23). The staggering thing is His choice of bride - not a woman of rare beauty, but a Samaritan of ill-repute.

## Text notes

### 1-26 'I WHO SPEAK TO YOU AM HE!'

Jesus is the Messiah who brings life to all, Samaritan as well as Jew. He reunites Jew and Samaritan in 'true worship'. Everything in this section builds towards verse 26. Jesus' calling of a Samaritan woman is further evidence of what has been taught from the beginning of the Gospel, that He is the longed-for Messiah (see OT notes).

**1-6 Scene change to Samaria.** The scene change and the geographical notes all ensure that the reader is in no doubt, in the following verses, about the implications of Jesus' actions and His offer of living water. We are not told why He 'has' to go through Samaria, merely that His decision to move into Gentile territory was a direct result of what the Pharisees had learned - the time for open conflict with the Pharisees has not yet arrived. Note the humanity of Jesus, that He was tired, thirsty and, presumably, hungry.

**7-15 Jesus is the Christ.** God gives eternal life through Him - a person, not a place! Jesus takes the initiative in calling this woman, whose character and identity both suggest she shouldn't stand a chance. She realises this. She is a Samaritan, to whom a Jew would not speak without risking defilement, and a woman, to whom a rabbi should not have spoken at all (v. 27). Further, the Samaritans and Jews hated one another bitterly. There is a deliberate contrast between Nicodemus and the woman, 'He was learned, powerful, respected, orthodox, theologically trained; she was unschooled, without influence, despised, capable of only folk religion. He was a man, a Jew, a ruler; she was a woman, a Samaritan, a moral outcast. And both needed Jesus.' (Carson, p 216). We are learning the breadth of the word 'whoever' in 3:36 which acts as a fulcrum between chapters 3 and 4: there is no-one that is too good to need Jesus, but no-one who is too bad to benefit from His death.

In verses 10-12 Jesus introduces the main issues of the conversation - who He is, and the nature of God's gift (as readers we already know that Jesus is Himself God's gift to a rebellious world, and that those who receive Him receive the gift of eternal life (3:16)). Both these ideas had come into the conversation with Nicodemus, and there are real comparisons to be drawn between the ways they are discussed, with him and with her (notice that once again Jesus is talking to someone who is thinking from below - about physical water, while He is speaking from above - about living water. But the new thing (and it is surprising) is that Jesus is now offering God's gift of eternal life to a Gentile woman. She questions both His identity and His ability. Her question, 'From where...?' is another instance of ignorance about the origin of spiritual matters in John - 2:9; 3:8; 6:5; 9:29.

[In OT, talk of 'running' and 'living' water were sometimes sexual euphemisms: Prov. 5:5-18; Song of Songs 4:12, 15. If any ambiguity is intended here by John, it is to reinforce the idea of Jesus as bridegroom.] In verses 13-15 Jesus brings the conversation back to the point. The issue He is dealing with is God's gift of eternal life. The gift of eternal life lies with Him and He is offering it to this woman. He really is the Saviour of the whole world. Jesus implies that He is much greater than Jacob and that He can give something far greater than Jacob ever gave the Samaritans. In addition, this gift is for whoever drinks the water that He gives. Again, there is a comparison here between the Samaritan woman, who presumes that she is one of God's people because she can claim Jacob as her spiritual father, and Nicodemus, who fails to understand his need for anything other than his religion. The magnitude of the offer that Jesus is making should not be missed. There is a deep thirst in the heart of many men and women - Jesus is offering deep, enduring, thirst-quenching satisfaction to 'whoever' drinks of His living water. Eternal life is not just a cold, legal status; it is a thrilling, lavish feast.

**16–26 Jesus is the Christ: God seeks true worship focused in Him – a person, not a place!** In verses 16–20 Jesus' exposure of the woman's background serves primarily as a means of identifying Himself to her (although in the context of the betrothal-scene, there may well be a link between the woman's marital infidelity and the spiritual infidelity of her people - with the coming of Jesus, there is now the potential for Samaria's apostasy to be forgiven, and for her to be reunited with Israel and restored to her true Lord). Like Nathanael (in 1:49), the woman realises that she is not speaking to any ordinary stranger. Here is someone who 'told me everything I ever did' (v. 29) - a prophet rather like the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. Once she begins to realise who Jesus is, then the spiritual nature of the conversation begins to make sense. The fact that Jesus pinpoints her sin is not commented upon, so we should beware of making it a major point. For the reader, Jesus' supernatural knowledge of this individual provides a mark of His divinity. It also gives a further emphasis to the word 'whoever' in 4:14: He knows this adulterous Samaritan woman through and through, and yet still He offers her the salvation that earlier He had offered to Nicodemus.

In verses 21–25 Jesus brings the conversation to a focus. God is seeking 'true worshippers' who will worship in spirit and in truth. The phrase 'God is spirit' controls our understanding of what Jesus means: God is divine and other; He does not have a body, but is everywhere and knows everything. True worshippers, therefore, cannot tie Him down to a place, they cannot regulate Him or control Him. He cannot be confined by a simple set of legalistic codes, nor can He be confined just to one race. He must be worshipped in spirit because He is Spirit. He should be worshipped all the time, everywhere, and by all people. And yet, as 'spirit' He has revealed Himself in 'the truth', and so He must be worshipped as He has revealed Himself, first to the Jews in the OT and now in Jesus. Now that Jesus is here, He will unite Jews and Samaritans as true worshippers who will worship in spirit and in truth. This means that religious places for worship are declared redundant – a deeply shocking concept for both Samaritan and Jew – and also that the same kind of response is demanded from both Jew and Samaritan. Notice that Jesus speaks both of an 'hour that is coming and is now here' (v. 23), and 'the hour [that] is coming' but is not yet here (v. 21). Not everything that Ezekiel promised is yet fulfilled, but it is already possible to worship the Father in spirit and truth - all we have to do is worship Jesus (9:38).

Verse 26: Jesus really is the Messiah, for the Samaritans as well as for the Jews (Ezekiel 37:15–28). More than that, this is Jesus' first 'I AM...' statement in John, as Jesus takes to Himself a name reserved for Yahweh alone. He can do so because He is the new tabernacle (1:14), the new house of God (1:51), and the new temple (2:19-22) - He is the right place to worship God; indeed, He is God.

## **27-42 HARVEST TIME!**

These verses help explain why Jesus was going to the Samaritans (vv. 1–26).

**27–30** The disciples are astonished, but the woman displays true signs of discipleship (just as Andrew and Philip had done, 1:35ff). No longer does she just think of Jesus as 'a prophet'. Now she is beginning to believe that He is the Christ. Certainly, she is full of enthusiasm and is eager to point others to Jesus.

**31–38** Jesus explains that He is doing God's work and that God's harvest has come. Like the woman and Nicodemus, the disciples are preoccupied with physical matters, but Jesus urges them to open their eyes and see God's true harvest, the approaching Samaritans. Eternal life is being offered to the Samaritans and they are already receiving it! An entirely new age, with opportunities that are altogether new, has begun. Notice Jesus' determined commitment to fulfil the work of his Father (v. 34) - a theme that will recur at 5:30, 36; 6:38-40; 8:29; 9:4; 10:37-38 and 17:4.

We have not been told of any specific commission to the disciples to minister in Samaria (although they have certainly (4:2) been active in ministry elsewhere), but Jesus understands that His disciples will share in the harvest.

**39–42** As if to prove that it really is harvest time, the Samaritans display true growing faith. They believe without a miracle, simply by hearing the woman's testimony and then Jesus' words (vv. 41-42). In this way, the woman becomes yet another 'witness' who bears 'testimony' to Jesus, like John the Baptist before her, and the Beloved

disciple after her (1:7; 19:35). Jesus really is the Saviour of the whole world – praise God!

### **43–54 THE SECOND SIGN: THE HEALING OF THE OFFICIAL'S SON**

This sign provides a closing bracket to the section that began at 2:1 (see section notes). The section closes with further proof that Jesus really is the Messiah and further evidence of His glory – He can heal the dying even at a distance. At the same time, the Galileans' failure to believe is contrasted with the Samaritans' faith, and Jesus rebukes them (in verse 48 the 'you' is plural). But the royal official does exhibit a growing faith. Observing, in this chapter, the two types of response to Jesus, we are better prepared for the stark polarisation of response that comes in chapters 5–10.

[The proverb in verse 44 refers both backwards to the ambivalent reception that Jesus got last time He was in Galilee (2:23-25) and forward to the mixed welcome He will receive this time. They are still more interested in signs and wonders than they are in receiving what Jesus came to offer. That is why Jesus rebukes them in verse 48. But, just as the section started with some who exhibited genuine belief (2:22), so now the official 'believes the word' that Jesus spoke to him (4:50). Note that the official believes before the sign is confirmed to him.]

### **Key themes**

#### **Jesus reveals Himself as the Saviour of the world:**

- Through Him the Father calls true worshippers, whatever their race or background.
- He fulfils the OT promises and will gather in the harvest, both now and at the end of time.
- He has divine omniscience and divine authority over all.

#### **Different people react to Jesus differently:**

- The disciples are perplexed and appear not to recognise that OT prophecies are being fulfilled.
- The Samaritans respond in faith.
- The Jews and the Samaritans, Nicodemus and the woman, are compared and contrasted.

#### **The nature of true faith:**

- Jesus does not make it easy to respond to Him. He is provocative and searching with everyone He meets.
- He defines 'true worship'. A true response to God means worshipping Jesus in all places and at all times (i.e. in spirit) and as He has prescribed (i.e. in truth).

Or, you could summarise (certainly 1-42) under the headings of wedding, water, worship and witness.

### **Application**

**To them then:** This passage contains confirmation that Jesus really is the Messiah. By revealing Himself as the one true Saviour of the world who calls both Jew and Samaritan to worship Him, Jesus shows Himself to be the one promised in the Old Testament. This has implications for the disciples in their relationship with others (they need to recognise that Jesus offers life and membership of the kingdom of God to all), and also in their own response to Jesus (they need to demonstrate growing faith). Are they, like the Samaritan woman, beginning to see the spiritual implications of Jesus' identity? Or are they, like the Galileans, in need of rebuke?

**To us now:** We should join with the original hearers, and John's readers, in realising the implications of what Jesus is doing. He is claiming to be the Saviour of the world, and that His harvest time has begun. He calls true worshippers from every spiritual, racial and moral background to the same response of growing faith in Himself, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world (see OT notes). The most direct application concerns our response to Him. Do we have this growing faith? Or are we, like the Galileans and other Jews that we have come across in this section, unwilling to believe in anything except the spectacle of the miracles? Again, what is our understanding of the kingdom? Is the gospel that we believe and tell others as sweet as Jesus' gospel (v. 14)? We should not rush to caveat the promise that Jesus makes in verse 14. While it is true that Jesus also promises adversity and persecution to all His followers, He assures us that those who follow Him will know true and lasting joy. We play into the hands

of heretical prosperity-gospel preachers if the Gospel we teach is all about this life.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to realise that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world who brings spiritual life to all, Gentiles as well as Jews. We should respond to Him appropriately by believing His words and coming to Him as our Saviour and Lord.

## John 5:1–10:42

The two signs in 5:1–15 and 9:1–41, together with their discourses, form the brackets for this section. Both consist of a healing performed in Jerusalem on a Sabbath. Both result in a prolonged exchange, back and forth, between the person healed and the Jews. In both cases the story ends with the Jews wanting to take violent action against Jesus: persecution and the desire to kill Him in 5:16-18 and, in 10:32, 39, attempts at stoning and arrest.

The following incidents and explanations occur in these six chapters:

5:1–18	The healing of the lame man, and controversy over the Sabbath.
5:19–47	Jesus speaks of His equality with the Father as the Son from heaven.
6:1–70	Jesus and the Passover: the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on the water, and the discourse about the bread of life. Jesus is the true manna and the genuine sacrificial Lamb of the Passover. The disciples are tested, the presumption of the Jews is exposed, and Jesus teaches that unless God draws a person, no-one can enter the kingdom.
7:1–52	Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles: the Jews are divided and confused by Jesus. They attempt to seize Him. He responds by offering living water to all who will drink.
8:12–59	Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles: Jesus continues to expose the Jews' real attitude, pointing out that those who are hostile to Him are not His people, they belong to this world. At the same time He offers light to all who follow.
9:1–41	The healing of the man born blind, and controversy over the Sabbath. Jesus explains His work: the giving of sight to the blind, and the blinding of the sighted. It takes a miracle to 'see' spiritually.
10:1–42	'I am the Good Shepherd.' Discourse about the blind man's healing. Jesus explains how He can and will save.

### Recurring themes

#### The identity of Jesus:

He is the Son who has come from the Father, He is the Passover Lamb, the true manna, the water of life, the light of the world, the Good Shepherd and the great 'I AM'.

#### The rejection of the Son by His people:

Rising opposition in 5:1–7:52 gives way to radical confrontation in 8:12-10:42. The Jews cannot accept Jesus' claim to equality with the Father – He explains that they are not His people. They cannot see their need of true manna, and they cannot stomach His 'bread', which is His death on behalf of the world. They try to seize Him. He asserts that they hate Him because they are of the world. They are simply unable to 'see' because they refuse to admit their own sin and their need of His intervention. They are shown to be utterly blind and under judgement – selfish shepherds out for selfish gain.

#### The work of the Son:

Jesus has come to give life to the spiritually dead and sight to the spiritually blind. The beneficiaries are those who respond by listening to His words and accepting His Father's works. Throughout the section Jesus continues to hold out His offer of life to all those who will accept it. He demonstrates that this offer can only be accepted by those whom the Father draws, and to whom He gives sight as they listen to His word.

At the same time, the Son has come to judge those who fail to heed His word. At the start of the section he announces that the Father has entrusted all judgement to Him (5:22), and then at the end of the section he condemns the Pharisees for thinking that they have spiritual sight apart from Him (9:39).

[Note that the two signs in chapter 6 and the sign in chapter 21 do not act as brackets. Chapter 6 is remarkably dense, summing up most of the main ideas contained in the Gospel. The two signs in this chapter highlight the significance of what is going on, stressing the true identity and mission of Jesus, and exposing the true nature of the Jews and also their destiny.]

**Application**

Having established the themes and purpose of the section, it is important that our application is in line with John's intention.

**Jesus' identity:** Jesus is the long-awaited Son of God to whom all the OT feasts and ceremonies point. He has come to deal with sin through His sacrificial death as the true Passover Lamb.

**Warning:** The response of God's historic people to God's Son is the major surprise of the section - He came to His own, but as we were warned in the Prologue, His own did not receive Him (1:11). We need to realise that the Jews are not, by birth, members of God's family. (And if even the Jews are not members of God's family by descent, then neither are the rest of us!) We need further to heed the warnings for those who, like them, will not accept God's Son. The reason the Jews reject Him is that they cannot stomach His teaching about their sin; nor can they stomach His 'hard teaching' about the necessity of dependence on His death for forgiveness. They want to follow an earthly Messiah, with an earthly agenda – a Messiah of their own making. We need to be asking ourselves whether we are following a different Christ from the Christ revealed in these chapters.

**Invitation:** At the same time as the warning, there is great hope for anyone who is prepared to accept Christ's offer of light, life, and freedom from judgement. That is, the person who will come to Him and listen to His word. Such a person is assured that they have been drawn by the Father and given sight. As they feed on Jesus, the bread of life, they will never hunger, and will enjoy the protection of the Father Himself. He or she must then listen to the Good Shepherd.

## John 5:1–47

### He came to His own

#### Context

Chapter 5 opens a new section that runs right through to 10:42. In chapters 2–4 Jesus is presented as having come from heaven to earth; He announces the arrival of His messianic kingdom and teaches about membership of it. In chapters 5–10 the issues dealt with all relate to Jesus' claim to be the Messiah and equal with God. His claims are challenged by the Jews who already consider themselves to be God's covenant people (e.g. 8:33). As we observe the move from mere reservation and hesitation about Jesus to murderous hostility, the question is, 'What will happen in this extraordinary conflict between God's Son and God's historic people who want to kill Him?'

In chapter 5 the presenting issue is the Sabbath. By setting out and expounding His claim to equality with God, with the right to give life and to judge, Jesus shows the Jews what is at stake if they reject Him. We are left wondering why they reject Him, and what will happen to them.

#### Structure

5:1–18	Proof of equality with God: the healing by the pool.
5:19–30	Claim: Jesus is the Son, equal with God, who gives life and judges.
5:31–46	Jesus' equality with God: affirmed or rejected.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### The lame shall leap!

Isaiah 35 looks forward to a day when God will rescue His people, at which time 'the lame will leap like a deer' (35:3–7). In selecting the paralytic from a group of lame, blind and paralysed people, Jesus confirms His identity as the divine Messiah and demonstrates that the time of God's rescue has come.

##### The Sabbath:

The Sabbath was the day of rest when God's people were meant to remember that they were both made by God (Exodus 20:8-11) and redeemed by God (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Both great events pointed ahead to God's new creation - the ultimate realisation of His creation purposes (Gen. 2:1-3). However, for the Jews of Jesus' day, the Sabbath had become an end in itself. The keeping of the Sabbath rules and regulations was more important than the God of the Sabbath. They should have recognised, in Jesus' healing of the paralytic, the clear sign that the 'future rest' of the messianic age was at hand; instead, they quibbled about the keeping of rules.

##### The Son of Man:

From Daniel 7 we have already seen that the term 'Son of Man' speaks of Jesus' role as king after the final judgement John has already added to that that He is the gateway to heaven (1:51; 3:15). Now further meaning is loaded into the title as we see the Son of Man as life-giver and judge.

#### Text notes

##### 1–18 PROOF OF EQUALITY WITH GOD: THE HEALING BY THE POOL

The signs in John are significant. This sign again announces the arrival of God's king and His rescue (see OT ideas). However, it also sparks off a controversy with the Jewish authorities which runs through chapters 7–10. The controversy is about Jesus' action of healing on the Sabbath, which He claims is justifiable on the basis of His equality with God (vv. 17-18). The purpose of this sign is to illustrate Jesus' claim to be the giver of spiritual life and the judge of all mankind on the Last Day. To that end, John emphasises the severity of the man's plight: he has been an invalid for 38 years; he has been there a long time; he is 'sick', unable even to put himself in the water. It is interesting that John makes no comment on the state of the man's faith – this is to emphasise that all of the initiative in the healing (and therefore in salvation) rests with Jesus. John intends us to recognise how the claims of Jesus are being substantiated.

First, the man is healed by the authoritative word of Jesus (v. 8) - here is the powerful voice of the judge on the Last Day (explained in verse 25). Secondly, the man's illness is part of the general condition of men living in a fallen world (the 'something worse' of verse 14 is almost certainly a warning of final judgement, rather than some worse illness) - here is evidence of the Son of Man's power to reverse the effects of human fallenness on the Last Day (the word translated 'get up' in verse 8 is the same as the word used for the general resurrection in v. 29). Thirdly, this all happens on the Sabbath (see OT notes) - here is the Son of Man accomplishing, for the paralytic, all that the Sabbath pointed to in terms of rest and rescue (just as the 38 years emphasise the severity of the problem, so the man's ability to pick up his mat and walk emphasises the completeness of Jesus' cure).

In the face of all this evidence, it is astonishing that the Jews should be worrying about 'work' (verses 9b-16). In verses 16-18 we see that the sign, and the resulting discourse (and particularly the claim to be equal with God) are the spark which lights the fire that results in Jesus' death. This is because Jesus' authoritative action on the Sabbath strikes at the very heart of the Jews' religion (see OT notes). As Jesus justifies His action in healing the paralytic on the Sabbath, He makes a most radical claim: God has always worked on the Sabbath, and in healing the paralytic Jesus was simply engaged in His Father's work. The Jews see this as a claim to equality with God - which it is! An idea which is strengthened by Jesus' reference to God as, 'My Father' (cf. 2:16). But His claim needs explanation. On what basis does He have the right to do this sort of thing?

(It is also worth noting that verse 17 marks a change in approach from Jesus. In verse 13, Jesus withdrew to avoid a crowd. In verse 17, however, Jesus seems to seek out controversy with the Pharisees for the first time: He 'answers' their plots by provoking them to even greater hostility.)

### **19-30 CLAIM and EXPLANATION: JESUS IS THE SON, EQUAL WITH GOD, WHO GIVES LIFE and JUDGES**

In John's Gospel this is the most important passage concerning the deity of Jesus. He Himself explains the nature of His work on earth, and the implications of His claim to be equal with God. A clear grasp of both these points will be vital to our understanding of the rest of the Gospel. The passage begins with a 'therefore' in verse 19 (translated 'so' in the ESV) and is structured around three 'Truly, truly, I say to you' sayings. The central saying, in verse 24, contains the key point of the whole chapter, the assertion that whoever responds to Jesus now, genuinely trusting His words and His Father who sent Him, has already crossed from death to life. The other two sayings mirror each other.

#### **19-23 He is the life-giver and the judge - so honour Him.**

In this passage Jesus explains the basis of His relationship with His Father. He is dependent on the Father's revelation to Him. He restricts Himself to doing only what His Father reveals. He has chosen, in obedience (v. 30), to do exactly what He sees His Father doing. This relationship of obedience and submission guarantees the Father's love. The Son's perfect dependence (in obedience) guarantees rather than limits His equality. Because He only does what He sees, so the Father loves Him completely and reveals everything to Him. This is how the Son perfectly accomplishes His Father's work and, at the same time, perfectly reveals the Father to us. ('Though Jesus is the unique Son of God (1:49) and may truly be called God (1:1, 18; 20:28) and take to Himself divine names (8:58) as well as divine rights (5:17), yet He is always submissive to His Father.' Carson, p. 250.) We are to resist the strange modern idea that there was a complete 'reciprocity' of relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son is everything that the Father is, except Father. Thus, the Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions and grants while the Son responds, obeys, performs His Father's will and receives authority from Him. They are equal, but different. The argument is that it would be impossible for the Son to work against the Father, because He is the perfect Son - sharing will and purpose with His Father.

In verse 20b, however, Jesus claims that the Father will show Him two greater 'works'. These greater works are to be shown to the Son in order that people may be amazed (v. 20b) and that they may 'honour the Son' (v. 23) as much as they honour the Father. These greater works are:

- the divine work of giving eternal life.
- the divine work of judgement.

We may be so familiar with Jesus' astonishing claims that verse 23 passes us by: whoever does not honour Him, does not honour God: 'such a statement belongs to one who is Himself to be addressed as God, or to stark insanity... Either John is supremely deluded and must be dismissed as a fool, or his witness is true and Jesus is to be ascribed the honours due God alone.' (Carson, p. 255.)

#### **24 He is the life-giver and the judge – so believe in His words and in His Father who sent Him.**

This verse emphasises both the necessity of belief and the present possibility of 'crossing over'. Having told us what sort of 'Son' He is, Jesus now promises eternal life to anyone who takes His words seriously. Anyone who hears and believes the words of God's appointed judge now may be assured of salvation both now and then (the Day of judgement)

#### **25–30 He is the life-giver and the judge – so do not be amazed!**

Verses 25–26 tell us that Jesus is able to give eternal life to the spiritually dead because He has the very life of God within Himself, and verses 28–30 give us two reasons why we should not be amazed ('marvel') at what Jesus does in the present. First, He is to be the Great Judge of the Last Day. He has already made that clear (vv. 19-23), but here He amplifies it. Secondly, His perfect relationship with His Father guarantees the perfection of His judgement, both now and then. Notice the repeated, 'An hour is coming, and is now here...' and, 'An hour is coming...' that we saw in chapter 4: Jesus is able to give eternal life in the present (v. 25) in anticipation of the general resurrection at the end of time (v. 28).

Those who do good (which in this context must mean that they hear the words of Jesus and believe the one who sent Him) have life, while those who have done evil (those who have failed to honour the Son, just as they honour the Father) will be judged.

#### **31-46 JESUS' EQUALITY WITH GOD: AFFIRMED OR REJECTED**

Jesus has made massive claims as to His own identity. Now He points to what will validate these claims. John the Baptist (vv. 33-35) was one witness, but Jesus makes it clear that the Baptist's testimony has been surpassed by the witness of His work (v. 36) and His Father's words (vv. 37–39). His work is seen in the sign of verses 1–9, which ought to be proof enough! His Father's words, contained in the scriptures, also testify to the identity of Jesus.

All this points to the reality of who Jesus is, and yet the Jews, who claim to be God's people, refuse to believe. These verses begin to explain why 'His own did not receive Him' (1:11). Jesus multiplies the negatives as He exposes the Jews' failure to believe. Their reaction to Him proves that they have never really listened to God's voice in scripture (vv. 37–40), and therefore they have never really believed Moses whom they claim to follow (vv. 45–47). Had they listened they would have understood the prophecies about Jesus and so they would have recognised Him. Also, they do not really love God wholeheartedly (vv. 41–42), and therefore they make no real effort to please Him. By their reaction to Jesus, the Jews show that they are not the people they claim to be (cf. v. 23). In short, their religion is a hypocritical farce. Stand by for chapters 6–10! What will happen in the inevitable head-on collision between God's Son and God's historic people?

#### **Key themes**

This chapter contains the fullest account of how Jesus is equal with His Father. It unlocks and explains the next four chapters and, as we shall see, it casts a long shadow: it is on account of the claims made in this chapter that the enemies of Jesus seek His death.

#### **Equality with the Father:**

- Jesus claimed it, and the Jews recognised the claim for what it was. John the Baptist, Jesus' own works and the Father's words in scripture are cited in support of this claim.
- Jesus is the life-giver and the judge. He gives eternal life to all who make a genuine response, hearing His words and believing the Father who sent Him; He judges all others.
- Equality means that Jesus is entitled to honour with the Father; no-one can honour the Father who does not

honour Jesus: true Jews love Jesus.

- Jesus is dependent on and submissive to the Father. Because of His obedience His equality is guaranteed.
- Jesus' work on earth is to judge and to give life through His word. Our response to His word, therefore, has enormous significance. This point will recur throughout the Gospel.

**The response to Jesus' claim:**

- His claim is attested by John the Baptist, by His own works, and by His Father's words in scripture.
- The Jews will not listen to God, nor seek His approval, for they do not accept the one He has sent. They will be judged for their behaviour towards Jesus, which shows that they are not God's people.

**The state of the world:**

- The state of the world is illustrated by the invalid: spiritually helpless and in need of divine intervention; apart from the work of Christ, the world is dead.
- The essence of sin is Christological: God's great desire is that the world honour His Son. Someone may appear incredibly moral, or even religious, but if they fail to heed the voice of scripture and honour the Son, they remain under divine wrath.

**Application**

We need to experience afresh the impact of Jesus' claims to equality with God, and to 'marvel' at who He is. To do this will require close study of verses 19–30.

We need to grasp that God's work on earth now is to rescue people for eternal life. This will come about when people listen to Jesus' life-giving words about Himself and His mission, and trust in them. God is at work, therefore, through Jesus' words. We need to be galvanised into taking Jesus' words more seriously as we trust and obey them ourselves, and we also need to have confidence in them as God's power for His work in the world.

The works of Jesus and the words of God in scripture testify to the truth of what Jesus is saying. We need to ask ourselves whether we pass the test of believing where the Jews failed.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus is equal to God, and that we can only honour God and have eternal life by believing in the powerful words of Jesus, the eternal life-giver and judge. The Jews did not do this and so they are not God's people.

## John 6:1–40

### He came to his own (2)

#### Context

In chapter 5 Jesus showed Himself to be equal to the Father, the one with authority to give life and to judge. In this passage we see Jesus identifying Himself as the true Redeemer who is able to give life (5:24). He is the one about whom Moses wrote. As the chapter proceeds Jesus presses home the implications of His identity and His rescue. As He explains the nature of His rescue operation, those who appear to be following Him start to fall away. Eventually we shall see that even some of His disciples are unable to accept what Jesus says about His work of rescue.

This chapter answers two of the big questions raised in chapter 5:  
 Why are the Jews stumbling?  
 What has God's Son come to do now – to give life or to judge?

Also in chapter 5, Jesus claimed that the Scriptures bore witness about Him (5:39). That point is now illustrated by a succession of allusions to the Exodus - Jesus is the one about whom His Father bore witness in the Old Testament.

#### Structure

6:1–21	The signs: evidence that Jesus has come to perform God's rescue.
6:22–40	Why did the crowds follow Jesus? Motives exposed, signs explained, and an invitation extended.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### The Exodus:

God rescued His people from slavery to the Egyptians, leading them out of Egypt and into the land He had promised to their forefathers. The rescue was accompanied by signs and wonders, of which one of the most crucial was the Passover (described in Exodus 12) when God passed through Egypt in judgement, striking down every first-born among the Egyptians. There then followed a period of testing, trial, and also further miracles, as the Israelite nation wandered around the wilderness before being brought into the Promised Land. The whole Exodus period was key to Israel's understanding of herself as a nation belonging to God, and of her God as a God who rescues.

Around the time of the exile, when Israel was driven away from the Promised Land, God promised a new rescue which would take the form of a new Exodus under a new leader (Isaiah 11:15–16). Since then the Jews had been longing for God to bring about this promised rescue. At the time of the Exodus, God had provided certain key events which enabled Israel to look back and remember the character of their God as Rescuer:

*The Passover feast:* This was an annual festival instituted by God to ensure that His people remembered the night of escape. (More on this next week.)

*Manna:* The miraculous provision of bread – called 'manna' – sustained the Israelites day by day. It also served other purposes of God, reminding His people of their rescue and testing them, to see whether they really would continue to depend on their Rescuer alone, by keeping His commands (Exodus 16:4).

*The Prophet:* In Deuteronomy 18:15–18, God promised Israel a new prophet 'like Moses' who would lead them as Moses had done.

*Walking on water:* The rescue of the Exodus involved two miraculous partings of water: (i) Moses parted the Red Sea, so that the Israelites could cross over safely, and (ii) Joshua parted the River Jordan, in order to bring them into the Promised Land. There is an allusion to this in Isaiah 11:15.

This chapter reveals that Jesus is God Himself, come to accomplish a new Exodus for His true people; He is the Bread of Life; those who feed on Him know great satisfaction and security.

### Psalm 78:

This long psalm, containing many references to the Exodus and the desert wanderings, contrasts the Israelites' stubborn, unbelieving behaviour with the continued goodness and mercy of God. The reference to this psalm in verse 31 is highly ironic.

### Text notes

#### 1–21 THE SIGNS: EVIDENCE THAT JESUS HAS COME TO PERFORM GOD'S RESCUE

Chapter 5:24-30 taught us that Jesus is the life-giver, but left us wondering how He is going to give that life and what exactly He is going to do now – give life, or judge? This passage is designed to teach that Jesus has come in the first instance as God's promised Rescuer - the giver of life - verse 33. The events of chapter 6 echo the events of the Exodus and provide evidence that Jesus is the one about whom Moses wrote (cf. 5:46). First, John tells us that it is Passover time (v. 4), so the context, we realise, is one of heightened expectation, that God's promises of rescue for His people will soon be realised. [In the broader context of John, there are three Passovers - 2.13; 6.4 and the final one from 11.55 onwards. The three are linked: it is through Jesus' death that He is able to provide the wedding banquet of chapter 2 and the rescue of chapter 6.]

Secondly, in this context Jesus feeds the crowd miraculously. Notice that there is no mention of the crowds' hunger and that the initiative to feed the crowd comes solely from Jesus - He is the sovereign host who decides graciously to provide for His people. The sign itself is impressive - John twice tells us that the crowd is 'large' (verses 2 and 5), and Philip tells us that 6 months' salary (a denarius was the amount paid to a day labourer for a day's work) would not be enough to give each of the crowd even a little bread. Then the inadequacy of the boy's lunch is highlighted (v9), before the actual size of the crowd (v. 11), the abundance of Jesus' provision (each had their fill, v. 12) and the scale of the leftovers (v13) is announced. (There are twelve baskets of leftovers because the rescue that Jesus provides is sufficient for all Israel.) The people are quite clear that this demonstration of creative power shows Jesus to be 'the Prophet who is to come into the world' (v. 15); they have made the link between Jesus and Moses, the one through whom God rescued and provided.

Thirdly, Jesus later walks on the water of Lake Galilee. At first glance, verses 16-21 appear to break the flow of the narrative. In fact, Jesus is providing immediate confirmation to His disciples that He really is the deliverer of Isaiah 11, who will enable men to cross the waters in sandals. Jesus cannot be confined to conventional human expectations (v. 14, v. 15), because He is in fact the divine 'I AM' - Yahweh of Exodus 3 (I AM is picked up as a title for God in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:18; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12). See also Job 9.8 where God 'tramples the waves of the sea' and Psalm 77.19. Although the crowds will be addressed in verses 22-59, the disciples will be the audience of verses 60-71. Will anyone realise the full significance of who Jesus is and what He has come to do?

The crowd are obviously expecting a Rescuer and they appear to have identified Jesus correctly. But John's comment in verse 2 about the reason why the crowd are following, and Jesus' withdrawal in verse 15, leave us slightly uneasy. We have already been told that people who respond to Jesus purely on the basis of the miracles they have witnessed are highly suspect (2:23–25). John tells us twice (vv. 2, 14) that the crowd are responding on that basis. Verse 15 gives us a partial clue as to what is wrong: their expectation of the nature of His rescue seems to be unsatisfactory. Jesus does not want to be made king by force, so He withdraws.

Verse 6 shows that the disciples, as well as the crowd, need to make a response to Jesus. Just as the manna in the wilderness was a test for God's people (see OT notes), so the feeding of the five thousand will be some sort of test for His disciples, to see whether they have begun to trust Jesus' teaching. In giving a purely physical answer (and so becoming a part of the misunderstanding motif that we have witnessed already in the Gospel), Philip fails the test.

[Commentators have repeatedly tried to draw a link between the events of John 6 and the Lord's supper. No such link is in the text - this is bread and fish, not bread and wine!]

## **22–40 WHY DID THE CROWDS FOLLOW JESUS? MOTIVES EXPOSED, SIGNS EXPLAINED, AND AN INVITATION EXTENDED**

In the dialogue of this passage a number of themes are dealt with simultaneously. The best way to tackle them is to focus on them one at a time. (Although these notes are set out thematically, notice as you read the dialogue that the crowds' questions or comments, which become increasingly negative, are used to tee up the next aspect of Jesus' teaching. Notice also that most of the dialogue can be seen as a commentary on Jesus' key saying in verse 27.)

### **Motives exposed.**

Verse 26 presents us with a problem. In verses 2 and 14 John told us that the crowds were following Jesus because they had seen the miraculous signs. In verse 26 Jesus tells the people that they are following Him not because they saw the signs, but because they had had their fill. The problem is resolved when we realise that Jesus is criticising them for not having fully seen the significance of the sign. They have seen something but not everything. One commentator puts it this way: 'instead of seeing in the bread, the sign; they see in the sign, only the bread ...' They are looking for a rescue and a rescuer, but Jesus' analysis of them is that they are looking for a different type of rescue to the one He has come to bring. Their agenda is entirely materialistic, so they want a political king (v. 15) who will meet their materialistic needs (v. 26), through their religious works (v. 28).

Their motives are further exposed in verses 28–30, when they ask what they need to do. Jesus tells them to believe in the one God has sent, but their reply immediately reveals that they are willing to do this only if He conforms to their ideas of what a Messiah should be. His analysis of their condition is shown to be accurate in verse 31: He has just done a miracle such as Moses did, but they do not see the significance of it and will not believe His claims, so they ask for another miraculous sign! They are so obsessed with their own ideas of what the Rescuer will be like, and what He will do, that when Jesus comes they do not recognise Him. He summarises their failure in verse 36 - they are impressed by the filling of the stomachs but they are still not listening to His word.

### **Signs explained.**

At the same time as He exposes the wrong motives of the crowd, Jesus describes the nature of the rescue He is going to provide. He does this in terms of the Father's 'work' (vv. 27ff), the Father's gift (vv. 32ff), and the Father's will (vv. 38ff). The Father's 'work' – in other words, what the Father requires – is to believe in the Son of Man, who provides food that endures to eternal life (v. 27). The Father's gift is 'the true bread from heaven', Jesus Himself. And the Father's will is that those whom He gives to Jesus should never perish but be saved. In replying to the crowd, Jesus identifies the nature of the bread they should be looking for: not ordinary bread at all, but the man whom the Father has sent from heaven and who will give spiritual life to all.

By verses 35–36 Jesus has taken the crowd beyond their focus on manna, showing that manna was only ever intended to point beyond itself, both backwards in time, to their rescue by God, and forwards, to Jesus who will accomplish God's new rescue on God's terms.

### **An invitation extended.**

Having seen the crowd's failure to understand, we may be wondering whether anyone at all is going to be rescued. But in verse 35 Jesus extends an invitation to all who will come, urging them to come to Himself and be satisfied. Note the generosity of the offer, in contrast to the peevishness of the crowd's response in verse 41. Despite the increasing negativity of the Jews and the sluggish response of the disciples, verses 37–40 assure us that the Father is indeed interested in rescuing. He is the sovereign Saviour, and His rescue will be accomplished through the perfectly obedient Son (5:19ff).

## **Key themes**

- **Jesus is the divine Rescuer who fulfils His Father's will and rescue plan.**
  - He fulfils OT types and prophecies – indeed, He far surpasses them.

- He really is God's Rescuer; He has His Father's approval.
  - His Father's plan is to give eternal life, which comes only through Jesus.
  - He continues to offer abundant life to all who will come on His terms.
  - His Father's will is to draw His people to His Son who will keep them for eternity.
- **Jesus' miracles and words are a test for the people, just as the manna was in the OT; the contrast between the two agendas, the will of God and the will of humanity, is exposed.**
    - The people's motives and will are exposed. A rescuer who conforms to their image of the Messiah is what they want, not God's genuine Rescuer with His agenda of eternal issues.
    - The people are only really concerned with earthly things. They want instant and physical satisfaction now, hence their insatiable desire for miracles.
    - In the end they are not interested in what Jesus is doing; they do not want His sort of rescue because they want to remain 'in control' of God.

### **Application**

**To them then:** The Jews were clearly expecting a rescue. As God's people they were therefore on the right tracks. However, it rapidly becomes apparent that they are looking for the wrong sort of rescue. Their concern is entirely for something physical to meet their immediate needs. They have missed the point of the lessons to be learned from the Exodus, failing to recognise the events that the Exodus foreshadowed (i.e. God's provision of abundant eternal life through Jesus). He makes it clear that the rescue they need, the rescue that He has come to provide, is eternal life. He will not be influenced by their agenda. Instead, He continues to make His offer to anyone who is prepared to come to Him. Those who come to Him receive both satisfaction (v. 35) and security (vv. 37-40).

Their mistake is fundamentally Christological: the passage begins with the encouraging realisation that Jesus is the eschatological Prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18, but ends with the crowds (and to a lesser extent the disciples) clinging to human categories and failing to recognise Jesus as the divine Rescuer Himself.

**To us now:** This passage presents us with the challenge of realising just how great Jesus is, and then accepting Him on His terms. It presents a real challenge to the world, which is not interested in God's spiritual rescue but is preoccupied with present material needs (social gospel, political gospel, God to sort out immediate problems). There is also the challenge to the church, preoccupied as it is with present material concerns – power in this world, status, health, wealth, prosperity. Often the church is only interested in miraculous signs and in forcing Jesus' Spirit to meet an earthly agenda. And frequently it shapes its evangelistic message to the world's felt needs rather than its real needs as identified by Jesus. My life is challenged too: do my prayers and requests to God reflect my present needs, rather than being shaped according to His agenda and His future kingdom, with Him in control?

In the midst of this challenge, we must not however miss the encouragement. Jesus really is the divine Rescuer who has come to provide secure, abundant, satisfying life to all those who will come to Him.

### **The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus has come as God's Rescuer to bring eternal life, and that we need to look to Him to provide that sort of rescue, not a rescue of our own design.

## John 6:41–71

### He came to His own (3)

#### Context

Chapter 5 raised several major questions. First, why are the Jews stumbling? Secondly, what has God's Son come to do now – to give life or to judge? Thirdly, what then will happen to the Jews? Last week we saw the first two questions being answered, as Jesus exposed the Jews' motives in looking for a rescuer, and explained what it means for Him to be 'the bread of life'. This week we see those answers developed. He explains how it is that He is the 'bread of life' – His origin and His death are central to His explanation.

Jesus continues to expose the Jews' unwillingness to accept His offer of life on His terms. They will not 'eat this bread' (i.e. they will not believe) because the ideas of His divine origin and of His death are deeply offensive. And they will not accept that they are sinful. Verse 63 is the key verse which summarises Jesus' response to the argument: the Jews' best works are useless and a divine rescue is needed if they are to have life. He begins to provide an answer to the big question of what will happen in the conflict between God's people and God's Son, by teaching us that the Father will give Him all whom the Father draws, all who listen and learn. This third question is not fully answered in the chapter but is further developed in chapters 7 and 8.

#### Structure

The structure is based around the response to two 'hard teachings'.

6:41–51 Jesus' supernatural origin: 'How can He say "I came down from heaven"?'

6:52–59 The scandal of the cross: 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?'

6:60–71 The response: 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' Division among those who will not accept that 'the Spirit gives life but the flesh counts for nothing'.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### The Passover feast:

This was an annual festival instituted by God to ensure that His people remembered their miraculous rescue from Egypt under Moses' leadership. On the night of the Israelites' escape from Egypt, each family had had to kill a lamb and daub its blood on the lintels of their door, marking out the family as one that belonged to God. The lamb's death protected the family's eldest son from the wrath of God's angel, who came that night in judgement on the Egyptians (Exodus 12:1–13). Every year, at the time of the feast, the killing and eating of the Passover lamb would remind God's people of this event. The mention of 'eating flesh and blood' in connection with the Passover would immediately conjure up images of this substitutionary lamb, sacrificed on behalf of the eldest son. The blood of the lamb had marked out God's people so that they were safe.

##### Grumbling:

one of the most notable characteristics of the Jews during the Exodus period was their constant refusal to trust God for their rescue. Instead of trusting they grumbled, against Moses and against God (Exodus 16:2, 7, 12).

##### 'They will all be taught by God':

The people of God have always been set apart by the one great fact that they possess, listen to, and obey the Word of the Lord. This quote from Isaiah 54:13 pictures the people of God, redeemed by the Suffering Servant, standing in God's presence and being taught by His word of truth. It is a picture of the true family of God, with God forever. The point is that those who truly belong to God will listen to God's words about Jesus.

**Text notes****41–51 ‘HOW CAN HE SAY “I CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN”?’ THE ‘HARD TEACHING’ OF JESUS’ SUPERNATURAL ORIGIN**

The central features of this passage are the Jews’ unwillingness to believe that Jesus is ‘from heaven’ (the question in v. 42 summarises Jesus’ sayings in verses 33, 35 and 38) and Jesus’ insistence that He is from God. How can someone whose earthly origins are known claim to have a heavenly origin? The Jews insist that an earthly perspective is sufficient to categorise Jesus. Thus the lines are being drawn ever clearer between Jesus and the Jews: misunderstanding is gradually giving way to open hostility and conflict.

**The Father’s drawing work.** Verses 43–46 provide an explanation as to why the Jews do not believe: coming to the Son for life is entirely dependent upon the Father’s ‘drawing work’. But notice how divine sovereignty and human responsibility are interwoven: the quote from Isaiah 54:13 demonstrates that the true people of God have always been those who willingly listen to, and learn from, His word. The Father does His ‘drawing work’ through His revelation. So, it is by paying attention to the Father’s word that people are drawn to His Son. (See also v. 65.) It is as true to say that the Jews are culpably refusing to listen to the Word of God as to say that the Father is not drawing them. They are responsible because they have chosen to reject Jesus’ words. But at the same time, the only one who can enable someone to listen to the words of Jesus is His Father.

**The Jews’ presumption.** The Jews refuse to listen and learn, and so they do not come and receive the life that the Son offers. The negatives in this passage (the two ‘no-one’s’) provide the explanation of this and also expose the problem: the religious Jews are presumptuous because they assume that they already have all they need. Jesus emphasises that no-one can come unless ... and that no-one has seen except ... (vv. 44, 46). The Jews need to learn the lesson of verses 29–31, that their works, and the bread Moses gave them, have failed to bring life, for ‘the flesh counts for nothing’ and only the Spirit can give true life (v. 63). In verses 47–51 Jesus exposes their presumption even more by pointing out that the manna eaten by the Jews’ forefathers was insufficient to provide life; something else must be required.

**Jesus’ supernatural origin and mission.** Jesus points to Himself as that ‘something else’, the only one who has seen the Father, and the true ‘bread of life’. He begins to explain how the bread He provides is superior. The bread is His ‘flesh’ which will be given on behalf of the world, as a substitutionary sacrifice; He is the Passover Lamb who dies to bring life (see OT notes).

**52-59 ‘HOW CAN THIS MAN GIVE US HIS FLESH TO EAT?’ THE ‘HARD TEACHING’ OF THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS**

At Passover time, mention of eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking His blood in connection with ‘this bread’ would tie Jesus’ death to the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb (see OT notes). While the Jews cannot work out what Jesus is saying in verse 51, He replies by stressing the essential nature of His death for the obtaining of eternal life. His death is vital to the work of rescue.

**Negatively,** Jesus insists that unless a person depends on His death they have no life (v. 53). Again He stresses that the manna provided in the desert was insufficient to give life (v. 58). The Jews must realise that their presumption – that they are acceptable to God because they were born Jews – is fatal.

**Positively,** Jesus teaches that His death achieves the eternal life that is lacking. First, anyone at all (i.e. ‘the world’, verse 51) who does ‘feed’ on Jesus’ death will be rescued and given eternal life, for this bread is truly life-giving (vv. 54, 55). Secondly, anyone at all who ‘feeds’ on Jesus’ death will have an intimate personal relationship with Jesus, who takes up residence and lives within a person (v. 56). By the end of this passage (vv. 57–59) the development of the ‘bread types’ is complete. The chapter began with the feeding of the five thousand and physical bread. Jesus has shown that physical, material food is entirely insufficient to meet the Jews’ real need, which is for eternal life. This need can only be met by God coming to earth and giving His life on behalf of the world. The Jews need to stop being so presumptuous, and to start depending on Him and on His solution to their real problem. Or as Jesus put it in v. 27, they need to stop working for food that spoils and to start working for the food that endures to eternal<sup>P</sup> .

The big question throughout the passage is, What does Jesus mean by 'eating', or 'feeding on', His flesh? That question is answered by verses 35, 40, 47 and 63. Throughout the chapter 'feeding' has been a metaphor for 'believing' His message. His message has been shown to include the prediction of His death on behalf of the world. The very choice of 'bread' to describe Himself is revealing: not only does it recall the manna of Exodus, but it was the staple food of the day. Someone without bread cannot live - Jesus is equally essential for true, eternal life. (On the question of whether this passage can be taken as referring to Holy Communion, Carson, p. 297, is excellent.)

### **60-71 'THIS IS HARD TEACHING. WHO CAN ACCEPT IT?'**

Up to now it has been the Jews who grumble. Now the disciples are unable to take Jesus' teaching. The 'hard thing' to accept is His supernatural origin and His death as the Passover Lamb. They can't handle the idea of God coming to earth in human form, or of following a dying Messiah. These ideas 'scandalise' them, or cause them to trip up. Jesus criticises them for being unable to see His divine nature and divine mission. He has come from heaven to die and He will return to heaven (v. 62 - cf. 16:28). If the first idea horrifies them, they'll never grasp the second!

In verse 63 Jesus explains the whole chapter by showing that the Spirit is the one who will bring spiritual life. The Spirit brings this life through the words of Jesus. It is a great error either to drive a wedge between the Spirit and the words of Jesus, or to expect God's Spirit to work apart from Jesus' words. The eternal life that Jesus offers can come no other way than by His Spirit through His word, for all our human efforts are useless - 'the flesh counts for nothing.' (The word 'flesh' is used here in a different sense from that in previous verses; here it means earthly understanding and earthly life.) The disciples have still not grasped the lessons of 3:1-8.

By verse 66 it becomes clear that some who have been following Jesus as 'disciples' are, like the Jews, only interested in following Jesus on their own terms; they have failed to see Him as He really is, God's true Rescuer. It is now even clearer than before why Jesus does not entrust Himself to people who believe only on the basis of miracles (cf. 2:23-25). When Jesus asks the Twelve if they too want to leave, Peter answers. His reply is the model response to Jesus at this stage in John: we are to understand that Jesus is indeed the Holy one of God, and to cling to His words in order that by them we may have life (e.g. 5:24).

Within the mounting narrative of John, verses 70-71 tell us both the means by which Jesus will eventually die and that He will not be surprised when it happens - Jesus will be in control of His 'hour' when it comes.

## **Key themes**

### **Jesus is God's Rescuer**

- He alone has seen God, He alone has come from God, He alone can give eternal life.
- He will accomplish God's rescue of 'the world' by giving His life on our behalf.
- His offer of life is extended to 'everyone who listens to the Father', and 'whoever' eats His flesh.
- His offer of life is explained as an intimate union with Him now and certain rescue by Him at the Resurrection.
- Rescue, or eternal life, is only available to those who 'eat His flesh'. In verse 56, those who 'eat His flesh' are described as 'remaining in Him'; in chapter 15, those who remain in His word 'remain in Him' - the parallel is deliberate. It is those who abide in the Word of Jesus' death who last the course.
- 'Eating Jesus' flesh' is a metaphor for believing in His death on our behalf.

### **The Jews and the disciples grumble**

- The idea of Jesus' death is deeply offensive both to the Jews and to some of the disciples; they cannot accept Jesus' assertion that 'the flesh counts for nothing'. They are proud and presumptuous and will not accept God's solution to their problem. They cannot see beyond their own earthly agenda, nor can they see their need. They fall away once they realise that this Messiah is going to die.
- The Twelve, represented by Peter, recognise Jesus' identity and also their need.

**Predestination**

- Only God can enable a person to come to Jesus on His terms.
- A person can only come to God if he or she comes to Jesus and learns from Him.

**Application**

**To them then:** The shock of this passage, to Jesus' audience and to John's readers, is on account of the nature of Jesus' mission and also the exclusivity of it. He is the Bread of Life because He is going to die on behalf of the world. No-one else can provide God's rescue because no-one else has come down from heaven and no-one else has seen God. Jesus exposes the failure of all past systems to achieve a real rescue that lasts, and points to Himself and His death as the only and essential solution for anyone who wants to be rescued.

Once again, like last week, this teaching proves highly offensive, not just to the Jews but also to His disciples. They are not ready to follow a Messiah who will die; this prospect proves to be a stumbling block to them. Nonetheless, Jesus continues to extend His offer of life to all who will believe. The benefits are enormous: intimate union with Him now and then (cf. 5:24).

**To us now:** Are we like the Jews, people who grumble? Are we presumptuous, or are we scandalised by a suffering Messiah? Are we, like Peter, holding fast to Jesus' word (especially about His death), even when it is hard to bear? It is all too easy to impose alternative agendas onto Jesus, and make Him into a 'here-and-now, political, social, me-and-my-immediate-needs Messiah'. If we are tempted to do this, it is because we have failed to see the seriousness of our sin, and our urgent need of His divine, substitutionary rescue. If we are dependent on His death for eternal life, then the benefits, both now and then, are immeasurable.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that following Jesus means believing in His death as the central point of His rescue mission, without which we have no hope of life.

## John 7:1–52

### His own did not receive Him

#### Context

In chapter 7 Jesus returns to Jerusalem where He finds hatred, on account of His healing on the Sabbath (vv. 20–25). This fact helps us see how all of these chapters are part of a major section which began at chapter 5, with the description of that healing. In chapter 6 Jesus claimed to be the long-promised Rescuer to whom the OT festivals pointed and for whom God's people should have been waiting. However, God's people 'grumbled' at the kind of Rescuer He claimed to be. They were scandalised at His exposure of their sin and at God's solution (6:63). The questions left in the air are, is He really God's rescuer? And, are they really in need of this sort of rescue?

This is the background to the hostility, confusion and division that runs right through chapter 7 and into chapter 8, as the confrontation continues between God's historic people and God's Son. Set against the backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles, chapters 7 and 8 note the increasing threat to Jesus' life (7:1, 19, 25, 30, 32, 33; 8:37, 40, 59 - each amplifying the initial threat of 5.18). In answer to the second question, chapter 7 sees a development in the exposure of God's people's motives and hearts. Verse 7 sums it up: the Jews hate Jesus and are therefore of the world. The next two chapters will see a rapid downward spiral among the Jews as Jesus exposes the true nature of even the most religious human heart. In connection with the first question, the discussion about Jesus' 'right time' is very important. Jesus' words and actions demonstrate that He is in complete control of all that is going on, that He is working to an agenda specifically laid down by His Father, and that He has come down from above to accomplish a task among God's people. At 'the right time' He will return to His Father and fulfil the Rescuer's promise, namely the pouring out of the life-giving Spirit of God upon the people of God (see verse 39).

#### Structure

7:1–10	Setting the scene: Jesus has 'a time', and knows when that time is. As He heads towards it He is always in control of His agenda. The world remains hostile, hating Him for exposing its sin.
7:11–31	He is from above: they are of the world.
7:32–52	He is returning to His Father: they cannot come to His Father.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### Feast of Tabernacles:

This feast dominates 7:1-10:22 (where the focus changes to the Feast of Dedication). The Feast of Tabernacles was a harvest festival, a time of great joy and celebration. During the eight day feast all Israel gathered in Jerusalem and camped in 'booths' or 'tabernacles' made from branches. This was to remind the people that they had lived in tents in the wilderness during the time of God's rescue. During the feast the two themes of water and light played important parts. The people looked back to the past, remembering God's provision of water from the rock in the desert, and also His presence in the pillar of cloud or light that went ahead of them to lead them. For that reason, on the first seven days of the Feast, the celebrants marched to the Pool of Siloam to collect water, and danced through the night in the court of women - which was specially illuminated for the occasion.

At the same time the water and light themes pointed forward to the future, to the time when God's Spirit would be poured out, as promised, in the last days. The prophet Zechariah, in the period after the exile, used the images as he urged God's people to look forward to a future great Feast of Tabernacles when all God's promises to His people would be fulfilled, through an act of cleansing, restoration and judgement, and His sovereignty over the whole world would be established (Zechariah 13:1; 14:6– 21). The feast culminated in a large gathering on the last day, an opportunity that Jesus uses to maximum effect.

#### Text notes

##### 1-10 SETTING THE SCENE

This introductory passage serves the important function of showing us the background to the action in chapters

7 to 10. The failure of Jesus' brothers to believe in Him reminds us of the 'hard teaching' and the 'scandals' of chapter 6. Ch 2:12 suggests that Jesus' brothers had at the very least been present at his first miracle, but still they do not believe. Even those closest to Jesus want Him to be championed by the people and to have a wide public ministry. The brothers are aware of the miracles but have failed to realise the nature of Jesus' mission - He is not here for public acclaim. They act in whatever way seems right at the time (v. 6), but He has come to obey the will of His Father. We realise that the questions left in the air at the end of chapter 6 – Is Jesus really 'the Christ'? Are God's historic people really so completely wrong? – are still very much in the frame at the start of chapter 7.

Verses 7–8 are key verses that begin to explain the answers to the two questions. Verse 7 explains the reason for the Jews' rejection of Jesus and summarises the shocking failure of 'God's people'. Their hatred of Jesus shows them to be part of 'the world' that is in rebellion against God, by virtue of its natural human tendency to reject God (see 1:10). This verse introduces the exposure of God's historic people, a theme that continues through to chapter 10. (Jesus' analysis of His brothers, that they too belong to the world, at least at this stage, underlines the seriousness and universality of human sin. There is no favouritism in God's family.)

Verse 8 raises again the theme of timing which will run through chapters 7 and 8. Jesus begins to explain what He means by His 'right time', and later we shall see that He has been sent by His Father, and will return to His Father, after accomplishing all that God's true people should have been looking forward to. Jesus' refusal to comply with His brothers' request, to make a public spectacle of going up to the Feast with them, is because He is working to His Father's agenda, in obedience to His Father's will (5:19). He will select the 'hour', not them. He needs to be at the Feast on the last day, so that His offer of 'streams of living water' (v. 38) may have maximum impact, but He cannot afford to spend too much time in the public eye because of the Jews' plan to arrest and kill Him. This matter of 'timing' highlights Jesus' total control of the situation, even amidst the complete confusion and the conflicting claims that await Him in Jerusalem. (We should not be troubled by an apparent change of mind by Jesus in verse 10. Twice already, Jesus has rebuffed an initial suggestion to which He later acceded (2:3-10; 4:47-53). He will do so again in 11:3-15. On this occasion, he will go to the Feast, but He will go on His Father's terms, because it is not this Feast, but the Passover, at which His hour will finally come.)

### **11-31 HE IS FROM ABOVE: THEY ARE OF THE WORLD**

This passage, with its first mention of 'widespread whispering' (literally grumbling – in the Greek it is the same word as in 6:41), contains three main areas of material.

#### **The exposure of the Jews:**

This continues in the round of questions and answers that follows, as Jesus testifies to the real attitudes and plans of the 'people of God'. Briefly, He explains in three steps the reasons behind their refusal to recognise Him: they choose not to do God's will and so have no hope of recognising Him (vv. 16–19); in fact, they so misunderstand God's law as to be able to make only human judgments from a human perspective (vv. 21–24). Their claim to know God is therefore shown to be as false as their hypocritical religion (vv. 28–29). Jesus' logic is ruthless and His assessment of the Jews is confirmed by their action – they are plotting murder, despite claiming to be God's people (vv. 25, 30 and 32), and so they are making a sham of the Sabbath. Indeed, their hostility is so great, that it is now dangerous even to speak openly about Jesus (v. 13).

#### **The identity of Jesus:**

In contrast to worldly behaviour, Jesus' integrity is absolute: He keeps God's law because He seeks God's glory and not His own (vv. 16–19) - that is why He shuns the sort of publicity hungry ministry that continues to draw so many today. He fulfils God's law by healing the whole person, in anticipation of the Sabbath rest (vv. 21–24). He knows God because He is from God and was sent by God (vv. 28–29). His teaching is not His own but from God - marking Him out as the true Prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15-22). The major emphases in this passage are the identity and mission of Jesus - He is from God (v. 29), and has come to do His Father's will.

#### **The response of the crowds:**

Jesus' teaching in verses 12–31 is met with hostility, as some try to kill Him (v. 19) or seize Him (v. 30), confusion, as some try to work out what is going on (vv. 25–27), widespread whispering (vv. 12–13), and a kind of faith (v. 31).

The charge that Jesus is 'leading the people astray' (v. 12) denotes Jesus as a false prophet (Deut. 13:5, 10, 13). The audience for Jesus' words are variously described as 'the Jews' (v11), 'the crowd' (v20), and 'some of the people of Jerusalem (v. 25) - the confusion deliberately highlights the confused and mixed response to Jesus' ministry.

## **32-52 HE IS RETURNING TO HIS FATHER: THEY CANNOT COME TO HIS FATHER**

### **32–36 Exposure of the Jews:**

Jesus is on His way back to the Father. Time is running short for the Jews to respond to Him. A time is coming when they will no longer be able to find Him and His offer of life, and nor will they be able to come to His Father. His greatness comes not only from the fact that He has come from the Father, but also from the fact that He is going back to the Father (cf. 16:28). The Jews still fail to understand what Jesus is saying. Note the irony of verse 35. In verse 32 comes the first mention of the Jews taking active steps to arrest Jesus – the pace is hotting up!

### **37–39 Jesus' mission:**

Even as the Jews fail to understand what Jesus is saying, He makes His offer to the world, to the 'anyone' and the 'whoever' who believes. This offer, coming at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, is a claim to be the fulfilment of all that the Feast signified, all that it pointed back to and all that it anticipated. Jesus is the one true Rescuer who will provide the outpouring of the Spirit of God. The Spirit's rich abundance of life will be like a self-replenishing stream in the believer; this will be the 'eternal life' that has been spoken of from the start of the Gospel. But note the key reference to Jesus' 'time' which John provides in his interpretative comment (v. 39). Once again we are being shown that Jesus is the true Christ who has been sent by His Father to accomplish a specific mission at a specific time and through a specific action.

Amidst all the division and confusion Jesus stands firm, continuing to develop His teaching that He has come to provide eternal life for God's people. As He teaches it becomes increasingly evident that without Him there is no hope of life, but that with Him life is possible.

### **40–52 The people's response:**

The people respond to this teaching in a whole variety of ways: they are divided, confused, and amazed. Their leaders deny that Jesus is the Christ. The shock of this chapter lies in the gradual and sustained exposure of the Jews. They are shown to be God's enemies who do not, in fact, listen to Moses. (Their failure to see in Jesus the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles is another example of the failure of 5:39.) They may appear to be religious people, serving God, but their reaction to Jesus and their attempt to arrest Him give them away. They are evil people. Of course, there is nothing new about this. It has always been God's verdict on His people that they cannot keep the Law and that they need rescue. The remarkable thing is that Jesus continues to offer to rescue anyone who will believe in Him. And it appears that there are some who are beginning to respond in genuine faith.

## **Key themes**

### **The exposure of the hypocrisy and failure of God's people**

- They cannot recognise Jesus, for the following reasons:
  - They do not keep Moses' law.
  - They hate Jesus for saying that they are evil.
  - They have failed to understand the Law and so can only make ungodly human judgments. They do not know God, and they will not go to Him.

### **The offer of Jesus to provide rescue as He steadily pursues His God-given mission**

- He is the one from God who is going back to God.  
He alone can provide the cleansing and spiritual life that His questioners need; this He does through the giving of the Spirit.
- He is only here for a short time. He demands a response.
- His offer is to 'anyone' who will believe, and to 'whoever' will believe, in Himself.

**The polarisation of those who would call themselves God's people** as they respond in confusion, denial, hostility, and also faith.

**Application**

**To them then:** The confusion, division and growing polarisation recorded in the chapter demonstrate how Jesus' claims applied to the people He was speaking to. He exposed the failure of the most religious people imaginable (like Nicodemus). In spite of all their claims and pretence, they did not know God. John's inclusion of Jesus' explanatory comment in verse 7 makes it all clear: 'it [the world] hates me because I testify that what it does is evil'. John's descriptive comments also help us to see the points that he wants his original readers to realise. God's people appear to be unable to respond to this uncomfortable Messiah in repentance and faith. They are not God's people. At the same time, Jesus purposefully pursues His God-given mission. He is God's Son, sent from God and returning to God. Those who turn to Him will have eternal life.

**To us now:** The application to us now is parallel. The shock of the passage, for us as for the Jews, is that Jesus is an uncomfortable Messiah who exposes the hypocrisy of all human beings towards God. Even the most religious people need His rescue. This has relevance for us, both in our own attitude to Jesus and in what we should expect when we teach the 'real Jesus' to our friends. We should expect to find confusion, division, and polarisation. We should expect hatred of Jesus from people to whom we bring the gospel, however religious they may appear to be. And yet we should realise that His response to that rejection is to continue to extend His offer of rescue. Therefore we should be unmoved as we continue to hold out His offer of life. More personally, we are to rejoice in the salvation that Jesus came to bring.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that even the most religious Jews are 'of the world' and are therefore evil, whereas Jesus is from God and is pursuing His God-given mission to bring life to God's people. His mission will therefore meet with a variety of responses.

## John 8:12–59

### Children born not of natural descent

#### Context

Chapter 8:12 follows directly from 7:52: Jesus is still at the Feast of Tabernacles speaking to the crowds and once again He extends His offer of salvation beyond the hostile Jews to the 'world' and to 'whoever' will follow Him. In chapter 7 God's historic people appeared to be divided on account of God's Son and many rejected Him. Jesus had already explained this rejection in chapter 6, by exposing the fact that the Jews were concerned with earthly priorities and an earthly Messiah.

In the first half of chapter 8 He reiterates the fact that those who are hostile are from this world and therefore cannot follow Him. But the second half of the chapter contains a far greater shock: even the faith of those 'many' who appear to accept Him turns out to be phoney. These are the people who pick up stones to stone Him. The shock is this: God's historic people seem incapable of expressing genuine, growing faith, the faith that would lead them to acknowledge their sinfulness and accept Jesus' Messiahship (cf. 2:23ff). They neither listen to Moses (ch. 7) nor belong to Abraham (ch. 8). They show by their response to Jesus that they are not God's people – indeed, they are children of the devil.

We are left wondering what is going to happen, now that God's historic people have rejected His Son? If they can't express proper faith in God's Son, who can?

Chapter 7 contains a hint of legal dispute (not unlike 5:19-47) with references to Jesus' testimony (v. 7), the law of Moses (v. 22), right judgement (v. 24), the true witness of Father (v. 28), and talk of Jesus' arrest (v. 44). These legal aspects now become more concentrated. At the beginning of our passage, Jesus is accused by those who presume to judge Him; by the end of the chapter, roles are reversed and Jesus becomes both prosecutor and judge of the opponents, levelling counter-accusations and charges against them. Once again, the issue is Jesus' identity - the veracity of the witnesses will be critical for the outcome.

#### Structure

8:12–30	Jesus is from above: the Jews are 'of this world'.
v12-20	Jesus in dispute with 'the Pharisees'.
v21-30	Jesus in dispute with 'the Jews'.
8:31–59	Jesus exposes their phoney faith. They are 'children of the devil' because they do not acknowledge their need and Jesus' ability to meet it. Jesus is the Son of the Father.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### Light:

This has a vast array of symbolic meanings in the OT. Chapters 8–9 combine the meanings of light to be found in the story of the Exodus, when the pillar of light led God's people to freedom, and also in the book of Isaiah, where the prophet relays God's promise of a 'servant' who will be 'a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness' (Isa. 42:6–7). Note that Jesus claims to be the light, not just of Jerusalem, but of the whole world. As 'the light of the world' Jesus offers freedom to the people of God (8:31) and sight for the blind (ch. 9). The Jews reject both offers and so are blinded by the light (in fulfilment of 3:19-21). As seen in chapter 7, light was also of special significance for the Feast of Tabernacles, which Jesus has come to fulfil.

##### Abraham:

The Jews believed that their racial descent from Abraham guaranteed for them all the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham. They were fiercely proud of their membership of his family and saw belonging to Abraham as synonymous with belonging to God. Jesus has already exposed the Jews for not listening to Moses or doing what Moses says. He now goes a step further and denies even their membership of Abraham's family, because they do

not exercise the faith that Abraham had in Him (8:56).

### **'I AM':**

When God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3, He called Himself Yahweh - literally, 'I am what I am' or 'I will be what I will be.' In context, the name was a promise of God's presence with His people. Then in Isaiah 43:10-13, the phrase 'I AM' is used again to underline Yahweh's unique status as the God and Rescuer of Israel. Several times in this passage, and many times in John, Jesus takes this divine name to Himself and thereby claims to be the Rescuer and God of His people. It is scandalous that when God comes to His own in this way, His own do not receive Him (1:11). Some today doubt whether Jesus ever claimed to be divine. His own audience were in no doubt (v. 59).

### **Text notes**

#### **7:53-8:11**

Carson explains why this passage is left out. In short, almost all of the earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include it. Those that do include it have it in different places. It is most likely that this incident did occur but that John did not have it as part of his original Gospel. (See Carson, p. 333.)

#### **12-30 JESUS IS FROM ABOVE: THE JEWS ARE 'OF THIS WORLD'**

With the exclusion of verses 1-11 the chapter begins at verse 12, which may be translated literally as, 'Again, therefore, He spoke to them.' This shows that these verses are a response to the Pharisees' condemnation of the soldiers, the crowd and Nicodemus in 7:42-52. The Pharisees despise the mob. Jesus, who has not left the feast, responds by announcing that He is the light of the world and that whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness. (For the meaning of 'light' see OT notes - Jesus is the salvation light of the world promised in Isaiah 9; note therefore the connection with the discussion about Jesus' origins in chapter 7 - 'Galilee of the Gentiles'.) Given the reference to the cross (v. 28), and Jesus' exposure of the Pharisees as being in desperate need of rescue (8:21, 24), the life that Jesus promises must be eternal life, i.e. rescue and salvation.

Note also the 'I AM' formula of verse 12 (repeated at vv. 18, 24, 28). Even more than fulfilling the Feast of Tabernacles and the promise of Isaiah 9, Jesus is claiming to be divine, and possibly also to fulfil the function of scripture (Ps. 119:105).

The dialogue that follows divides into two sections, in which Jesus re-states first His divine origin (vv.13-20) and then His divine mission and destiny (vv. 21-30). As He does so, He continues to expose the darkness of the Pharisees and the Jews, who for their part are questioning the legitimacy of Jesus' testimony about Himself. His words are deeply offensive (v. 20b). He condemns God's historic people as being ignorant, unable to make anything but fleshly judgments (cf. the use of 'flesh' in 1:12; 3:6; 6:63), having no relationship with God, destined to die in their sins and, finally, being 'of this world!' God's historic people are in desperate need of rescue. If they do not follow Him they will never find the rescue they need. Jesus, on the other hand, claims that He stands with the Father (His own witness is valid because of His heavenly origin) and has the Father as His witness, that He has come from above and has been sent from above by the Father. He is the promised Rescuer who has come to accomplish His mission in His Father's time (vv. 20, 28).

(When Jesus says that He judges no-one, there is an apparent contradiction with 5:30. Jesus' statement is qualified by what follows - the point is that His judgement is like no other human judgement because His judgement is combined with the Father.)

We, the onlookers, wonder what on earth is going to happen to God's historic people. Is there any hope for God's people who refuse to follow His Son? Jesus closes by teaching that the ignorance of God's people can only be dealt with at the cross (vv. 27-29) after they have crucified Him. Then they will realise that He is on His Father's mission. This is the clearest suggestion yet that Jesus' 'time' will be His death, by which means He is going to rescue His people. (Later in the Gospel, when John relates Jesus' crucifixion, he will carefully record certain details of the event, pointing out how they fulfil scriptural prophecies. Understanding all this will enable people to realise that Jesus was fulfilling His Father's purpose by redeeming the world.) The way to be transferred from the realm of sin to the light

of God is to 'believe that I AM He' (v. 24, cf. Isaiah 43:10-13). In the context of Isaiah, what is required is to believe that Yahweh is the only God and the only saviour of Israel; here, we are to believe that of Jesus. 'Many' people in the crowd appear to believe in Jesus, and so He turns His attention to them.

### **31–59 JESUS EXPOSES THEIR PHONEY FAITH: 'YOU ARE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL, I AM THE SON OF THE FATHER.'**

We saw earlier, in 2:24, 25, that Jesus knew what was in a person and therefore would not entrust Himself to anyone. In chapter 2 it was not altogether clear what was required, if a response to Jesus was to be genuine, other than that some sort of 'growing faith' was needed. In chapter 6 Jesus tested the disciples and many proved not to have this kind of faith. Here in chapter 8 Jesus continues to show us what real faith is all about: it is a matter of 'holding' to His teaching. This implies much more than the cliché of 'stick close to Jesus'. The word for 'hold' is literally 'remain in' (cf. 15:1–7). And so 'holding to His teaching' is the mark of true faith and of real disciples, even when His teaching proves to be as searching and uncomfortable as it is here.

The profession of faith of verse 30 may already have caused concern to careful readers - the combination of incomprehension about Jesus' heavenly origins and yet some sort of belief in Him does not bode well. In the verses that follow, Jesus exposes the 'faith' of the Jews on two counts. First, the Jews are unable to accept the unpalatable truths about their own sinfulness and, it follows, about their own need of rescue. Secondly, they are unable to accept the truths about the identity of Jesus and His claims. They could not persevere. We often hear verses 31–32 used in evangelistic talks, in order to point to this benefit of following Jesus, but when Jesus spoke these words He was face to face with people who were already professing faith. Their response was to try to stone Him. Some follow-up meeting! The point is this: it is the same gospel that both creates faith in the first place, and keeps the Christian later on.

**31–48 Who is the Jews' Father?** Will the faith of these Jews who 'put their faith in Him' prove to be genuine? Will these people 'hold to His teaching'? The ensuing discourse (which focuses on the truthfulness of Jesus and His word in contrast to the falsehood of those who doubt Him) shows that their faith is not genuine. As Jesus points out:

- Genuine children of God are set free from sin's penalty, but they are still enslaved by it.
- Genuine children of God do the things Abraham did (i.e. have room for His word, the truth that He has heard from God), but they have no room for His word and are plotting to kill Him.
- Genuine children of God love Jesus, but they are plotting to kill Him and so betray their true family membership. They are 'children of the devil'.

Jesus' argument is so strong that the Jews can only respond with abuse (v. 48).

**49–59 Who is Jesus' Father?** With their true identity exposed by Jesus, the Jews resort to insult (v. 48). Jesus rebuts their insults and then offers eternal life to anyone who will actually keep His words – unlike these people who have professed a phoney faith. The Jews are deeply offended by Jesus' claim to be able to save from death, to provide the solution to the greatest of all human problems. Jesus closes the debate with a claim to divinity, the clearest claim yet, but the Jews are simply unable to handle it. To a monotheistic people this claim by a human to equality with God must be blasphemous. There is only one solution. Earlier, in chapter 7, they had taken active steps to arrest Jesus, but now they try to stone Him.

### **Key themes**

#### **Jesus makes a devastating appraisal of God's historic people:**

- They belong to this world and so are only able to make worldly judgments about Jesus.
- They are unable to reach eternal life. They are in real need of rescue but cannot see it.
- Their inability to express genuine faith proves that Jesus is correct in His analysis.
- They are not, in reality, members of God's people. They are slaves to sin and therefore children of the devil.

#### **The claims of Jesus Christ, the Son of God:**

- He speaks the Father's words, not His own.

- He has been sent by the Father, who testifies to Him and glorifies Him.
- He is one with the Father (8:58), and honours Him.
- He is the one who is able to save the people of the world from sin, to set them free, to give them light, and to keep them from death.
- He is the great I AM.

**This passage shows Jesus sifting the faith of His hearers to see 'what was in a man' (cf. 2:25):**

- Genuine faith is a matter of accepting one's total inability to provide for one's own rescue, and total dependence on the Son to set one free.
- Genuine faith perseveres to the end. It means holding on to Jesus' teaching, however uncomfortable that may prove to be.

### Application

**To them then:** The shock of this passage, both to the Jews in Jerusalem and to John's original readers, is that God's historic people are utterly incapable of responding adequately to the arrival of God's long-awaited Son and Rescuer. Jesus' explanation of this failure is highly offensive to them. They are unable to respond correctly because they are 'children of the devil'. But Jesus does not leave it there. Even those who appear to respond in faith find that they cannot stomach the grim realities of their utter helplessness and their absolute need of rescue. Pride and self-sufficiency prove to be insurmountable obstacles for those who think that they can call themselves 'Abraham's children', simply on the basis of their birth certificate.

The root failure of the historic people of God however is again Christological. It is because they do not accept Jesus' heavenly origin and divine status that they are unable to accept His word about them. Once again we see that true knowledge of ourselves is tied directly to true knowledge of God.

**To us now:** This passage presents us with 'the Christ' who is exceedingly uncomfortable and who seems to raise more questions than He answers. He prompts us to ask ourselves whether our own faith is genuine. The faith that keeps the Christian is faith in exactly the same gospel as the gospel that saves the Christian. New Christians don't need an addition to the gospel. Rather, Christians new and old need to be challenged to allow the same gospel to shape and reshape their thinking and lives. Do we still realise that we are, in fact, enslaved unless Jesus sets us free? Are we still prepared to admit that by nature we are children of the devil? Are we prepared to recognise that we are, by nature, blind, unable to see? If we cannot still say this then we are not holding to His gospel teaching and we need to ask serious questions about the genuineness of our faith. In amongst all the challenge is real hope: if we do admit these things, then we may have light, freedom and life - make sure that you get to this good stuff in your study; these are 3 enormous blessings, all of which are entirely alien to the world, but which are supremely wonderful!

### The aim

The aim of this study is to see that even God's historic people were utterly unable to respond to Jesus adequately, owing to their blindness and the hardness of their hearts. The correct, genuine response to Jesus involves a life-long commitment (or holding) to His gospel, with its hard teaching about human sin and His role as divine Rescuer. Those who do hold to His teaching enjoy the blessings of life, light and freedom.

## John 9:1–41

### Born of God

#### Context

Three broad headings help to summarise what we have learned in chapters 5–8:

**What we discover about Jesus:** He is from God, He is equal to God, and He is the one who provides God’s rescue – though He is radically different from what the Jews expected. He has been described as ‘the Son of Man’, who has authority to execute judgement (ch. 5) and who gives His flesh and blood for people to eat and drink (ch. 6); He is also described as the Christ, the Son of God, and the eternal ‘I am’.

**How the Jews respond to this Rescuer:** Their response was hostile. Jesus exposed the true state of their hearts and that they were really ‘children of the devil’. They were rebels in need of rescue. But instead of repentance, the Rescuer met rejection. It began to emerge that God’s historic people were unable to accept His Son because they did not really belong to God. The shock of these chapters is enormous – especially to John’s audience. John wants to persuade his readers that they must acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. John’s point is that they must believe, even if the Jews won’t: he makes it clear that the Jews’ unbelief is a reflection of their own sin, and not of Jesus being false.

**How then will anyone ‘see’?** Throughout chapters 5–8 we find a number of answers to this question. People will ‘see’, or recognise Jesus as the Christ, if they listen to Moses and so to God (5:46), if they listen to the Father and learn from Him (6:45), if they choose to do God’s will (7:17), and if they hold on to Jesus’ words (8:31, 32). But we have seen that even the most promising among God’s historic people (i.e. those who initially ‘believed’) have failed to do these things. How then will anyone be able to see? Chapters 9 and 10 reflect on the life-giving ministry of Jesus announced in chapter 5 (and before that in the Prologue) and answer this question. They summarise and close the section that began with a Sabbath healing in chapter 5 (see section notes). Spiritual sight requires the miraculous intervention of Jesus, the Messiah. The self-sufficient, who consider themselves healthy and who therefore reject the Messiah, will remain blind forever. As the chapter progresses we witness the blind man becoming progressively more spiritually sighted, and the Jews becoming progressively more blind. Jesus really is ‘the light of the world’ and in this chapter He expounds the meaning of that title. In chapter 10 Jesus completes His mission to Jerusalem, pronouncing a final condemnation of the Jews and holding out, to all who will turn to Him, the prospect of complete assurance of salvation.

More specifically, chapter 8 saw the conflict between Jesus and the Jews reach new heights: they picked up stones to kill Him, while He rejected them as children of the devil. Now in chapter 9 Jesus announces that He came for this very purpose: to give sight to those who recognise their need of Him (like the cripple of ch. 5 and the man born blind in ch. 9), but to blind in judgement those who reject His light (like the Jews). To put it differently, after Jesus repeats His claim to be the light of the world (in 9:5), we see the two effects of the light at work in the world - giving sight (cf. 8:12) and judging (cf. 3:19-21).

#### Structure

This chapter divides most easily into a series of ‘interviews’:

9:1–7	The significant sign: the healing of the blind man and its significance.
9:8–38	Different responses to the sign:
8–12	Interview with the blind man’s neighbours.
13–17	Blind man’s first interview with the Pharisees.
18–23	Parents interviewed by the Pharisees.
24–34	Blind man’s second interview with the Pharisees.
35–38	The blind man worships Jesus.
9:39–41	Jesus’ summary explanation of His work and condemnation of the Pharisees.

## Old Testament ideas

### 'I am the light of the world':

Blindness in the OT is more than just a physical thing. It is used as a metaphor to illustrate total spiritual failure. This is a major theme in Isaiah:

- Blindness is a sign of refusing to see and believe God (Isaiah 29:9; 42:18–25).
- In fact God, in judgement, spiritually blinded those who rebelled (Isaiah 6:9, 10).
- This blindness will be remedied for God's people when the Messiah comes to rescue them (Isaiah 29:18; 32:3; 35:5; 42:7).
- God's saving light will extend to all the nations of the world (Isaiah 49:6).

In chapter 9 Jesus is developing the 'light of the world' theme, which first appeared in 8:12. In chapter 8 He had offered freedom to His people but they had rejected Him because they were blind. Now, in chapter 9, He gives sight to the blind but blinds those who rebel.

## Text notes

Although we study chapter 9 apart from chapter 10, the two form a unit. In chapter 10, Jesus will once again denounce the Pharisees as blind shepherds (ch. 10 refers explicitly to the episode of ch. 9 in verse 21).

This sign is striking because Jesus is absent for large parts of the chapter (verses 8–34). This is in contrast to chapter 5, for example, where the healed man passed quickly from view. It may well be that the man born blind is being presented to us as something of a model disciple - one who holds to Jesus' teaching even when it is hard. Thus we find him speaking in 13 of the 41 verses, and even lecturing the religious authorities who would oppose Jesus. Certainly, those among John's readers who have known opposition for their allegiance to Jesus will readily be able to identify with him.

## 1-7 THE SIGNIFICANT SIGN: THE HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Not uncommonly, the two main players in the chapter are introduced to us in the first verse. As with all the signs in John, the healing of the man born blind has a purpose. Jesus identifies that purpose in verses 3–5. Other translations of 'displayed' are 'become visible', 'known' and 'revealed'. So the purpose of the man's blindness is not for the disciples to apportion blame, but so that God's work might be made visibly apparent; the man was born blind so that Jesus could display His work of bringing people to believe in Him. Verse 5 encapsulates and explains part of John's Prologue, 1:4–9 – Jesus really is 'the light of the world' who gives sight to the spiritually blind, and blinds those who consider themselves sighted. Verse 4 looks tricky, but 13:30 explains it: 'night' comes when Jesus is betrayed and taken to the cross. Following His ascension His 'work' will continue (14:12).

The healing itself is only reported briefly. As in chapter 5, the initiative rests entirely with Jesus - the blind man neither speaks nor is spoken to before the healing occurs. The blind man is healed through the pool whose name means 'sent' by the one who was 'sent' (v. 4) to do the work of His Father.

Notice the irony of the chapter: the one who is labelled 'sinful' in the opening verses comes to the light, while those who presumed to judge Jesus in chapter 8 remain in their sin (v. 41), partially fulfilling 8:24.

## 8-38 DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO THE SIGN

**8–12 Interview with the blind man's neighbours.** The previous chapter had ended with a violent confrontation between Jesus and the Jews, leaving us with the shocking realisation that God's Son was being rejected by God's historic people. At this point we need to be assured that Jesus really is who He says He is. The giving of sight to the blind is something that only God can do, but did Jesus really perform this miracle? It is important that the fact of the miracle is backed up by clear evidence that it really did happen – hence the value of the blind man's neighbours (and later his parents) as witnesses. At the same time we will notice the progression in the man's own understanding as we journey through the chapter. At this stage, he confesses his ignorance as to Jesus' whereabouts (there is a link between seeing and knowing in John: to see is to know truly) and speaks only of 'the man called Jesus'.

**13–17 Blind man's first interview with the Pharisees.** For the first time we are told that the healing occurred on the Sabbath, and so a sense of foreboding begins to loom (in light of the events of chapter 5) especially because in the Pharisees' understanding, Jesus has committed two Sabbath violations - making mud and healing were both forbidden (see Carson). In chapters 7–8 we saw the division and blindness of the Pharisees. Both are on display again here as the Pharisees appear to be unable to see beyond the immediate event to the wonderful reality of wholeness that the healing symbolised (see OT notes on the Sabbath for chapter 5). They remain preoccupied, throughout the chapter, with how the blind man was healed (v. 26). He however begins to see more clearly – 'He is a prophet' (v. 17). The mixed response to Jesus exhibited by the Pharisees invites the reader to form our own conclusion - who do we say that Jesus is?

**18–23 Parents interviewed by the Jews.** This part provides further authentication that Jesus' miracle was genuine. At the same time we see the stubbornness of the Jews who will not believe, despite the evidence; they have already made up their minds. For the first time we see their hostility being transferred to someone who has decided to follow Christ. Eventually this hostility will lead to action against the blind man. The parents, for their part, are so afraid of the Jews that they leave their son to fend for himself.

**24–34 Blind man's second interview with the Pharisees.** This part is full of tragic irony. The Pharisees refuse to see who Jesus really is (in fact, despite the illusion of gathering evidence in the chapter, they have already made up their mind about Jesus - they think that He is a sinner), and so they urge the man to 'give glory to God' by condemning Jesus. Their illogical position (see v. 33) drives the man one step further towards his conversion, as he gives glory to God by saying, 'If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.' The harshness and bitterness of the Pharisees, these 'false shepherds' (cf. ch. 10), is confirmed by their reaction both to the man and to his parents. They throw him out of the synagogue. As in chapters 5–8, the Pharisees continue to claim to be Moses' disciples, but even the man born blind can see that their claim is hollow. (We of course know that if they were true disciples of Moses, they would come to Jesus for life - 5:39-40.)

**35-38 The blind man worships Jesus.** The reappearance of Jesus makes us wonder why He hasn't been around to help the blind man. He seems to have healed him and then left him to it! We are not given the answer to this question, but the man's perseverance, sticking with Jesus in spite of hostility, shows that he has the persevering faith we read of in chapter 8, e.g. verse 12b. Once a genuine work of God has begun in a person, then no-one can snatch that person out of God's hands – Jesus will 'lose none of all that He [the Father] has given me' (6:39). Jesus seeks out the blind man because he is ready to believe, in spite of opposition, and his faith grows. Once again, Jesus gives Himself the title 'Son of Man'. In chapter 5 we saw that it is the Son of Man who speaks God's final words of life and judgement now (5:27), and later we understood that unless a person eats and drinks the Son of Man's flesh and blood that person has no life (6:53). The blind man now 'sees' and worships this life-giving, self-giving Son of Man. This is model 'belief' indeed.

### **39-41 JESUS' SUMMARY EXPLANATION OF HIS WORK AND CONDEMNATION OF THE PHARISEES**

In explaining His action (v. 39) Jesus enables us to understand what has been going on all through chapters 5–8. He is 'the light of the world', but His light does two different things. It blinds the hardhearted who, like the Pharisees in this chapter, are convinced that they see everything, but who are in reality blind (and so their sin 'remains' cf. 3:36). But it illumines those who are willing to believe in the significance of the signs.

Thus 'the light of the world' brings rescue and fulfils the prophecy in Isaiah 42. The work of the Son of Man is to bring this judging, life-giving light.

### **Key themes**

#### **Jesus is 'the light of the world':**

- His coming fulfils the prophecy in Isaiah 42:6–7.
- He does what God alone can do: He opens blind eyes, enabling people to see. Restoring physical sight is the sign that He, and He alone, can give spiritual sight and rescue.

- He blinds the hard hearted who reject Him.
- He is the means by which anyone can come to believe and to persevere in belief.

#### **The response of the Jews:**

- They refuse to accept Jesus as the Christ, despite the evidence.
- They are unable to see beyond God's OT revelation to the person to whom it testifies, because they are convinced that they already have the last word.
- This response means that they will be judged.
- Their failure to respond rightly should not hinder our belief; it will not stop God's work.

#### **The blind man's response – and his example of 'growing faith':**

- Jesus works in him and 'keeps' him; the initiative is God's.
- He obeys from the beginning.
- He perseveres in acknowledging Jesus, despite opposition.
- He grows in understanding as he acknowledges Jesus and, remarkably, as he is persecuted.

### **Application**

**To them then:** Jesus' explanatory comments in verses 39–41 indicate how He intended the sign and following dialogue to be interpreted. His words help us to make sense of the shock of chapters 5–8. The sign has provided clear and convincing proof that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the messianic rescue really has come. But the surprise is that Jesus' work as 'the light of the world' is both to give sight to the blind and to blind those who think they can see. The application of this to John's readers is clear: it means that they should not be disturbed, shaken, or put off by the fact that God's historic people have rejected His Son. Nor should they be unnerved by the hostility of God's historic people. They should not be dismayed at the apparent impossibility of anyone being able to recognise God's Rescuer, because it is Jesus Himself who gives sight to the blind, and He will 'keep' those in whom He is working. The only qualification required, for sight to be given, is a recognition of blindness. But, for those who think they can see there is no hope.

**To us now:** Once we see the application to John's readers then, the application to us now should be very clear. This passage explains what has been going on in the previous four chapters: after studying it we should come away convinced that Jesus really is the Messiah - if we are worshipping Jesus with the blind man, we are doing the right thing! At the same time, we should come away humbled as we understand why and how we have believed, and clear that Jesus' work as 'the light of the world' involves spiritual blinding as well as the giving of spiritual sight. This should encourage and reassure us in our evangelism, because the opening of blind eyes is His work and He will do it completely, whatever the world's reaction to those who believe.

### **The aim**

The aim of this study is to be assured that, despite the negative reaction of the Jews in chapters 5–8, Jesus really is the long-awaited Messiah. His work involves giving sight to those who recognise that they are in need of rescue, and blinding the spiritually self-sufficient.

## John 10:1–42

### The Good Shepherd

#### Context

In chapter 9 Jesus has been expounding what it means for Him to be the 'light of the world'. Primarily it means that He gives spiritual 'sight', or understanding, to those who are being rescued. Simultaneous with this work of rescue is the exercising of God's judgement on those who oppose His purposes, and this takes the form of blinding. Despite the negative reaction of the Jews, in chapter 9, the story of the blind man has assured us that people can and will be saved.

The harsh treatment that the blind man received from the religious authorities in chapter 9 (he was driven out of the synagogue) provides a significant link between chapters 9 and 10. In chapter 10 Jesus draws on the traditional imagery for the people of God and its leaders – sheep and shepherds – to provide a framework that both criticizes the behaviour of the religious authorities (the bad shepherds) and sets up His own contrasting role as the Good Shepherd who will lay down His life for His sheep. In this way, Jesus picks up the prophecy in Ezekiel 34, in which God had promised that when He came to rescue His people, He would provide a true shepherd from the house of David who would call out and rescue God's true people (Ezek. 34:23). This chapter therefore explains how Jesus is the true Shepherd, and begins to explain how He will effect His rescue - by laying down His life. It also demonstrates how, in the conflict between Jesus and the Jews, Jesus is in the right and the Jews are in the wrong.

#### Structure

10:1–21	The Good Shepherd:
1–6	The parable.
7–18	The explanation:
7–10	'I am the door' – not like the thief.
11–13	'I am the good shepherd' – not like the hired hand.
14–18	'I am the good shepherd' – and all my flock know me.
19–21	The response from the Jews.
10:22–39	The Jews prove that they are not God's sheep. In spite of the miracles that Jesus has worked before them, the Jews prove by their actions that they are not God's sheep.
10:40–42	Jesus goes back across the Jordan.

#### Old Testament idea

##### The Good Shepherd:

Back in Numbers 27:12-23 when Moses is about to die, he prays that God will provide another leader like Moses for His people so that they will not be 'like sheep without a shepherd'. In the immediate context, Joshua is that man, but from that moment on, God's word often refers to the leaders of God's people as 'shepherds' and to the people themselves as 'sheep' (see e.g. 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16; Zechariah 10:2; Jeremiah 3:15; 10:21 etc.). Chief among such 'shepherds' however remains David 'the shepherd who was taken from tending the sheep to become the shepherd-king (cf. 2 Sam 5:2; 7:7-8; 1 Chron. 11:2; Psalm 78:70-71) and who becomes the model for the future messianic shepherd king (Ezek. 37:24; Micah 5:2-4)' (Lincoln).

Whatever the state of the flock, however, the one true shepherd of His people is God Himself – the one who rules, judges, rescues and tends for His sheep (e.g. Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 28:9; 74:1; 80:1; 95:7; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:3; 31:10; Micah 2:12; 7:14).

All of these themes are drawn together within the Old Testament in the crucial passage of Ezekiel 34. Within the book of Ezekiel, chapter 34 represents a turning point. Up to this point Ezekiel has been preaching judgement on God's people and the destruction of Jerusalem. But, just when God's people appear to be doomed, God promises a Good Shepherd who will rescue His true sheep. The chapter promises two things. First, judgement on God's failed shepherds, who should have been feeding the sheep but who have in fact exploited them, with the result that the sheep had become scattered. Secondly, God promises to rescue the sheep who have been lost and scattered

among the nations. When He has done this He will provide a shepherd to tend His flock. At times, this shepherd is described in human terms - he will come from the family of David; at other times, it is clear that the Shepherd will be none other than God Himself.

John 10 confirms for us that Jesus is indeed God Himself, the true Shepherd of His people. He will effect their rescue by laying down His life for them, and then taking it up again.

## Text notes

### 1-21 THE GOOD SHEPHERD

**1-6 The parable.** The 'figure of speech' (v. 6) employed by Jesus in these verses contains five metaphors: the sheepfold, its gate, the sheep, their shepherd, and the intruders. These metaphors serve to contrast the religious leaders of chapter 9 (the intruders) with the true Shepherd of God's people (Jesus Himself) who leads His people by His voice. The door is the correct (and only legitimate) entrance to the sheepfold. Verse 6 shows that this discourse is still part of the response to the sign of chapter 9 – Jesus' audience includes the Pharisees of chapter 9:40 and others, and probably the blind man too. Whereas the religious leaders 'cast out' the blind man from the synagogue (9:34), the Good Shepherd will 'bring out' (same word) His sheep into the pasture of God's blessing (10.4).

**7-18 The explanation.** Jesus' listeners fail to understand the meaning of verses 1-6, so He explains His meaning to them in 3 sections, each of them marked by at least one 'I AM' saying:

**I am the door – and not like the thief (vv. 7-10).** Jesus has already told His disciples that when they come to Him they will see 'heaven opened' (1:51). This metaphor of the door may pick up on that idea, with its resonance of Genesis 28. Alternatively, it may have its background in Psalm 118:19-20. Either way, the verses again contrast Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees are 'thieves and robbers' who are unable to provide salvation for God's people. Ultimately, they are able only to steal and kill and destroy. They have already sought to destroy the blind man by casting him out of the synagogue – it won't now be long before they seek to kill Lazarus (12:10) and Jesus Himself. By contrast, Jesus is the genuine doorway into salvation – everyone who enters through Him will find rescue and security.

The 'life to the full' that is offered by Jesus (v. 10) is the summary of the blessings promised by Jesus in verse 9. Anyone who 'enters by Jesus' will 'go in and out and find pasture' (v. 9), which is a picture of security and provision for those who have been rescued – shorthand for Ezekiel 34:11-16. It is likely that Psalm 23 is also in view which means that this is definitely not a promise of an easy life (we will still 'walk through the valley of the shadow of death'), but a promise of God's presence ('you are with me'), His blessing ('surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life') and His gift ('and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.')

**I am the Good Shepherd – and not like the hired hand (vv. 11-13).** The first 'good shepherd' statement contrasts the genuine shepherd with the hired hand. The key distinction is about commitment to the sheep. The thing that will ultimately authenticate Jesus' ministry is that He will never abandon the sheep; more than that, He will lay down His life for them because He is the 'good' (in the sense of 'beautiful', 'noble', 'honourable' or 'ideal') shepherd. As so often in John, Jesus is here making an astonishing claim and doing so almost in passing: in the Old Testament, and especially in Ezekiel 34, it is God who is the Shepherd of His people; now here Jesus sees Himself as taking the divine role of seeking, rescuing, guiding, feeding and caring for the sheep. In contrast is the hired hand, who is like the false shepherds of Israel (Ezek. 34:1-6) – despite appearances to the contrary, the Jewish authorities are only interested in taking care of their own interests.

**The Good Shepherd and His flock (vv. 14-18).** The second 'good shepherd' statement expands on the Shepherd's vital relationship with His flock. The Good Shepherd knows His flock, and they know Him, as intimately as He and His Father know each other. A second time, Jesus speaks of laying down His life for the flock. The extent of His flock goes beyond the 'sheep pen' of Israel but, importantly, whatever 'pen' the

sheep come from, the genuine response to the Shepherd is still that of listening to His voice.

Verses 17-18 focus on the death of Jesus: His self-sacrifice is quite voluntary – ‘I lay it down of my own accord’ – because He really does love the sheep; He retains absolute control over His death and resurrection, since He is no puppet or robot, and He submits to death out of perfect obedience – ‘This command I received from my Father’ – because He always submits fully to His Father. This is the Shepherd whom the Father loves, and whom the sheep know and listen to. [The statement establishes the right way for us to understand the cross from this moment on in John: we are to look out for the theme of Jesus’ sovereign control over His death.]

**19–21 The response from the Jews.** The Jews’ response again highlights the divisive effect of Jesus’ teaching, and especially His teaching about His own death (a theme that we noticed at the end of chapter 6). Many of the Jews simply refuse to ‘listen’ to His voice: this is the first of 3 explicit rejections of Jesus in the chapter: (i) in verse 20 they regard Him as demon-possessed and insane; (ii) in verse 31 they ‘again’ pick up stones to stone Him, and (iii) in verse 39 they ‘again’ try to arrest Him. As Jesus draws to the end of His public ministry, ‘many’ of the Jews want only to be rid of Him. The only glimmer of hope is that some appear intrigued by both the ‘words’ and the ‘sign’ of Jesus. Perhaps the blind man is not the only one who can now see?

### **22-39 THE JEWS PROVE THAT THEY ARE NOT HIS SHEEP**

The Jews of Jerusalem repeat the question that they asked the Baptist (1:19ff). In the discourse that follows the issue that has kept the Jews from turning to Jesus becomes sharply focused: they are not His sheep. In answer to their question about His identity Jesus makes it quite clear that His miracles, which have been done in public, speak for Him. These miracles have one clear message, which Jesus twice puts into words: He is one with God the Father (vv. 30 and 38).

The Jews do not object to the miracles (works) – they are happy with a miracle-working Messiah! But they will not accept what these miracles imply about Jesus, even though they have clearly understood it (vv. 31, 39). When Jesus makes the point of the miracles explicit, they want to kill Him. The Jews want ‘a Christ’ of their own devising, not ‘the Christ’ who challenges their practices and presuppositions!

This proves that they are not His sheep, for His sheep listen to His voice and are rescued and kept by the Shepherd. Jesus maintains that their objections are entirely unreasonable, both in view of scripture (vv. 34–36) and in view of the clear public message of His works. In Psalm 82:6 God addresses His people as ‘gods’ and ‘sons of the Most High’. If God can call His people His son (cf. Exodus 4:21–22) then it is entirely reasonable for Jesus to speak of Himself as ‘God’s Son’. But His authority to do this is all the greater in view of His works and words which make Him uniquely the Son of God.

### **40-42 JESUS GOES BACK ACROSS THE JORDAN**

This geographical note is a significant marker, showing us that this section is now being drawn to a close. The reference to John the Baptist reminds us of his purpose (see 1:7), the purpose that is now being fulfilled as people come to believe in Jesus, on the strength of the testimony of the Baptist.

### **Key themes**

#### **Jesus is the divine rescuer.**

- He is the only way in to God’s kingdom. All other ways of trying to get to God are futile.
- He is God Himself, the true Shepherd, who cares enough for the sheep to die for them, in contrast to the false shepherds who run away.
- He is the true Shepherd who will be recognised by the sheep. He will call them out from wherever they are and guarantee them eternal life; they will never perish.
- His works support His claims that His Father loves Him and is with Him, and that the Father has set Him apart and sent Him into the world.

**Those who oppose Jesus do not belong to God** (as announced in 5:23).

- Anyone who attempts to lead God's people any other way than to Jesus is a thief and a robber, but such a person will not succeed with the true sheep.
- Anyone who does not respond to Jesus is not one of His sheep.
- The Jews, by their actions, prove that they do not belong to God: they will not recognise Jesus, they will not accept His miracles, and they will not listen to the scriptures.

**Belief.**

- True belief is defined, not for the first time in John, as allegiance to the words of Jesus. Strikingly, Jesus equates the two phrases 'follow me' with 'hear my voice' in verse 27. I cannot have Him without His word.

**Life.**

- The life that Jesus has come to offer is 'life to the full' – a life that enjoys the blessings of Psalm 23. Further, it is secure life, because all of Jesus' sheep are safe in His hands forever.

**Application**

**To them then:** Jesus is the Good Shepherd who provides rescue for His people even when they are in the grip of false teachers. He alone is the Good Shepherd – all others are hoaxers – and He is the only way to God. His credentials are plain for all to see – He alone is committed to His sheep to the point of death. The chapter provides great hope of rescue just at the point when the leaders of the Jewish nation appear to be under judgement. There is also great assurance for His people and especially for the man born blind, who would appear still to be in the audience. Even though he has been rejected by his family and cast out of the synagogue by the Jews, he has real life, to the full, in Jesus - no-one will ever snatch him out of the hands of the Father.

The Jews' rejection of Jesus is no reason for other people to doubt Him. Jesus' real sheep will follow Him and they will have eternal life, which no-one will be able to snatch away from them. The Good Shepherd is able to shepherd His sheep, caring for them and providing for them in every way necessary.

**To us now:** Together with chapter 9, this chapter is a source of great confidence and hope, coming at the end of a section dominated by the rejection of God's salvation by God's historic people. We can know that there really is a Rescuer, able to provide rescue and shepherding for all who recognise Him, listen to His voice and follow Him. This rescue is a rescue to eternal life with God now, which may entail persecution and suffering (viz. the blind man), but which brings life to the full now, and in heaven will bring all the blessings of Ezekiel 34.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to be assured that Jesus is the genuine 'Shepherd' who gives certain salvation to all who trust Him, to all who listen to His voice and follow Him. All who oppose Him are certainly thieves and robbers.

## Section Notes: John 11:1–20:31

This section begins with the resuscitation of Lazarus in chapter 11 and ends with the resurrection of Jesus in chapter 20. Here is yet further proof therefore that Jesus really is able to give life. Significantly, however, the section repeatedly emphasizes the death of Jesus – the message is clear: the way that the Son will be able to give life is through His own death. This is the hour of Jesus, the instance of His supreme glory, the moment when we see Him most clearly revealed as king, the time when He most glorifies the Father, the occasion for His departure from the world. The section can be summed up as follows: the achievement of Jesus' death is life!

The following incidents and explanations occur in these ten chapters:

- 11:1–57 Lazarus is raised from the dead and Jesus identifies this miracle as a demonstration of the glory of God. Jesus announces to Mary that He is the resurrection and the life. Caiaphas prophesies that it is better for one man to die on behalf of the people than that the whole nation should perish.
- 12:1–50 Jesus the king prepares for His death at the time of the Passover. Jesus explains that His death will bring life, and also judgement  
Question to ponder: how significant is the break at the end of chapter 12? Do chapters 11 and 12 belong with chapters 2-10 or with 13-20, or both?
- 13:1–30 The foot washing: Jesus' death is essential to life.
- 13:31–16:33 'The Upper Room Discourse': what life will be like while we wait. Jesus explains, for the first time, that when He goes away His disciples will not be able to follow Him immediately but will have to wait for His return. This provokes a series of questions about His departure. He explains that His departure is the way to the Father, and that when He is gone His disciples will continue to 'see' God and to 'do the work' of God by bringing life to His people through their teaching of His word.  
Once He has gone (to the cross) He will send His Spirit who will enable His apostles to record His word accurately. His people will remain in Him through remaining in this word. As they remain in Him so they will bear fruit. In spite of the persecution they will experience, His going will be for their benefit, for the Spirit will come to testify to the world and to enable the apostles to testify. His going will bring them peace and joy in an open union with the Father through the Spirit.
- 17:1–26 Jesus prays that His Father would glorify His name, through completing His plan to call together a people, a people who would belong to Him for eternal life.
- 18:1–27 His death, on behalf of His people, will mean that He, instead of them, bears His Father's wrath against sin.
- 18:28–19:16 He is the king from above who has come to establish His heavenly kingdom through His death as the innocent 'Passover Lamb'. His death establishes the guilt of the world, represented by the Jews. They will not listen to the truth and prefer an earthly kingdom to the kingdom of Jesus' Father.
- 19:17–42 Jesus' death as the Passover Lamb accomplishes His Father's sovereign plan to overthrow the effects of the Fall and bring life to His people.
- 20:1–31 Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that the cross has indeed been the means of fulfilling the Father's plan. He commissions His apostles to take the message of His achievement on the cross to all the world.
- 21:1–25 Jesus reinstates Peter and commissions the apostles to feed His sheep.

**Recurring themes**

- Jesus teaches what His death will achieve, namely the glory of the Father through the bringing of life to His people. His people will not be Jews alone, but anyone who believes (11:25).
- Jesus teaches that His death as a substitute will achieve life, because in it He will be bearing His Father's wrath at sin, wrath that would otherwise bring destruction to sinners. At the same time this death will judge the world and overthrow Satan.
- Jesus teaches that once He has gone His people will be drawn together through the work of His Spirit. The Spirit will enable His apostles to record His words accurately. And so the Spirit will do the work of God (i.e. bringing life to His people) through His word as it is proclaimed by His people.
- Jesus teaches that once He has gone His people will experience the benefits of His death: they will be indwelt by Him, and they will also experience the joy and peace of a relationship with the Father.

**Application**

The main application is to believe that Jesus has achieved what had long been looked for, the overthrow of the effects of the Fall. Death has been conquered. The devil has been driven out. The Father's wrath has been dealt with, and life is now available.

In addition, these chapters teach us what the Christian life will be like. When He returns, He will take us to the place that He has prepared for us in His Father's house. While we wait, true life is experienced as we remain in Him by listening to His words, which have been accurately recorded by His apostles. Those who remain in Christ in this way are promised the joy and peace that come from knowing that God's wrath has been dealt with, and from the reality of knowing God and being able to pray to Him. We are also promised intense hatred and persecution from the world.

## John 11:1–54

### 'I am the resurrection and the life'

#### Context

On the assumption that chapters 11-20 are the right section, we can say that, as with the previous two sections, this last major section begins and ends with signs that introduce and sum up its main subject material. The signs that bracket this section are the raising of Lazarus and the raising of Jesus. In this way John identifies the key focus of the section: the giving of life. The material of chapters 11–20 can be grouped under two headings: the whole question of what Jesus' death achieves – life, and the Gospel's developing narrative – the plot to put Jesus to death.

John introduces the section's key themes in chapter 11 by showing us that those who already believe still have a great deal to learn about Jesus. Martha, like Peter in chapter 6, may recognise Jesus as 'the Christ, the Son of God', but she hasn't yet understood what it means for Him to be 'the resurrection and the life'. For people like Martha and Peter, the first half of John's purpose statement in 20:31 has by now begun to be achieved, but needs working through more deeply. John is going to do that in this section by showing that 'the glory of God' is revealed in His dealing with the greatest problem facing the human race – death. The direct link between the raising of Lazarus and Caiaphas' prophecy, at the meeting of the Sanhedrin, indicates to the reader that Jesus' substitutionary death is going to be the means by which the effects of the Fall are reversed and life is given. (Bizarrely, it is specifically because Jesus gives life that they want Him dead!) And so the reader is driven forward to find out how Jesus' death will achieve this life, and where the plot of the Sanhedrin will end.

It is worth noting that this particular sign is given far more attention and space than any of the others have been to date. It is distinctive for other reasons also: the recipient of Jesus' action is named and said to be in a close, personal relationship with Jesus; and also, the discourse explaining the sign comes before the action itself. There are also several explicit links with previous signs – achieved through the mention of 'glory' (v. 4, 15, cf. 2:11), 'belief' (11:25 etc, cf. 2:11) and the recollection of the man born blind (v. 37, cf. 9:1-41; note also the imagery of 'light' (v. 9-10, cf. 9:4-5)). Further, while several previous signs brought Jesus into contact with someone 'as good as dead' (end of ch. 4, ch. 5), now Jesus faces someone who really is dead!

#### Structure

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>11:1–16</b>  | <b>Introduction to the sign:</b> Lazarus will be raised for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified and so that the disciples might grow in belief.<br><b>1-6</b> The setting of the story and the reason for Jesus' delay.<br><b>7-16</b> Jesus' dialogue with the disciples. |
| <b>11:17–37</b> | <b>The significance of the sign:</b> Mary, Martha and others express disappointment at Jesus' failure to be present to heal. Jesus tells Mary, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'<br><b>17-27</b> Jesus and Martha.<br><b>28-37</b> Jesus and Mary and the Jews.                              |
| <b>11:38–44</b> | <b>The sign itself:</b> Lazarus is raised to life.   |
| <b>11:45–54</b> | <b>The outcome of the sign:</b> more divided response: many believe in Jesus, but the Jews plot His death. God's plan is the substitutionary death of His Son.   |

#### Old Testament ideas

##### Death and life:

Ever since Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden and from the Tree of Life at the time of the Fall, the issue of death and life has been a major theme in the OT. Isaiah speaks of the 'shroud (of death) that enfolds all peoples' (Isa. 25:6ff) and looks forward to a day when death will be swallowed up forever. Jesus announced the arrival of His death-defeating kingdom in chapters 2-4; now for the first time, we see him actually overcome man's greatest enemy.

**Substitution:**

In Leviticus 16 the principle of substitution is established. In order for sin and guilt to be taken away from God's people, something has to die in their place to satisfy God's just wrath. In Leviticus 16 the sins of the Israelites are transferred to one of the sacrificial goats which is then killed. Leviticus 17:11 explains that 'it is the blood [i.e. death] that makes atonement for one's life'. Much later the prophet Isaiah looks forward to God's Servant coming into the world and dying on behalf of many (chapters 49 and 53).

**Text notes****1–16 THE PURPOSE OF THE SIGN, THE RAISING OF LAZARUS, IS GOD'S GLORY****The setting**

As often in the Bible, the main characters are all introduced in the first verse (Lazarus, Mary and Martha). Jesus is missing, as He will be at the hour of Lazarus' great need. Why? We are about to be told. In the meantime, John stresses the intimacy of relationship that the other characters share with Jesus (v. 2-3, v. 5). [Interestingly, although John refers to Mary's anointing of Jesus in v. 2, he will not relay that story until 12:1-8. That is not, despite the opinion of some scholars, because John got the order muddled in his mind (!), but because he wants us to understand the raising of Lazarus in the light of Jesus' movement towards his death.]

**God's glory**

The sign will bring glory to both Father and Son (v. 4). These words of Jesus in v4 give us the first indication as to how we are to interpret the raising of Lazarus; we need to be asking how it reveals God's glory.

**The disciples' faith**

Jesus also tells us that the sign will enable the disciples to believe (v. 15). But the odd thing is that He is speaking to a group of people who already believe. This indicates that there is much more for the disciples still to learn and suggests that the raising of Lazarus points forward to the new things that Jesus is about to teach them. All the way through the previous sections John has been teaching that genuine faith continues to grow (e.g. 2:22, 4:42 and the blind man in chapter 9). There are further lessons still to learn. As we apply the lessons of chapter 11 we shall need to be asking how this miracle stretches our faith.

Indeed, the disciples need to grow in faith, because to stick with Jesus is to risk death (v. 16). This is the first mention of Thomas in the gospel, but it is significant. Thomas may not yet understand His words, but the events surrounding Lazarus do spell danger not only for Jesus (11:8) but for His true disciples as well (11:16).

**The delay**

Verse 4 has already hinted that there is more going on than meets the eye. But now things get really strange: verse 6 literally reads, 'When therefore He heard ... He stayed where He was two more days.' The delay guarantees that when Jesus gets to the tomb everybody recognises that there is no hope for Lazarus – he is well and truly dead (vv. 37–39). Indeed, Jesus does not set off for Bethany until He already knows that Lazarus is dead (verses 11–14 – another instance of divine omniscience). But the comment in verse 5 that 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus', as well as the mention of Jesus' uninhibited grief (vv. 33–36) combine to ensure that the delay is not seen as a callous act, but as a genuine act of love. Jesus will demonstrate His love and bring glory to God, both by raising Lazarus, and by enabling Martha and Mary, the disciples and many others, to believe (v. 15).

**His death**

There are hints in this first part that Jesus' going to Judea will result in His death (vv. 7–10; v. 16).

**17–37 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGN****Disappointment at Jesus' failure to heal**

First Martha, then Mary, and finally the Jews express disappointment that Jesus did not heal Lazarus. Martha and Mary react to Jesus' arrival with exactly the same words (vv. 21 and 32). Both of them express faith in Jesus' ability

to heal, but also anguish that He didn't arrive in time to save their brother, anguish that is echoed by their friends (v. 37). Martha's recognition that God will give Jesus whatever He asks shows that she sees Jesus as more than just a healer, but we cannot go so far as to say that she was definitely expecting Jesus to raise Lazarus because of her objection in verse 39. Notice, for example, that when Jesus asks Martha if she truly believes that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, she replies that he is the Christ (v. 27). It's a good answer, but not exactly the question that Jesus asked!

### **Jesus' teaching on who He is**

Jesus is explicit with Martha. She, and the others, still have a great deal to learn. Martha is rightly looking forward to a final 'resurrection' (the final resurrection of all people at the Last Day, the Day of judgement, predicted, e.g., in Daniel 12:1-3). But she hasn't yet been shown the connection between an abstract belief in the resurrection and a personal belief in Jesus. Jesus, God's Rescuer, does not simply procure or promise the resurrection – He is the resurrection and He is the life. Those who come to Him in belief now have found life forever and they have found it now! They will never die in the fullest sense of being separated from God, even though they will die physically, because He is God's Rescuer who overthrows death. He is God's answer to the greatest problem facing humanity.

This statement, 'I am the resurrection and the life', is enormous. The terms are not synonyms. Jesus is claiming to be both 'the one who embodies the power to raise from the dead and the one who is the source of the positive verdict of life' (Lincoln) on that judgement day. That the claim takes the form of an 'I AM' saying reminds us that it is also a claim to divinity – to raise the dead and give eternal life are divine prerogatives (cf. 5:21). The claim does however, leave us with a few questions. What exactly is this life that He gives? How does He give it? How can He be 'the resurrection'? We have had hints to the answer to these questions already. But while the disciples may believe in Him already, they still have a huge amount to learn about what their belief really means. Later on in the Gospel, in chapters 12–21, we shall learn what it means to say that 'the Christ, the Son of God' is 'the life'.

### **Jesus' indignation and grief at death**

Verses 33–36 show Jesus expressing indignation at the sadness, pain and suffering caused by death. The word translated 'deeply moved' expresses indignation, outrage and anger. Commentators are divided about the cause of Jesus' indignation: is He angry at the Jews' intrusion on private grief? Is He frustrated at Mary's unbelieving tears? The context suggests that He is in fact indignant (and rightly so) at the presence of death in a fallen world. That is why He Himself cries when He sees the tomb. This is not how things ought to be – Jesus recognises that and, unlike us, He is able to do something about it. People often ask why, if Jesus knows He is going to raise Lazarus, does He get so upset by his death? The answer is that He is grieved at the very alien presence of death in his world. This is not the way that things should be. Death is not just a fact of life, but a distressing intruder in the world.

## **38–44 THE SIGN: LAZARUS IS RAISED TO LIFE**

The sign has already been explained to us. It is not merely intended to dazzle us, but to reveal God's glory by showing that Jesus is the one who can overcome death itself, thus reversing the fall and fulfilling God's creation purpose of life (see OT notes). Jesus raises Lazarus simply by His word because that is how He works to give life (cf. 5:25). He calls Lazarus by name because His sheep know His voice and follow Him (10:3b; 27). He instructs them to remove the grave-clothes to symbolise Lazarus' liberation from the bondage of death. Further, John again highlights the link between glory and belief (v. 40), but his word order is surprising. We may have expected that people would believe because they see the glory of God. Here, however, Jesus indicates that belief is a pre-requisite for seeing the glory of God. Martha (v. 39) does believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God (v. 27), but is yet to believe that He is the life-giver.

## **45–54 THE OUTCOME OF THE SIGN**

Some believe in Jesus at once, just as the disciples did in 2:11. God's glory has been revealed and the result is the awakening of faith. But the very miracle that 'reveals God's glory' also precipitates the crisis of the death of His Son; the raising of Lazarus provokes a violent reaction among Jesus' enemies and drives the plot on towards His death (note the causal link, 'therefore', in verse 45). In showing us this, John is indicating that the giving of 'life' and the 'glory of the Son' cannot be separated from the Son's substitutionary death.

The 'prophecy' of Caiaphas is, on the face of it, simply a politically motivated remark about the most expedient way to deal with Jesus. It is better for Him to be killed than for the whole nation to go through political upheaval as a result of Him continuing His ministry. But, as John points out, the suggestion is in fact a prophecy of Jesus' substitutionary death (see OT notes). The plot to take His life will result in Jesus, 'the Lamb of God', giving His life on behalf of many nations. This idea has come before (6:51), but by making such a plain reference to substitution, here, John ensures that the explanation of what Jesus' death achieves, which comes in chapter 12, will be understood in the context of His death being a substitutionary death. Caiaphas' comment is also loaded with irony: it is 'better' that Jesus dies, but not for the reason Caiaphas thinks!

Verse 48 is the absolute give-away as to the reasons for the Jews' response to Jesus in chapters 5–9: they want a Christ, but not this uncomfortable Christ. Jesus withdraws until the time is right (v. 54).

### Key themes

- We've said it so many times that it is hard to remember just how amazing is the achievement of Jesus' death: it brings life!
- Death is a horrifying thing, the greatest enemy of mankind.
- Mary and Martha believe in Jesus as 'the Christ'. They even seem to believe that He will bring about the resurrection at the Last Day, but they don't yet see that He is able to give eternal life now – though this is the kind of rescuer He is. Wonderfully, Jesus is committed to helping them grow in belief.
- Belief itself is of foundational importance. Twice in the key verses (25–26), Jesus states that belief is the necessary pre-cursor to life (a big John theme – 20:30–31!). Jesus' question to Martha at the end of v. 26 is the question that John is asking all of his readers, 'Do you believe this?'
- God's 'glory' and the 'glorification' of God's Son will be seen in the overthrowing of the horrors of death by means of the Son's own death.
- Jesus' substitutionary death is going to be at the heart of His achievements for the 'scattered children of God' (11:52) and is part of the revelation of His glory.
- The developing narrative. The Jews plot to kill Jesus. The highest authorities, when confronted with His miracles, see only a reason to put Jesus to death.

### Application

**To them then:** Jesus tells the disciples how this sign applies to them (vv. 1–15). Through it they will see God's glory revealed and so their faith will be strengthened. The general coming and going of the funeral scene indicates a much closer contact with death than we have in the 20th century, so the scandal of death being present in God's world may have been more vivid in those days than now.

Martha, it seems, does believe that Jesus will bring life at the general resurrection on the Last Day. But Jesus shows, in the raising of Lazarus, that He has come to bring eternal life now to those who believe in Him. He shows the disciples that while they may recognise Him as 'the Christ', they have yet to see the full significance of who He is, that He is, in the present, the resurrection and the life. Through faith in Him, the scandal of death is reversed already – and will therefore be reversed fully in due course.

**To us now:** We should rejoice in the revealed glory of Jesus – He really is the one who can deal with death and reverse the effects of sin in a fallen world. He brings life now; He does so through His substitutionary death, as prophesied by Caiaphas. We should expect our faith in Jesus to be challenged (v. 26) and especially strengthened (v. 15), as a result of studying this account; we should also expect our faith to grow, as did the disciples' faith, as we grow in our understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do.

### The aim

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus, as the Christ, brings life and resurrection because He is the resurrection and the life.

## John 11:55–12:50

### Death in this world – life in eternity

#### Context

Chapters 11–20 seem to form a section which begins and ends with a ‘resurrection’ sign, the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus. Within these two events the narrative weaves together two ‘strands’ of material:

- **The unfolding narrative.** In chapter 11 the Sanhedrin again plot to kill Jesus. Their plot will end in His death, but up until this point, He is still eluding their grasp (despite their best efforts – v. 57). The suspense continues to build however, with the mention of John’s third Passover in v. 55. It is astonishing that at a time of such national excitement, their attention is focused not on the Passover itself, but on Jesus – v. 56.
- **The explanation of what Jesus’ death achieves – life.** In chapter 11 Jesus explained what His death will achieve by teaching that the ‘life’ He offers is far more than the general resurrection of all people to face judgement on the Last Day. Rather, as 11:25–26 demonstrated, Jesus offers an eternal life that is to be found only in Him. It can be experienced now, for He is the resurrection and the life. Caiaphas’ prophecy made a link between Jesus’ substitutionary death and ‘life’ (11:50). Throughout chapter 12 the achievements of Jesus’ death are emphasised. As we follow Jesus’ explanation of His death and glorification, and take note of the events and actions that are pushing the narrative forward to the Passover, to Jerusalem and to the cross, we begin to see that the ‘life’ of chapter 11 can only come through the ‘death’ foretold in chapter 12.

#### Structure

11:55– 12:11	Preparation for Jesus’ death.
11:55-57	Passover approaches.
12:1-8	Jesus is anointed by Mary.
12:9-11	The plot to kill Lazarus.
12:12–19	The arrival of the rescuing king on the way to His death.
12:20–36	His death explained: the hour of Jesus’ death is the hour of His Father’s glory, for death leads to life.
12:37–50	Jewish unbelief explained: summary of responses to Jesus’ signs and words.

#### Old Testament Ideas

**‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’:** Psalm 118, from which this line comes, is one of a group of psalms that look back to the rescue of the Exodus. These psalms were always sung to celebrate the Passover, and Psalm 118 was used to welcome pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. In the context of today’s passage the crowds were using the psalm to welcome the one they perceived to be the Messiah, come to rescue His people.

**‘Your king is coming, seated on a donkey’:** Zechariah 9:9–13 prophesies the arrival of God’s rescuing king, who will ride a donkey, not a warhorse. Three features about the arrival of this gentle king are worth noting: His arrival will bring the end of war (v. 10), He will proclaim peace to the nations, extending His reign to the ends of the earth (v. 10), and His arrival will release prisoners, on the basis of the blood of God’s covenant (v. 11). He arrives on a donkey because He is a humble servant as well as a warrior king.

**Isaiah 53:1:** This verse expresses the surprise that the faithful remnant feel when they are met with unbelief as they try to tell others of the arrival and death of God’s suffering servant – God’s rescuer of His people.

**Isaiah 6:10:** This is a key verse in the book of Isaiah. It is picked up in all four Gospels and also in Acts; we have already seen it in John 9. God hardens the Jews’ hearts in judgement so that they cannot see or understand the message.

**Text notes****11:55–12:11 PREPARATION FOR JESUS' DEATH**

This is now the third Passover recorded in John's account. By mentioning the feast at this point, John establishes a link between Jesus' approaching death and this festival, which is so significant in the life of God's people. The expectations of the people in verse 56 only heighten the sense of Jesus' control over His planned arrival in Jerusalem for the feast. At the same time, Jesus' explanation of the anointing (v. 7) shows Him to be fully aware that His journey to Jerusalem will end in His death. Note the contrast with Jesus' progress to the feast of Tabernacles in chapter 7. At that point His 'hour' had not yet come and He resisted any attempt to impose an agenda upon Him. Now His 'hour' has come and He heads up to Jerusalem with full knowledge of all that awaits Him.

The narrative of verses 1–11 helps us identify the key issues of life and death. Lazarus, once dead but now living, sits at table with Jesus, now living but soon to die. As with Caiaphas in chapter 11, Mary's action signals more than she realizes: on face value, it is a simple expression of loving devotion to Christ (John highlights the cost (a year's wages) and the smelly results (previously, the stench was of Lazarus' dead body (11:39); now the smell comes from Jesus' body, as He is anointed for burial (v. 7))). But taken together with Jesus' explanatory comment in verse 7, Mary's action takes us to the heart of what is happening at this point in John: Jesus is going to His death.

The response of Judas Iscariot is a negative foil for Mary's costly, model (cf. ch. 13) discipleship. His questions may have seemed innocent (v. 5), but his true motivation was not (v. 6).

At the same time, the deliberate unbelief of the chief priests continues to astound. As they heard of the raising of Lazarus, many Jews were beginning to believe in Jesus. Therefore, the chief priests decide to kill not just Jesus, but Lazarus as well (verses 10–11). They will do whatever it takes to protect their own position and glory (cf. 5:44).

**12-19 THE ARRIVAL OF THE RESCUING KING ON THE WAY TO HIS DEATH**

This passage is sandwiched between the preparation for Jesus' death and the arrival of the Greeks, an incident that signals the approach of His death. The great crowd hails Jesus as their rescuing Messiah. Hosanna means 'Give salvation now', and the people greet Him as 'King of Israel' (cf. 1:49) and one who 'comes in the name of the Lord'. In contrast to the other occasion when the crowd wanted to 'make Him king' (6:15), Jesus both allows and accepts their adulation. But while they see Him as Messiah, they fail to see that in coming on a donkey Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy; and so, once again, they fail to see what kind of Messiah He is and what He is going to achieve (see OT notes). He knows the agenda of the next few days and so allows them to hail Him as their king, but John acknowledges that even the disciples failed to see the significance of the donkey (v. 16) until after Jesus' death and resurrection (it is not the first time that we have been told that the disciples' understanding was clarified after Jesus' death and resurrection (2:22). It seems that the disciples made real progress when they realized that the hour of Jesus' glorification would be upon the cross.)

The Pharisees meanwhile are helpless to prevent Jesus' mission in drawing all peoples to Himself (v. 19, cf. 4:42; 12:23, 32).

**20–36 HIS DEATH EXPLAINED: THE HOUR OF JESUS' DEATH IS THE HOUR OF HIS FATHER'S GLORY, FOR DEATH LEADS TO LIFE**

In the overall move toward the hour of His death and glory (11:1–12:50), this is the first time that Jesus announces the arrival of His hour; He proceeds to give detailed hints about what his glory will entail.

**20–23 The 'hour' has come.** The arrival of the Greeks is the trigger that causes Jesus to announce that His hour has now come. This is the 'hour' that we have been waiting for, all through the Gospel, since it was first mentioned at Cana (see 2:4; 7:30; 8:20). The request to see Jesus, coming from the Greeks, symbolises the ingathering of the nations by God's Messiah, and the beginnings of the fulfilment of Jesus' role as the 'saviour of the world' (4:42). It stands in stark contrast to the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews (cf. 1:11–12). But Jesus' delay in speaking makes the reader aware that there is more to 'see' before they can 'come to Him'. In the events that follow (Jesus' death and resurrection) the reader will see the full glory of God.

**24–26 The explanation.** The explanatory metaphor about the grain of wheat introduces the key principle underlying all Jesus' actions in the next few days. It outlines the central truth that the only way to have life in eternity is to hate life and lose life now. To hate life is not to be miserable, but to have an allegiance to Jesus that is higher than even my allegiance to life itself. Jesus Himself lives out this principle, achieving rescue and life for His disciples (v:24). But in verses 25–26 He makes it plain that this is the way of discipleship that all must follow – discipleship therefore entails great cost and great reward. This does not mean that His followers should become spoilsports who are unable to enjoy God's good gifts. Rather, they should learn from the cross that life lived out in rebellion against God in this world stands under judgement, and is what took Jesus to His death (see vv. 31–33).

For the people in the crowd, this short paragraph contains major correctives to their understanding, about the kind of Messiah that Jesus is, and also about the nature of true discipleship. The verses end with the twin promise that the disciple will be where Jesus is (seeing and sharing His glory – cf. 14:3; 17:24) and will be honoured by the Father (just as the Father wants others to honour the Son – 5:23).

**27–30 The Father's witness.** These verses show clearly that Jesus' death was part of God's overall plan for achieving His own glory (the death of Jesus will lead to the glory of the Father (here) as well as to the glory of the Son (v. 23)). They also make it clear that Jesus did not somehow escape from all the physical and emotional agony involved in crucifixion. His death was not a mistake, and He did not draw on supernatural powers to avoid the pain and agony of suffering His Father's wrath. His death, which conquers death itself and brings life to the world, really is the supreme moment when God's glory is revealed. The voice from heaven is for the benefit of the disciples: they hear it and are convinced, but the crowd, though they hear it, do not understand it (cf. verses 37ff). It truly is remarkable that even at this moment of great distress, Jesus does not pray for His own deliverance, but solely for His Father's glory. The Father has already glorified His own name, primarily through the signs, and will now glorify it once again.

**31–33 The achievements of the cross.** As Jesus is lifted up in death (cf. 3:14; 8:28; cf. also Isaiah 52:13), He will bring judgement on the world, drive out Satan, and draw all kinds of people into His kingdom. By 'all men' He does not mean 'all people without exception', but rather 'all without distinction'. This reminds us of the significant arrival on the scene of the Greeks and Jesus' immediate response about His death; Gentiles as well as Jews would be rescued through His death (v:20–23; this marks the fulfilment of a plan that began all the way back in Genesis 12).

Note that Jesus does not yet tell us how these things will be achieved; we must be careful not to pre-empt the narrative. Nevertheless, we are encouraged to recognise that the events of the next few days will be full of significance; looking back we will understand what was going on in this fulfilment of the Passover.

**34–36 The final appeal.** Interestingly, the people in the crowd understand Jesus' reference to being 'lifted up' to be an explicit reference to His death. They do not understand how the Messiah could possibly die, so Jesus appeals to them to learn from Him and trust in Him before it is too late. Judgement is a real threat and they, together with John's readers, need to respond to Jesus' offer and accept the opportunity of becoming children of God before the time has passed. Jesus withdraws; His public ministry will soon come to an end.

### **37-50 UNBELIEF EXPLAINED**

John's comments show us that the Jews' unbelief has been foretold, and so is not unexpected (v. 38), and that it is from God, and so is not outside God's sovereignty (v. 40). Not everyone rejects Jesus outright, for many Jews, even leaders, do believe, though secretly (vv. 42–43). The question we are left asking, however, is, 'what is the exact nature of this 'belief'? Is it the inadequate belief that we have seen in the crowd, or is it the real thing? John's description of their fearful cowardice, and their thirst for man's praise (v. 43) is not encouraging – their condition is the same as that of the Pharisees themselves in 5:44).

Jesus' final public words (vv. 44ff) summarise His message to the Jews. They contain yet another appeal to those who are unbelieving to change their minds, on account of who He is and what He offers.

The major emphasis is that the unbelief of the Jews will lead to their judgement (v. 48). Note the 'did not' (v. 37) and 'could not' (v. 39) of their unbelief.

### Key themes

**The developing narrative:** the major development is Jesus' decision to move, voluntarily, towards His death. He sees that His hour has now come.

### The significance of Jesus' death:

- It is the death of God's chosen king who has come in fulfilment of the OT prophecies.
- It is the thing for which He came – the way He brings God glory, yet it is something He dreads.
- Through His death He will bring judgement on the world and drive out Satan.
- Through His death He will draw all kinds of people to Himself, bringing God's peace, rule and freedom to all nations.
- It is the model for genuine discipleship.

### Responses to Jesus (John is still focusing on this):

Some (the Greeks) respond rightly, others (the Pharisees) wrongly.

- Jesus highlights the urgency and necessity of a right response to Him, in order to obtain eternal life and avoid judgement

### Application

The events of the first twenty-three verses show Jesus to be in complete control of the timetable of His death. He enters Jerusalem as king, though not the kind of king the crowds are expecting. His death will be a voluntary sacrifice, timed and enacted deliberately (though not without huge personal anxiety) by Him, in order that eternal life might be made available to all. Our response should be modelled on Mary's response to Jesus – uninhibited devotion. Unlike Mary, however, and the disciples of verse 16, we should be fully aware of why we respond the way we do.

Verse 20–36 increase our understanding about Jesus' death, as He teaches what it means and what it will achieve. As we study this chapter, we should be prompted to praise God for Jesus' death, and to make His death our lifelong study. Jesus' death should become the continuing focus of our faith and discipleship as we learn to hate all our rebellious attitudes and actions that led to His death.

Verses 37–50 show us the reason why people failed to respond to Jesus and also the urgent reason for responding to Him. Verses 42–43 are extremely challenging to us as we seek to live as Christians in the world.

### The aim

The aim of this study is to see the significance of Jesus' death in bringing eternal life, and as a model for Christian ministry.

## John 13:1–30

### The Cross is Central!

#### Context

This section (chapters 11–20) contains two major subjects. First, there is the unfolding narrative – the plot against Jesus which leads eventually to His death (followed by His resurrection). Secondly, John gives us the theological explanation of what Jesus' death and resurrection achieved. Chapter 12 contained both these elements: the plot intensified, and Jesus explained the achievements of His death in terms of 'life', His Father's glory, the judgement of the world, the driving out of Satan, and the drawing of many people to Himself. Chapter 13 continues these themes. Yet there is a shift in emphasis too. The hour, announced in 12:23, has now emphatically come and is linked not only with Jesus' departure to the Father, but with the Passover. There is also a move from public teaching to private; from the world/Jews in general to believers/disciples; from the choice of life or death to the consequences of life. In this personalised section, we also find a deliberate contrast between the 'love to the end' of Jesus (the one with all God's authority) and the Satanic betrayal of Judas who (like the world in darkness of 12:44-50) hears Jesus' words and does not keep them – choosing instead to embrace the darkness and go into the night.

The foot-washing is an acted parable performed in the presence of the disciples that both explains the cross and is explained by the cross – the cross cleanses from sin and is itself the ultimate in love and service – not something that is remote, impersonal and abstract. Another vital aspect of the foot washing is that it shows the personal application of Jesus' death to His disciples – the cross must be central in the discipleship of every individual believer. In this way the foot-washing is an illustration of the truth of Jesus' metaphor about the grain of wheat in 12:24; it applies the principles, taught there universally, to the individual disciples. Without the foot-washing, the explanation of the achievements of Jesus' 'hour' in chapter 12 remains on a grand, universal scale; with it, we see the need for the cross to be appropriated by every believer, individually. In addition we see the importance of understanding Jesus' example for the life of the believer.

Interwoven with this graphic illustration is the plot against Jesus, with the climax of Judas going out into the night. Throughout the chapter, however, John makes it clear that Jesus is the one in control, not Satan, and that Jesus lays down His life – it is not taken from Him. This point is forcefully made by John's contrast between the disciples' failure to understand events and Jesus' complete awareness of what is going on.

#### Structure

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 13:1–17  | The foot washing – the cross in the life of the believer.                               |
| 1–11     | Being 'washed' by Jesus is essential to belonging to Him, and is also sufficient        |
| 12–17    | Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is an example for His true 'messengers' to follow |
| 13:18–30 | Jesus is in control of events leading to his death – He identifies the betrayer.        |

#### Old Testament ideas

**'You will be clean from all your sins'.** The idea of being 'clean' is often found in the OT as a picture of being forgiven (see Lev. 16:30; Ps. 51:7).

#### Text notes

##### 1–17 THE FOOT-WASHING – THE CROSS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

**The foot-washing as an explanation of the cross.** The narrative of the developing plot against Jesus could flow quite naturally from verse 2 through to verse 18, missing out the foot-washing incident altogether. So, we need to ask why John includes an incident which all the other Gospel writers leave out. The answer becomes clear when we realise that the foot washing is an explanation of the cross. But is this really so? Three things show us that it is right to understand the foot washing as an acted parable of the cross.

First, John introduces the chapter by telling us that the cross is imminent. The mention of the Passover, and of the time having come for Jesus to leave this world and return to the Father (His 'hour'), points the reader

unequivocally to the fact that Jesus is now focusing on the events of His death.

Secondly, John contrasts Jesus' understanding of events (vv. 1, 3, 11) with the disciples' lack of understanding (vv. 7, 12, 28). He also shows us how Jesus is educating the disciples so that they will see the place of the cross in the life of the believer. At this stage the disciples do not understand what Jesus is doing, but He assures them that 'afterwards' (v. 7), i.e. after His death, they will understand.

Thirdly, by telling us that Jesus 'loved them to the end' John is indicating that we should look ahead to the cross. The foot-washing shows Jesus' love, but with the events of the cross only a day away, verse 1 cannot be read without understanding it to refer to the cross. Thus, the foot-washing must be understood within the context of the cross. NB It is helpful to realise that the foot-washing has a similarity with the 'shepherd' metaphor of chapter 10: in both cases Jesus develops the metaphor as He makes a number of slightly different points.

Verse 1 contains an interesting detail: much of the Gospel so far has confirmed what the Prologue anticipated, 'He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.' Now Jesus has a new people who can be called 'His own' – the disciples for whom He is about to die.

### **1–11 The cross is essential to the believer's cleansing.**

Peter's horror (v. 6) is understandable when one realises that foot-washing was a task given only to the most menial slave. Some Jews held that even Jewish slaves should never be allowed to do it. The streets were full of animals, and since shoes, if worn, were open sandals, feet got pretty dirty!

Verse 3 is a very significant verse. It shows Jesus' humility – He is so great, yet He stoops so low; His love – He even washes Judas' feet; His knowledge – He knew that God had given Him the position of supreme power, and He knew that Satan had prompted Judas, yet He proceeded with God's plan of action because He knew that this was the way for Satan to be driven out (12:31); and His power – as Jesus gives up His life, so He accomplishes God's supreme purpose (12:24).

At first Peter questions Jesus' action – perhaps understandably –but then he reacts with embarrassment as he objects to his master's words. Afterwards (literally 'after these things') Peter will understand what Jesus is doing. Following the cross, when Jesus has loved His own to the end (v. 1), and when the Spirit has come (cf. 7:38-39), Peter will realise that he can have no share with Jesus unless he allows Jesus to wash his sins away. He cannot serve his master until he has first been served by his master. (The key phrase in this paragraph is 'if I do not', in verse 8.)

Once Peter begins to understand that being washed by Jesus is essential, he reacts with characteristic enthusiasm. Jesus uses this to make a second point about the sufficiency of the cross for the believer. People going out to dinner didn't need to bath again when they arrived, it was just their feet that needed cleansing. Similarly, once believers have come to Jesus for washing, they don't need to keep on going back to the beginning and starting all over again each time they sin. Once clean, Jesus' own people remain clean (see 15:3, the only other instance of this word in John, where it's clear that the cleansing is certain because of Jesus' word, not their own actions). But, at the same time, they need to remain dependent on Jesus' cross for the washing off of dirt that is picked up after the first bath. (Here the key words are 'except for', in verse 10.) Confidence in the sufficiency of the cross, however, must not lead to complacency. The cross is completely adequate to cleanse a believer, but not all are cleansed by it (v. 10b-11). For those who will not believe, the stumbling block is the idea that the Christ must suffer, serve and die (cf. 6:51-71). Judas, already tempted to betray Jesus (v. 2) responds to the teaching of the foot-washing episode by actually betraying Jesus. Throughout the chapter Peter and Judas, believer and unbeliever, are compared and contrasted. Both will deny Jesus (13:26-30, 36-38) and both submit to having their feet washed by Jesus (v. 10-12, 22). The fact that Peter, unlike Judas, is clean is a wonderful picture of grace.

### **12–17 The example of Jesus in washing the disciples' feet is to become a central model for all believers who wish to be called blessed.**

A distinguishing feature of those who follow Jesus should be that they humbly follow His example and lower

themselves in order to serve others (cf. 13:34). By drawing a parallel between His disciples and a servant or messenger Jesus shows how absurd it would be for a believer to refuse to serve someone. If Jesus has lowered Himself to the point of death on a cross, His disciples must follow His example – however hard they may find it to love their brother or sister. ‘Blessed’ (v. 17) means ‘highly favoured’ (by God). The point is that faith will only be seen to be genuine if it is matched with obedient action – this is the proof that a person has understood the gospel. Moreover, knowing we ought to serve is no good at all if we do not do it (v. 17). This is not saying that salvation is by works (it is a word to believers only, v. 18) but that service is true greatness and, despite appearances, the best and happiest way to live. But this is another instance of the way that Jesus explains the cross and then immediately points to the application, in the life of the believer, of His example in submitting to the cross. (For other instances of this see 12:23–26 and 13:34.)

It is worth considering the exact nature of the service that Jesus wants of His followers. His service of us is the example – and it is not so much social as spiritual and eschatological. Our service of each other is to be the same.

### **18–30 JESUS IS IN CONTROL OF EVENTS LEADING TO HIS DEATH – HE IDENTIFIES THE BETRAYER**

These verses continue the unfolding narrative of the plot to kill Jesus. Judas, of course, has been present during the foot-washing, his presence adding a frisson to the story and increasing its dramatic irony: Jesus knew exactly what was going on and what was in each man’s heart (v. 18a, 21, 26, 38 cf. 1:47;2:25;6:61;13:1;11). This point is emphasised by John, as he records the disciples’ lack of awareness and their failure to understand. More than that, what happens is Jesus’ will.

‘Chosen’ in v. 18 probably means the same as in 6:70 – i.e. Jesus is referring to the selection of the Twelve rather than the election of the saved. Jesus knew what he was doing when he chose Judas and deliberately included a traitor among the twelve. He did so to fulfil the prophecy of Psalm 41:9, identifying the betrayer by giving him a piece of bread to make the parallel even clearer (18b). When the betrayal takes place, both the OT prophecy and Jesus’ prophecy (v. 19a) will be fulfilled, showing that Jesus is (i) the Messiah to whom the psalms of David point and (ii) the prophet like Moses (v. 19b cf. Deut. 18:18-22). Men only have power when Jesus gives it to them. Time and again the Jews had failed to arrest Jesus because His ‘hour’ had not yet come (e.g. 7:25-6, 30,32,45-46; 8:20,59; 10:39; 11:53,57; 12:19,36). Now knowing that His appointed hour has come at last, Jesus tells His betrayer to do what he has to do quickly (v27); Judas leaves at once and the arrest happens within hours. (13:30; 18:12,28 cf. 10:18). Jesus’ foreknowledge also enhances His plausibility and, later on, the plausibility of the disciples (vv. 19–20). The cross was not a huge accident. It took place according to the Father’s plan and with Jesus’ full knowledge, in accordance with the Scriptures. This is a point that Jesus has made before (8:28ff), but now in verse 20 He envisages the message of His pre-ordained death being spread abroad by His disciples; this is how He will ‘draw all men to Himself.’

Verse 30 is deeply significant, alerting us to the close of the ‘twelve hours of daylight’ (11:9; 12:35). The final chapter in the plot against Jesus has opened and the darkest hour of history is upon us.

### **Key themes**

- **The achievement of the cross for the individual believer, as shown in the foot-washing:**
  - The achievement of the cross is applicable to individuals who believe, and not to those who refuse to accept the necessity of Jesus’ death on their behalf. If He does not wash us, we remain unclean.
  - The cross accomplishes the once-for-all washing away of the believer’s sins, which brings that person within the scope of Jesus’ work. Without this washing no person can belong to Jesus.
  - Once washed, the believer does not need to keep going back to the beginning again. There is no room for complacency, however; that person must continue to rely on the cross for forgiveness.
  - The cross, like the foot washing, provides the model for genuine Christian discipleship. It is not enough just to understand this; genuine faith involves taking action on what is understood.
- **The developing plot that brings about Jesus’ death:**
  - With Judas’ departure, the hour of ‘light’, when Jesus is in the world, draws to a close.

- Throughout the chapter John has made it clear that Jesus is fulfilling what He had said in 10:18. He is in control and His life is not being taken from Him; this alone would be proof of His identity.

**Application**

**To them then:** The initial reaction to the foot-washing – that Jesus should take on the task of a slave – is one of horror. But, following the events of the cross the disciples understood what Jesus was teaching them. John's presentation of the incident shows that he had understood how the cross must be central to membership of God's people and also central in the ongoing life of the believer. The whole passage emphasises the intimacy of Jesus' love for His own and His commitment to His own, even when He knew what was about to happen.

**To us now:** The overriding application of this passage concerns the place of the cross in the life of the believer. No person can serve Christ unless they have first been served by Him. The cross is central to our membership of Jesus' family, to our assurance, to our day-by-day forgiveness, and to our life and witness as His servants and messengers. As we study the passage, seeing what Jesus has achieved through the cross and what it cost Him, His determination knowingly to go to His death ought to move us to a deeper and more real love for Him. Similarly, the teaching of 12:25–26 cannot simply remain as an abstract truth that we assent to: Jesus going to His death should affect every part of our lives as we lay them down in His service.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that the cross must be central if individuals are to become believers and belong to Jesus. We must be 'washed', we must trust His 'washing', and our discipleship must be modelled on Jesus' humble service of us.

## John 13:31–14:14

### 'Lord, where are you going?' 'How can we know? ... Show us!'

#### Context

It was noted, at the beginning of this section, that two main strands of material are interwoven throughout the section: the unfolding narrative, and the explanation of the theological significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Chapter 13 contains three prophecies (the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter and the departure of Jesus) and interweaves the stories of Judas and Peter with the beginning of Jesus' teaching on the cross and its consequences. With the departure of Judas, Jesus is now left alone with the Eleven and a conversation known as 'The Upper Room Discourse' begins. The narrative is placed on hold as Jesus uses the opportunity to explain the meaning of His death and departure. His words have been compared with Moses' farewell in Deuteronomy as, like Moses, Jesus reiterates God's covenant promises and instructs His disciples how to live as the redeemed people of God; He also predicts their failure and restoration (e.g. compare John 13:35 with Deut 4:6-8, John 14:2 with Deut 1:33).

In summary, He teaches His disciples that:

- His imminent departure via the cross is a good thing (& not a disaster) because it will achieve salvation.
- His disciples will not go with Him immediately. They will continue to live 'in the world' as His people; their 'life' will be marked by the privilege of intimate friendship with God and the pain of the world's hostility.
- After His departure His disciples will need to persevere in following Him. This perseverance will require continuing faith and obedience as they abide in His word.
- After His departure His people have a mission to accomplish while in the world, namely, to bear witness to Him and so to produce, by His grace, the lasting fruit of more disciples.
- His departure will precipitate the sending of the Holy Spirit. His Holy Spirit will dwell in God's people, equipping and enabling them to accomplish God's purposes in the world and to experience God's presence.
- God's new people will be constituted around the words of Jesus (which come from the Father) and the Holy Spirit will guarantee these words by enabling the apostles to remember, understand and record Jesus' teaching.

Chapters 13–17 are therefore particularly important to our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus between the time of His ascension and the time of His return. Throughout the Upper Room Discourse Jesus continually reassures His disciples and teaches them about this period when He will be separated from them. The Discourse is essential to the overall purpose of John's Gospel; it explains what it means to believe and to 'have life' now, in this life, and then, after death. The discourse is divided into two parts by the phrase 'Come now; let us leave' of 14:31. The passage 13:31–14:31 is best studied by following the structure provided by the words of four disciples: Peter in 13:36, Thomas in 14:5, Philip in 14:8 and Judas in 14:22.

#### Old Testament ideas

##### Temple

In this section Jesus again talks about His 'Father's house' (cf. 2:16–22 where the failures of worship at the temple are linked with the promise of the destruction and raising of the temple of Jesus' body) and promises to prepare a place for his disciples there. This way of describing heaven as a new temple (cf. 2:16–17) prepares for what Jesus will say about believers being with Him and Him with us (v. 3, 20). The physical temple built by Solomon was a powerful symbol of God's presence with His people (e.g. Lev. 26:2, 11, 12) but it was no more than a shadow of the true temple of heaven (cf. Heb. 8:5), where God truly dwells (cf. Deut. 26:15). Man cannot enter the true temple of heaven until the sin which drove him out of Eden has been dealt with (Gen. 3:22–24 cf. Jn 8:34–35).

#### Structure

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| 13:31–35   | The shock of His departure. Jesus announces the hour of His glorification and the imminence of His departure.  |
| 13:36–14:4 | Peter: 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus' reply: 'You will follow later.' Jesus assures the disciples of the eternal achievement of His death, the rescue of His disciples for a place in heaven. |
| 14:5–7     | Thomas: 'How can we know the way?' Jesus' reply: 'I am the means!'   |

- 14:8–21 Philip: 'Show us the Father!'  
 9–11 Jesus' reply, part 1: 'If you've seen me you've seen the Father' – listen and believe!  
 12–21 Jesus' reply, part 2: The answer broadens – further consequences of Jesus' relationship with the Father and of His imminent return to the Father (we only get to v14 in this study).

## Text notes

### 31–35 THE SHOCK OF HIS DEPARTURE

**31–32 The hour of His glorification.** The ESV misses an important 'therefore' in verse 31. The text should read, 'When therefore [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, 'Now...'. The 'therefore' links v. 31 back to Judas' leaving and John's statement that 'it was night'. Thus, Jesus announces that the act of betrayal has set in motion the events of the cross which will bring about His glorification. Two points should be made:

First, what Jesus is teaching. When Jesus explains that the moment of God's glorification is 'now' (v. 31), and 'at once' (v32), He is referring to His imminent death. This brings to a climax the theme of glory which has been growing throughout the book (cf 1:14; 2:11; 5:41ff; 7:18; 7:39; 8:54; 9:24; 11:4; 11:40; 12:16, 23, 28, 41, 43). Verses 31-32 repeat the word 'glorified' five times – but at the heart of the two verses is the phrase, 'God is glorified in Him.' The key thing that is about to happen is the glorification of both Father and Son. They are glorified at the cross where Father and Son stoop to save humankind and are seen most clearly for who they truly are.

We must allow the impact of this to strike home to us: God's moment of supreme revelation and triumph is achieved through the betrayal, humiliation and weakness of His Son as He is nailed up to a tree by humankind, the people He has created. This can only really be understood by taking an eternal perspective. If we want to see God made known and honoured by any means other than the exploration and explanation of the cross, we shall have missed the Jesus of John's Gospel and we shall be making the mistake that the crowds made in 2:23–25 (see chapter 6:26–33 and also Application).

Secondly, the 'therefore' indicates a deliberate move by Jesus to set about teaching those who remain (His true disciples): they need to know what will happen next, before the events of His crucifixion overtake them. There is also an urgent need for them to understand what it means to be part of His rescued people, so Jesus explains at length to His disciples, and also comforts them.

**33 The imminence of His departure and the necessity of their remaining.** From Peter's response to this verse it is clear that Jesus' announcement of separation causes the disciples great surprise. They had heard Jesus tell the Jews that they wouldn't be able to go with Him – 7:34 and 8:21 – and in the light of the Jews' hardness of heart that statement had made sense. But now the disciples themselves are forbidden to join Him. Notice, though, the highly significant omissions. Jesus had told the Jews, 'You will seek me', and had then added, 'and you will not find me' (7:34) and 'and you will die in your sin' (8:21), but He does not repeat these last two phrases to His disciples even though He will go on to predict Peter's denial (v. 38).

**34–35 The mandate for His disciples.** The commandment Jesus gives His disciples is not, in fact, new – see Leviticus 19:18. The thing that is new is the way in which they are to love. Jesus qualifies His commandment with the words 'just as I have loved you'. So, this is the new commandment for His new people: their lives should be marked by a love that mirrors His love for them (cf. 13:14). Christian love may have an emotional element, but it always works itself out in self-sacrifice (12:25), service (13:14ff) and obedience (14:15) (see Application). In context the disciples must have been wondering how to tell a true disciple from a hypocrite, both because of the numerous examples of false 'belief' throughout the gospel (eg 2:23, 8:30ff) and because of the shocking betrayal of Jesus by one of the chosen. Here is their assurance. It is possible to know real disciples by their love for each other. More than that, so powerful is this genuine Christian love that it will mark God's people out in the world as His disciples. (cf. Deut. 4:6-8).

### 13:36–14:4 'LORD, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?'

**36–38** The dialogue between Peter and Jesus contains two elements:

First, Jesus reassures Peter. When the Jews had a similar conversation with Jesus (8:21), He told them that they would die in their sin. By contrast, although Peter cannot follow Jesus now, he will do so later.

Secondly, Jesus predicts Peter's denial. Peter's initial pronouncement in v. 37 is bold. Literally, it reads, 'the life of me on behalf of you I will lay down.' The irony is that Jesus has told the disciples that they must eat His flesh given on behalf of the life of the world (6:51) and that the Good Shepherd will lay down His life on behalf of them (10:11). But Peter has failed to understand his own need (13:8-9 notwithstanding) and now that the hour for Jesus' death is at hand Peter wants to die on behalf of Jesus, to engage in heroics rather than gratefully to receive Jesus' death on his behalf. By repeating Peter's offer word for word Jesus encourages Peter to reconsider. His prophecy of Peter's denial throws doubt on Peter's ability even to persevere as a faithful disciple, let alone to die on Jesus' behalf. Judas may have betrayed, but it's clear here that Peter was no more deserving of Jesus' love.

**14:1-4** Jesus then speaks to all the disciples, to reassure them. It is important that we realise just how troubled the disciples are. Chapter 13 has contained three prophecies (Judas' betrayal – already in motion, Peter's betrayal, and Jesus' departure). They have left everything to be with Jesus; in return He both doubts their discipleship and now tells them that they will be separated from Him. The remedy for their anxiety is that they should trust both God the Father and Jesus Himself. In chapter 2, Jesus' Father's house was a place sinful people needed to be driven out of. In the new temple of heaven there will be plenty of room for the disciples despite the failure which Peter's denial typifies. When Jesus says He goes to prepare a place for them, the emphasis is on what He achieves by His death on the cross, rather than on what He does once He reaches heaven. However, Jesus' 'going' (which must involve the whole process of His sin bearing death, resurrection and ascension) is precisely so that He may prepare a place for His people. Until now Jesus has focused on why and how they need to be rescued; now He explains what they are rescued for. Unlike the old temple, this one will be a place of perfect relationship with God (v. 3). This is the perfect comfort for a troubled people. The reason Jesus can tell them not to be troubled is because He Himself is undergoing the trouble (cf. 11:33, 13:21) of the cross for their benefit. He reassures them by pointing beyond the present trouble to the eternal reality of what His death is going to achieve.

### **5-7 'HOW CAN WE KNOW THE WAY?'**

Thomas' question in verse 5 shows that, perhaps understandably, the disciples haven't grasped where Jesus is going. Nonetheless, wherever it is that He's going they want to go with Him! So Jesus moves on to tackle the subject of the way to the Father. His answer to Thomas, the sixth of the 'I am' statements (6:48; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 15:1) is linked to all the others: to 10:7 by 'way'; to 11:25 by 'life' and to the rest by 'truth'. His use of the familiar 'I AM' reveals that the way is to be found in Himself. He explains why that is so by summarising what He has already taught about salvation, revelation and life.

**Salvation.** At the start of the Gospel, Jesus promised the disciples that they would see 'heaven open' (1:51), through the 'lifting up' of the Son of Man (3:14) as He gives His flesh 'for the life of the world' (6:61). And so when He says, 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (12:32), He anticipates His statement to Peter, 'you will follow later' (13:36). By dying on the cross He is the way to God.

**Revelation.** It was in the Prologue that John first alerted us to the fact that Jesus is the truth (1:17). He is the truth because His words are the Father's words (7:16; 12:49) and His deeds are the Father's deeds (5:19ff ; 8:29; 14:10). All that He says about God is true and all that He does and says perfectly reveals His Father. Since His Father's work is salvation and judgement (9:3, 39), when Jesus says He is 'the Truth', He means that He is the truth about God's rescue. Hence verse 4, 'you know the way to the place ...'

**Life.** Life is in Jesus (1:4), He has 'life in Himself' (5:26), and He is 'the resurrection and the life' (11:25); 'whoever believes in the Son has eternal life' (3:36), for He lays down His life for the sheep (10:15, 28). Again, since 'life' is eternal life, when Jesus says 'I am the life' He means that eternal life in relationship with God has its source in Him. Jesus' statement in verse 6b that 'no-one comes to the Father except through me' shows that there is no other means of salvation available to man – if someone wants to get to the Father, i.e. heaven, Jesus is the only way.

**8–21 ‘SHOW US THE FATHER!’**

Verse 7 provides the prompt for Philip’s request. There are two possible ways of taking it. One is that Philip, like so many disciples and unbelievers, wants to be given a unique vision of the Father as proof of His existence – he wishes to be transported to heaven and be granted an exclusive viewing. If so, Jesus’ reply exposes Philip’s shallow understanding of who He is and what He has done. If only Philip would realise what Jesus is doing, he would see that Jesus has provided him with a far greater privilege than a mere one-off glimpse of God; there is no need for further visions. The other possibility is that Philip is exasperated by the ongoing complexity and apparent difficulty of knowing the Father, in which case his request is for a simpler and more straightforward means of revelation, something like, ‘Come on! Can’t you just show us right now?’ Ironically, if Jesus were to have done that, Philip would have been left immeasurably poorer, for the only vision of God ever given to sinful humanity has been the merest glimpse of His back (Exodus 33:23) for ‘No-one has seen God ...’ (1:18).

**9–11 Jesus’ reply, part 1.**

Jesus begins by telling Philip that if he has seen Him he has seen the Father already. He commands Philip to look at Himself and to believe in Him as he listens to His words. Jesus’ three questions, ‘Have I been with you so long and still you do not know me?’, ‘How can you say, “Show us the Father?”’ and, ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father...’ reveal the extent of Philip’s ignorance. Jesus summarises His claims about Himself and His Father from earlier in the Gospel, and urges Philip to pay attention to His words and believe. We would expect the second part of verse 10 to read, ‘the Father, living in me, speaks His words’, but instead it reads, ‘is doing His work’. Thus, what Jesus says is the work of the Father. If a person will only come to Jesus and listen to Him, he will see the Father. Jesus continues with a command to believe His words, or at least to believe on the evidence of the works (meaning the totality of Jesus’ signs, explanations and actions, not just the miracles).

**12–21 Jesus’ reply, part 2** (we will only get to verse 14 in this study).

Jesus now spells out further consequences of His own relationship with the Father and of His imminent return to the Father. What He says is to ‘anyone who has faith in’ Him – it is not limited to the apostles. It is a promise that believers will be able to do ‘greater works’ than Jesus. This promise in v. 12 has been widely misinterpreted to suggest that Christians today should expect to do greater/more numerous miracles than Jesus Himself. A quick look at the context of ‘greater works’ in John’s Gospel will show this to be wrong. In John 5:20ff Jesus speaks of how He will be shown ‘greater works’, and then goes on to define these ‘greater works’: they are the giving of life (v. 21), and judgement (v. 22), in order that all may honour the Son (v. 23). Likewise, in 6:28 the works of God (same word, *erga*) are defined as belief in the one He has sent, and in 9:3 and 39 His work is seen to be salvation and blinding. All this teaching is summed up in 14:9ff where Jesus’ work is making the Father known through His words. So, these ‘greater works’ in 14:12 (again the same word, *erga*) do not point to greater physical signs; rather, as disciples proclaim the words of the Father about Jesus, so God will work to bring ‘life’ to people through them. Because Jesus’ work on the cross is so vital, what He achieves through His followers in the new post-resurrection age surpasses what He did in person before the cross both in scale and nature. The contrast is both between Jesus’ and the disciples’ works and between pre-cross and post-cross works. The ‘greater works’ are the world-wide, Spirit-endowed effective proclamation of the message of salvation and judgement. Anyone who has faith, therefore, will do ‘greater works’. How on earth will this be achieved? Jesus gives part of the answer in the promise of verse 13 – it is as we pray. Jesus is not saying that believers will be given anything that they ‘name and claim’ in the ‘name’ of Jesus, but that as we pray for God to work to bring glory to His own name through the salvation of sinners, He will hear and answer our prayers. This is no charter for self-centred, happy, wealthy, care-free living, but it is a glorious promise to disciples who witness to the Father in a hostile world – He will work to grow His Son’s kingdom.

**Preliminary summary.** If only Philip would believe it, the departure of Jesus is going to result in a far greater achievement than the one-off glimpse of God in heaven that he asked Jesus to give them. For Jesus has revealed God, and also opened the way to the Father for eternity, for the disciples now and for millions of others in the future, beginning at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). That way is made available through the words of Jesus which are the work of the Father.

## Key themes

### Jesus

- He fully reveals the Father because He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.
- The Father's work can be seen in Jesus' words, which bring eternal life.
- He is the only way to God, the only giver of the life of God and the ultimate revealer of truth about God.

### The death of Jesus: its present and eternal consequences

#### a) eternal implications of Jesus' death.

- It will bring His glorification and God's. It seems a failure but is in fact God's greatest victory as He is revealed most clearly.
- It will mean the preparation of a place in heaven for His disciples. Unlike the Jews, who will die in their sin, they will join Him later when He returns to take them to be with Himself, even though they continue to let Jesus down within this life.

#### b) The present implications of Jesus' death.

- In the short term, the disciples will be separated from Jesus by His sacrificial death which gives disciples a pattern for the way that they are to love each other. The disciples will need to trust Jesus after His departure.
- At the same time, the death of Jesus opens the only way to the Father.
- Following Jesus' departure, His disciples will do works 'even greater' than the works of Jesus for they will play a part in the worldwide expansion of the church as many come to know Him as 'the way, the truth and the life'. These works will be done by the Father as disciples pray to Him and ask Him to glorify His own name.

### Peter's confusion

- He doesn't understand that Jesus must die on his behalf.
- He hasn't understood the depths of his own weakness. He wants to die on Jesus' behalf and believes he has the strength to do it. Even so, Jesus' death is sufficient for him, and he will later follow Jesus to the Father.

## Application

First, God's supreme moment of glorification is at the cross. Peter struggled to understand, but we need to learn and relearn that God is glorified by the teaching of the cross more than by 'signs and wonders', church buildings, large numbers, big budgets, clever rhetoric and fine singing. It is Jesus' death that achieves God's glory, through the reversal of all our failure. All through history the church has stumbled when it has drifted away from this truth, either by thinking we are good enough to achieve God's glorification (like Peter), or by failing to view history from an eternal perspective and looking for God's glorification in a visible way through our work now.

Second, the time of physical separation from Jesus may cause dismay and 'troubled hearts' as we experience the pain of life in a fallen world. The way to tackle these emotions is through an eternal and cross centred perspective. Jesus' departure via the cross secures our salvation, a place in heaven. Trust in Jesus can banish anxiety because of the cross. What we can trust him to do is determined by the promises associated with the cross.

Third, Christian love is distinctive and should act both as an assurance for believers and as a powerfully effective form of witness in the world, while we wait for Jesus to return. The Christian community should be highly attractive. Whether we find individuals easy or hard to 'get on with', the way to love them is to learn from Jesus' death for us on the cross.

Fourth, we learn a lesson about salvation. Jesus is making it clear that individuals cannot come to God unless they have a personal encounter with Him. No matter how religious they are, or how strict their observance, or how good their deeds, or how 'orthodox' their Jewish faith, He is the only way to the Father. He alone has opened the gate to heaven through His death, He alone has come from the Father and is the truth from God, and He alone offers true

life that will not perish. The applications of Jesus' words to our relativistic world are obvious.

Fifth, now that Jesus has gone to the Father, we need to realise that the way to 'see the Father' is through the words of Jesus. For, because of who Jesus is, He reveals the Father, and because He has gone to the Father we, as believers, will be able to continue doing the work of the Father through our teaching of His word and through prayer. Again, the application is obvious: through hearing His word and believing it we will be seeing the Father at work! We are supremely privileged!

All these lessons need learning and relearning throughout our Christian lives. We should not be surprised at our own, or others', slowness – discipleship is all about growing in understanding. Peter had to learn the hard way and it took him a long time.

**General note.** In the Upper Room Discourse Jesus makes a large number of promises to His disciples. Some of these promises are specifically directed towards them as apostles, but other promises apply to anyone who believes. Therefore, we need to be very careful to note what the application was to them, and also whether the application is intended for all believers through all time, or just for the apostles. Taking care in these two ways will mean that we avoid misapplication and false expectations. Usually it is pretty clear when the point being made is to be applied generally, to all disciples; we have an example in this passage, when Jesus uses the phrase 'whoever believes in me'.

### **The aim**

The aim of this study is to appreciate the full significance of the cross, now and eternally. It opens the way to the Father and sets the pattern for our life of Christian love now. It also means that His disciples will be able to accomplish great works for Jesus today, through His word and prayer, and for His glory.

## John 14:15–31

### 'Show us... why us and not the world?'

#### Context

Several themes from the Prologue recur in this section: including life in Jesus, receiving Him and becoming children (as opposed to orphans); the world contrasted with those who see Christ's glory; Jesus' temporary 'tabernacling' with us; Father and Son, and the blessings of grace and truth which come through Christ. It also looks back to the world's opposition to Christ in chapters 1-12 (e.g. 1:11, 5:16-18, 7:32-34, 8:19-20, 47, 59). The passage looks forward too to the resurrection appearances of ch. 20, where Jesus' greetings of 'peace' (20:19, 26) echo the farewell of 14:27, where He breathes the Spirit on the disciples (20:22) and where they at last understand both Jesus' relationship to the Father and their relationship to Jesus (20:28 cf. 14:20).

The imminence of the cross is felt throughout this section. Jesus is going away and the time is now very short (v. 19, 25, 28-30). In this part of the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus' purpose is to instruct His disciples about His departure and what it is going to achieve. Peter has been told that it will achieve a place 'in my Father's house' for Jesus' disciples, and Thomas has been told that Jesus Himself is the way to the Father. Now Jesus is in the middle of addressing Philip's desire to 'see the Father'. In verses 8–11 He had explained to Philip that he had already seen the Father through being with Jesus and through listening to His words. Philip needs to understand that hearing and believing lead to seeing. In other words, Philip has already seen the Father! In part two of His answer (vv. 12ff), Jesus broadens out the topic and assures His disciples of the privileges that will be guaranteed to them following His departure:

- They will do the works of the Father as a result of praying in Jesus' name (v. 12).
- They will receive the Spirit who will live with and in them, so that they continue to 'see' Jesus (vv. 15–19a).
- They will therefore live (v. 19b) and so...
- They will understand Jesus' relationship with the Father and will themselves know the love of the Father and the Son as Jesus reveals Himself (vv. 20–21).

This answer provokes another troubled question, this time from Judas. Up to this point the disciples have had little reason to expect anything other than that Jesus' death would be followed immediately by the start of His Messianic reign over all nations. All this talk of a delay, and of Jesus revealing Himself to the disciples alone (v. 19), confuses them. Jesus' answers in the Upper Room presuppose that the Messianic age will not come right away – there will be a delay. Jesus spells out the implications for 3 different groups in this section.

#### Structure

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| 14:8–21  | Philip: 'Show us the Father!'  |
| 12–21    | Jesus' reply, part 2 (cont'd): The disciples will not just see the Father; they are even more privileged than they understand. |
| 14:22–31 | Judas: 'Why us and not the world?'   |
| 22–27    | Jesus' reply, part 1: 'Don't be anxious – Father, Son and Spirit will be with you.'  |
| 28–31    | Jesus' reply, part 2: 'Don't be sad – my departure is better for me, for you, and for the world.'                              |

#### Old Testament ideas

**The Holy Spirit:** OT references to 'the Spirit of God' number just short of 100. The Spirit is God active as creator, controller and revealer. There are occasions in the OT when the Spirit was said to enable and equip specific individuals, e.g. Bezalel, who was given artistic skill (Exod. 31:1–11), and Moses, Saul, David and many others who were equipped for leadership. The key, however, to understanding the NT significance of the Holy Spirit is to be found in the writings of the prophets. There the Spirit is associated with the Exodus and the return from exile (Is. 63:11-14; Ezek. 11:17-19). The prophets anticipated a day when the Spirit of God would be poured out on all His people, bringing them new life and giving them new clean hearts, so that they would be ready and able to obey

God (Ezek. 36:26ff). While there are references throughout the OT to the Spirit being God active in power, it is only the prophets who suggest that the Spirit could ever indwell and remain permanently with all God's people. Their prophecy was never universally realised in the OT. Previous references in John to the Spirit include: chapter 1, identifying Jesus as the one who would baptise with the Spirit; chapters 3 and 4, linking the living water of the Spirit and the birth of water and the Spirit to the new kingdom of God; chapter 6 where only the Spirit can give life; chapter 7 where the giving of the Spirit depends on Jesus' glorification (i.e. cross/resurrection/ascension).

**Peace:** The Hebrew word 'shalom' has the wider meaning of wholeness, prosperity and right relationship with God, others and self. It is a major OT covenant theme. The world cannot give 'rest' in any lasting sense, v. 27 because the Sabbath 'rest' which God ordained at creation was lost at the Fall (Gen. 2:1-3; 3:17-19; Is. 57: 19-21). Peace, foreshadowed but never fully realised by the Promised land and the Davidic Kingdom (Josh. 21:44; 2 Sam. 7:11; 1 Kings 4:24), was looked forward to in the Messianic age (e.g. Is. 9:6; 52:7; Ezek. 37:26; Zech. 9:10)

**Isaiah 40:5:** There was an expectation that the whole world would see the messianic age coming immediately, when the glory of the Lord was revealed.

## Text notes

### 8-21 'SHOW US THE FATHER!'

If the first half of chapter 14 stressed belief as a necessary response to Jesus (v. 1, 8-10), the focus now moves to love (v. 15, 21, 23-24, 28), and in particular to love expressed in obedience to Jesus' commands.

**12-21 Jesus' reply, part 2 (cont'd).** In reply to Philip, Jesus continues to outline the privileges of discipleship. As He broadens out His answer and begins to describe the privileges, He makes sure that the disciples understand who His real followers are (vv. 15ff). The word translated 'obey' is a key word in the passage (vv. 15, 21, 23 and 24). The same word was used in 8:51 where Jesus taught that the person who kept His word (literally observed, fulfilled, paid attention to), or persevered in His word, was the one who would see life. Here, in chapter 14, Jesus describes the person who loves Him as the person who 'keeps His commands'. Jesus is not teaching that someone becomes a believer by obeying His commands (except the command to believe (3:36)), but He is teaching that someone cannot be a believer if they do not obey His commands. The implied command to love and obedience in v. 15 is sandwiched between promises of answered prayer and of the Holy Spirit's help for believers (vv. 13-17, cf. Luke 11:9-13). We must obey Jesus' specific commands and His whole teaching, but (the 'if...then...' argument extends to v. 17a) we must not be reliant on our own efforts, or, like Peter, we will always fail. The Spirit is not a reward for our obedience but inseparable from it. Our responsibility is balanced by God's sovereign work in us. These are the privileges of those who love Jesus:

- They will receive the Spirit.
- They will live (v. 19b).
- They will be in relationship with the Son and the Father (v. 20).

It is important to identify what Jesus teaches His disciples about the Spirit:

**The Spirit is the Paraclete.** The word 'Paraclete' is used of a legal friend (a formal legal Advocate) who fights the cause of the defendant. He is 'another', of the same sort as Jesus, who remains with His disciples and will dwell in the believer forever when Jesus is gone. The English word 'counsellor' doesn't quite capture the sense of the one who comes alongside and pleads the cause of God in us. Like Jesus, He is a witness for Jesus and against the world (15:26; 16:8-11 cf. 8:14, 26). 'Paraclete' is definitely not 'counsellor' with the sense of 'therapist'!

**The Spirit is the Spirit of truth.** Jesus, who described Himself as 'the truth' (14:6), now describes the Spirit as the Spirit of truth. Truth has been a key and vital emphasis in John's Gospel: Jesus reveals the truth (1:18), calls true worshippers who will worship 'in truth' (4:23), is Himself the truth (14:6). The Spirit will lead the apostles in all truth, when Jesus is gone, by reminding them of Jesus' teaching (v. 26).

**The Spirit is the Holy Spirit.** His presence will change lives as well as minds, making us holy, as those set apart to belong to and be like God, obedient to as well as knowing Jesus' commands (v. 21).

**The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus.** Though the Spirit is a distinct person in the Trinity, He does not have His own unilateral agenda. He is the Spirit of the risen, living, life-giving Jesus who comes to be with Jesus' disciples forever. When Jesus says, 'I am coming', He means that His Spirit is coming – He uses the two phrases almost interchangeably. The Spirit is given by the Father at the request of the Son. He is personal, a 'He', like Jesus. He will never depart from Jesus' words (v.26), but will use Jesus' words to accomplish the Father's agenda. Indeed, the more we read the New Testament, the more we see that the three persons of the Trinity, though distinct, are very much one God. Like Jesus, the Spirit cannot be 'seen' or understood or received by the world, by people in hostile rebellion against God.

(NB When Jesus says 'I will come to you', He cannot be referring simply to His resurrection appearances, for He promises that He will not abandon His disciples (v. 18) and also that He will come to 'whoever' (v. 21) and 'anyone' (v. 23) who loves Him and obeys Him.)

By verse 21 it is clear that Jesus' answer to Philip has broadened out to encompass a whole range of benefits that will be available to the believer following His departure. If only Philip will believe, he will realise just how privileged he is.

## 22 – 31 'WHY US AND NOT THE WORLD?'

Judas' anxiety about the failure of the world to see Jesus can best be explained by Isaiah 40:5 (see OT notes). In replying to Philip, Jesus has made it clear that, whereas His disciples will have a relationship of love with Himself and also with the Father, the world will not (v. 10). The messianic age, when the whole world will see and acknowledge the Messiah, will not come yet; there is to be a delay before this momentous era is fully ushered in. Judas cannot understand this. Jesus answers the question by first teaching the apostles what His departure will achieve for them. Having established this, He then answers the question with regard to the world.

### 22–27 'Don't be anxious.' What Jesus' departure will achieve for His disciples.

First, an intimate union with the Father and the Son (vv. 23–24). The impact of this amazing prospect is reinforced when we realise that the word for 'home', that Jesus uses here, is the same word that He used when speaking to Peter in verse 2 – there it was translated as 'rooms'. (Literally, the word means 'dwelling place', with the connotation of permanence.) At that point Peter was promised a dwelling place in heaven; now Judas is promised that he will become the dwelling place of God on earth. The sanctuary and the temple in the OT merely symbolised the presence of God with His covenant people (e.g. Ex. 25:8; 1 Ki. 8:12-13, 27). The reality, linked to the outpouring of the Spirit (e.g. Joel 2:27) and peace (e.g. Ezek 37:26-27), was still future (e.g. Zech. 2:10) – no longer! Note that the promise in verse 23 is sandwiched between two reminders, one positive and the other negative, about the link between loving Jesus and obeying Him: this promise is specifically for disciples who have responded rightly to Jesus' revelation of the Father. Note too that Jesus underlines His promise by telling us that it comes from the Father. God's presence is a sign of His covenant love (v. 23). There is an important sense in which God loves even those who hate Him (cf. 3:16) but the blessings of His love will only be enjoyed by those who respond in love and obedience.

Second, the sending of the Spirit will guarantee the accurate recalling of Jesus' words by the apostles (vv. 25–26). Note that the promise about teaching and reminding must apply initially to the apostles, for it is limited to 'everything I have said to you'. Wherever the Spirit is at work minds will be changed. The assurance to us is therefore that the apostolic writings are reliable. We don't depend on fallible human memory. This has major implications for us today when the accuracy and the authority of scripture are questioned. The 'all things' and 'all' of verse 26 show that the Spirit-inspired message of the apostles is both final and sufficient. The Spirit has no further words to add to the 'all things' He has taught Jesus' apostles. To suggest that He has more to say is to question Jesus' teaching in verse 26.

Third, Jesus' departure achieves peace for His disciples – a unique peace with God their Father, which is established through their belief in the achievements of Jesus' death (see OT ideas).

**28–31 ‘Don’t be sad.’ What Jesus’ departure will achieve for the world as well as for His disciples.**

In verse 29 Jesus tells His disciples that His instruction about His death now, before He dies, will enable them, later on, to believe in Him. He has already made this point twice (8:28; 13:19), but here He expands it in order to answer Judas’ question about the world recognising Jesus as Messiah: His obedient and loving response to His God-given mission will be not only the way to convince His disciples, but also the way to convince the world of who He is. Thus the cross becomes the fulcrum on which the world is either saved or judged. Here then is the answer to Judas’ question. The Spirit enables the apostles to record the message and meaning of the cross. The world will be enabled to respond correctly to Jesus through this message about the cross.

**Key themes**

- Jesus’ departure is not a tragedy for the disciples, whose love of Jesus is shown to be genuine by their perseverance in obeying His teaching. Following His departure:
  - They will receive the Spirit.
  - They will be the dwelling place of the Father and the Son.
  - They will be reminded of all the things that Jesus taught them.
  - They will be loved by the Father.
  - They will receive Jesus’ peace.
- Those in the world will not receive these blessings, for they are still ruled by Satan.
  - They are unable to receive, see or know the Spirit because they do not love or obey the Son.
  - They will not see Jesus after His death.
  - They will see Jesus’ love for His Father and His obedience to Him. They will either be judged or saved according to their reaction to this.
- The world can, however, be brought into a relationship of loving obedience to God through the Spirit-inspired message of the apostles – the gospel.

**Application**

**First, the breadth of a disciple’s privileges.** Replying to both Philip and Judas, Jesus promises that the one who loves Him will be able to continue to see the Father – more than that, that person will have the Father and the Son dwelling within him or her through the Spirit. This means, therefore, that a disciple now is in a position of even greater privilege than were the disciples themselves when Jesus was with them physically.

Make sure you focus on the intimacy suggested by the words ‘in’, ‘with’, ‘within’ and ‘forever’. It will be important, also, to spend plenty of time on the matter of obeying Jesus’ word, and the fact that this is what indicates a person’s genuine love for Jesus. Take care, however, not to encourage salvation by works! Obedience to Jesus is the mark of someone who loves Him, not a condition for belonging to Him.

**Second, it will be well worth getting straight** just who the Spirit is and who He is not! Don’t be surprised if there are some pretty strange ideas around. This is one of the key NT passages on the identity of the Holy Spirit, so spend plenty of time thinking through the teaching in these verses. He is the Spirit of Jesus, of His truth and of His word. He is not a materialistic Spirit who will give disciples the things that Jesus has so far refused to give them (note that the answered prayers of v.14 are followed by the expectation of v. 15!). The crowds, at various points in John’s narrative, attempted to force their own this-worldly agenda onto Jesus, and we must be aware of the danger of doing the same thing, trying to force our own ‘me-centred’ agenda onto the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit has enabled the apostles to record ‘all things’ and ‘everything’ that Jesus taught. His words are final and sufficient.

**Third, Jesus’ answer to Judas should encourage** us to ensure that the teaching about the cross is central to our evangelism. For Jesus says that it is as the world sees His loving obedience to the Father (in going to the cross), which he speaks about before He dies, that they will come to believe.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that, far from being impoverished by the departure of Jesus, those who demonstrate their genuine love of Jesus by obedience will be privileged to have God dwelling in them.

## John 15:1–17

### 'I am the true vine'

#### Context

The words of Jesus in 14:31, 'Come now; let us leave', mark a break in the discourse and a slight change in subject matter. Until now, Jesus has been answering the disciples' questions about His departure. He has explained that there will be a delay before His kingdom is inaugurated fully and He has taught them what His departure will achieve for them, things that they will experience and enjoy while they wait for His return. But how should they live while they wait? In chapters 15–17 Jesus explains that the most important thing in this life is to abide in Him and His word. This teaching on love leading to fruitfulness must be read in the context of 13:31-36 and 14:22. His teaching in the second half of the discourse has four major parts:

- 15:1–17**      **The disciples' relationship to Jesus.** Jesus is the true fruit-bearing vine. The disciples must abide in Him by abiding in His word.
- 15:18– 16:15**      **The disciples' relationship to the world.** The world will hate the disciples, just as it hated Jesus, but they must persevere in His word to the end, just as He did. They will have the help of the Holy Spirit as they wait.
- 16:16–33**      **The disciples' relationship to the Father.** Jesus' departure is a good thing because it will bring about a permanent relationship with the Father.
- 17:1–26**      **Jesus prays that the disciples will be kept to the end.**

#### Structure

- 15:1–2      Jesus is the true fruit-bearing vine.
- 15:3–8      Disciples must remain in the true fruit-bearing vine. The consequences of doing so and also of not doing so.
- 15:9–17      The vine metaphor explained: the meaning of abiding in Jesus.

#### Old Testament ideas

**The vine:** Psalm 80:8–19, Isaiah 5:1–7 and Jeremiah 2:21 are among a number of OT passages in which God's chosen people are described as a 'vine'. In each case the people are seen as a fruitless and unfaithful people, and their descriptions are accompanied by warnings of judgement and exclusion from God's kingdom. The imagery recurs in Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-10 and 19:10-14 as God's prophet berates the fruitlessness of Jerusalem. (Indeed, Ezekiel may well be the primary background for he not only speaks of the vine bearing fruit, but also has a distinction between the vine and its branches, and mention of branches that are good for nothing, that wither, and that are thrown into the fire to be burned. As Jerusalem was in Ezekiel's day, under God's judgement, so now is unbelieving Israel.) However, in Psalm 80:17–18 and Isaiah 27:2–6 the writers look forward to a future day when the vine will be fruitful, and Psalm 80 hints at a future son of man who will be the true Israel. Jesus is true Israel, the fruitful vine.

**Fruitfulness** is a creation command (Gen. 1:28; 9:1) and a covenant promise (e.g. Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:6). Moses entreated Israel on the borders of the Promised Land to obey in order to be established and be fruitful (Deut. 28:9-11). Disobedience would be punished by exile and unfruitfulness (Deut. 28:15,38,42) but God alone could make obedience possible (Deut. 30:6,8). When Israel failed to obey and was exiled the prophets looked forward to fulfillment of the promise in the Messianic age (e.g. Ezek. 36:11). Associated with the blessing of all nations, the Spirit, cleansing, obedience and answered prayer, fruitfulness is characteristic of the new creation (Ezek. 36:35).

**Joy** also figures in Mosaic descriptions of life in the Promised Land (e.g. Deut. 12:12; 14:26), not joy earned by joyless obedience, but joy in obedience, the blessing of God's rule. The later prophets described the joylessness of a people under judgement (e.g. Is. 24:11; Jer. 31:15 and Joel 1:11-12, which links joylessness with fruitlessness). They looked forward to being joyful again at the return from exile (e.g. Is. 9:2-3; 55:12; Jer. 31:10-14; Zeph. 3:14-20, cf. John 3:29); it was a joy that the 'return' of Ezra's day failed to deliver (Ezra 3:10-13, compare with 1 Chron. 15-16).

## Text notes

### 1–2 JESUS IS THE TRUE FRUIT-BEARING VINE

By introducing Himself as the true vine, Jesus is identifying Himself as the true, fruitful Israel (see OT notes). This is a claim of staggering egocentricity. His use of 'true' suggests that He, at last, will be able to accomplish all that God's people have failed to achieve throughout the OT. And it also suggests that a person can only enjoy the status of being part of God's true, fruitful people by being joined to Jesus; as in 5:23 and 14:6, this implies that all other religions are false. Characteristically, Jesus immediately explains (v. 2) that He does not work independently of the Father. As in the OT, the Father is the one who tends the vine, for the Father is passionately concerned for the fruitfulness of His people.

### 3–8 DISCIPLES MUST REMAIN IN THE TRUE FRUIT-BEARING VINE

Jesus now turns to discuss the vine and the branches and explains the consequences for those who remain in the vine and for those who do not. The branches are identified as 'whoever abides in Jesus'. Anyone who abides in Jesus will bear fruit. Any branch that is apart from the true vine is unable to bear any fruit at all. This further emphasises the centrality of Jesus and the futility of religion without Jesus. The principle and practice of bearing fruit is what brings the Father glory.

- Verse 3:** Jesus is the entry point to the vine. People 'join' the vine by hearing Jesus' words (including His words about His cleansing death – see chapter 13).
- Verse 4:** Abiding in Jesus is essential if someone is to bear fruit. God's people cannot be fruitful, we see, without Jesus.
- Verse 5:** All those who abide in Jesus are guaranteed to bear much fruit (v. 5b) – Jesus will explain the precise nature of the fruit in the second half of the passage.
- Verse 6:** There are consequences for those who do not 'abide': fruitless branches are thrown out and burned. These are very strong words, and, in context, may suggest Judas' fate.
- Verse 7:** Jesus now focuses on the positive aspect of 'abiding' and 'bearing fruit'. To abide in the vine means to abide in His words (cf. 8:31; 10:3). Thus we have seen that joining the vine, abiding in the vine and bearing fruit are all dependent on Jesus' words – for while fruit will be the result of prayer (v. 7b), that prayer will be governed by the words of Jesus which must remain in a disciple. (Obviously, this has been a big John theme.)
- Verse 8:** Finally, Jesus explains the purpose of the true vine and its branches. The complete vine is to bring glory to the Father – what Israel had failed to do, Jesus will achieve. (v. 8 suggests that the 'fruit' will (i) be something in line with Jesus' words; (ii) bring glory to the Father, and (iii) will come as a result of prayer.)

Some tie themselves in terrible knots about whether it is possible for someone who has once been 'joined to the vine' to be cut out of the vine later. But the vine imagery here is not intended to settle disputes about the perseverance of the saints (in context it may well be a reference to the betrayal of Judas, one whom He had chosen (13:18))! The obvious purpose of the verses is to insist that true Christians will always produce some measure of fruit. Fruitfulness is an unmistakable mark of true Christianity: from the earliest chapters of John's Gospel the genuine believer has been identified as the one who believes, and continues to believe, the words of Jesus. For such a person, says Jesus (vv. 7–8), bearing fruit is guaranteed. But what is this 'fruit'? Jesus answers this vital question as He proceeds to explain the metaphor.

### 9–17 THE VINE METAPHOR EXPLAINED: THE VINE AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Jesus' explanation of how the vine works, and what the images mean, presents us with a picture of how God's true fruitful people are meant to live. The emphasis is on their loving obedience to His word and work (i.e. His revelation of the Father); this obedience is the indispensable first step to fruitfulness.

#### 9–11 The nature of abiding.

The Father has loved Jesus by showing Him all that He does (5:20). Jesus has loved the disciples in the same way, by showing them all things through His words and works (v. 15). Jesus abides in the Father's love by loving obedience to His commands – even as far as death. In this respect, the disciples are to model themselves on Jesus, the perfect

example of abiding. This kind of obedience is costly – faithful branches are pruned even though they are not burned (v. 2). Love may require that we too lay down our lives – Jesus is about to warn His disciples to expect the world’s hatred. But obedience also leads to joy. Jesus has already taught that holding to His teaching results in freedom

(8:31–32); here we see that joy, the true joy that Jesus Himself experienced, can also be ours as we ‘abide in His love’ through loving obedience to His command. As we obey His command to love, He will love us as the Father loves Him and this will give us complete joy.

### **12–17 The nature of His command.**

Jesus has already shown His disciples that obedience to Him means putting self to death in loving service of His people (cf. 12:25; 13:12–17; 13:34). Paradoxically, if people obey Jesus’ command, He will call them His friends. As people remain in Jesus’ love, in loving obedience to His command, so they will have the Father’s will revealed to them. They will ‘know the master’s business’. So, on the basis of His word (vv. 14–15) they will be friends and not slaves. Clearly, it is as friends of Jesus, knowing the Father’s purposes, that they will be able to bear fruit. In verses 16–17 Jesus draws the threads together: the disciples cannot puff themselves up on account of their new-found privileges, because the initiative lies entirely with Jesus (cf. 6:70–71).

Verse 16 enables us to arrive at a better definition of ‘fruit’. It is possible to argue that fruit is synonymous with Christian behaviour. After all, Christian behaviour is the result of prayer in Jesus’ name (v. 16) and it brings glory to the Father (v. 8); it represents obedience to Jesus’ commands (v. 10), and it means experiencing His joy (v. 11), loving one another (v. 12), and witnessing to the world (vv. 16, 27). This suggests a broad definition for fruit of anything that is generally godly, and fits with the OT context. However, within John’s context, it is more likely that the primary meaning of fruit is what results from evangelism and mission, i.e. new believers – cf. the ‘greater works’ of 14:12. The context of the Bible supports this, with its emphasis on fruitfulness and multiplication of people being one of the main purposes of Israel. Both may be in view.

(There is no indication that John was thinking of the fruit of the Spirit at this point).

The above conclusion is confirmed by v.16, where the word for ‘appointed you’ is a verb used usually to mean appointing someone to a particular task or ministry. Since the context of v. 16 is the ‘going’ of the disciples, the words ‘appointed you’ suggest ‘mission’. Furthermore, the fruit of verse 16 is also expected to abide (i.e. in obedience, love and so on), which certainly suggests other believers. Jesus’ point is that He is the true vine who has called people and given them the task of bringing others into the vine.

Verses 16 and 17 stress God’s sovereignty over the disciples’ work of love, prayer and fruitfulness. Not only the disciples but even their fruit is destined by Him to abide. He guarantees the outcome.

## **Key themes**

### **The need to remain in Jesus.**

- Jesus is the true fruit-bearing vine promised in the OT, the true Israel. We can only be members of God’s true people if we remain in Him.
- On our own we are helpless and hopeless, fit only for destruction.
- We must let Jesus’ words live in us.
- We must obey His commands, particularly His command that we should love each other.

### **The consequences of remaining in Him.**

- Those who remain in the vine will bear fruit as they pray according to Jesus’ words.
- Those who obey His command to love one another will share His joy.
- The Father will thus be glorified.

**Remaining is God’s work** – in the midst of the challenge, God’s sovereignty is a comfort:

- It is God’s purpose that His people should bear fruit on earth, to His glory.
- He initiated His disciples’ membership by choosing us, loving us and cleansing us by His word.

- He has shown His love by obeying His Father, dying for His disciples and revealing all that God has told Him.
- He is sovereign over us and the fruit that we bear.

**Application**

The main impact of this passage should be to make us reassess our relationship with Jesus. Are we taking it seriously? We learn that God's purpose for His people is that we should bear fruit. It is not His primary purpose that we should have a happy life, though he does promise a joyful one, or a wealthy trouble-free existence. His concern is that His people should bear fruit and so bring Him glory. Jesus (and His words) alone makes it possible to bear fruit. He assures us that if we remain in Him and He in us we certainly will bear fruit, but He warns that the one who does not bear fruit is fit only for destruction. He explains that our remaining is by His choice, through His love, and according to His word dwelling in a person. He teaches that our loving obedience to His word will ensure His continued indwelling.

All this drives us to Jesus, to His word, and to an examination of our own response to Him. As we concentrate on these things, fruit certainly will follow. Too often we focus on techniques and events, but Jesus teaches that if we focus on Him, and our relationship with Him, we will know His love and share His joy and evangelistic fruit will come naturally, in answer to our prayer, and in this way we will bring glory to the Father.

We must not however interpret this promise too individualistically – there is no promise in the Bible that my friends and my family will become Christians. The promise here is that as I remain, so the vine will bear fruit.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is that we should recognise God's ultimate purpose for His people on earth, which is that they should bear fruit and so bring Him glory. (This should lead us to an absolute dependence on Jesus and His words as the only source of true fruitfulness.)

## John 15:18–16:4

### The disciples' relationship with the world

#### Context

In the second part of the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus teaches the disciples that God's purpose for His people as they live now is to remain in Jesus, the true and fruitful vine. In order to achieve this they will need to persevere as disciples of Jesus. In 15:1–17 the importance of remaining in Jesus and persevering is the major emphasis. The reason His people need to remain in Him is that this is the only way to bear fruit and to avoid destruction.

The purpose of the next passage, 15:18–16:4, is to warn the disciples (16:1). They have a job to do, as God's fruit-bearing people, in the world, but the world is hostile to Jesus and His teaching. Therefore, remaining in Jesus will mean experiencing the world's hatred. This is inevitable, and cannot be avoided, for God will not give up on the world. The world's hatred for disciples stands in stark contrast to their love for each other.

Thus 15:1–17 is primarily about the disciples' relationship with Jesus the vine, and 15:8–16:4 is primarily about the disciples' relationship with the world in which they still live.

#### Structure

The world will hate the disciples because of:

15:18–20	...its hatred of Jesus. Because the disciples belong to Jesus they too are recipients of the world's hostility towards Him.
15:21–25	...its hatred of the Father. This is revealed by the hostility towards Jesus. It is without excuse because the world has seen God's perfect revelation.
15:26–27	...the Holy Spirit's ongoing testimony to Jesus through the disciples. God has not given up on the world – He will send the Spirit and the disciples into the world to testify to Jesus.
16:1–4	Forewarned is forearmed. The world will persecute God's fruit-bearing people with zealous religious commitment.

Thus the world's hostility is depicted in general terms from 15:18-25, and specifically from 16:1-4. The centre-piece of the section (15:26-27) concerns the witness in the world of the Paraclete through Jesus' disciples. It is the disciples' witness (witness in John is axiomatic with belief) that draws the world's ire.

#### Text notes

##### **18–20 THE WORLD WILL HATE THE DISCIPLES BECAUSE OF ITS HATRED OF JESUS**

Jesus warns His disciples that they will be hated by the world, and explains why. It is likely that His command that they should love each other in verse 17 is just as much an introduction to this part as a summary of the previous one. Our love for one another is an indispensable element of our testimony to Jesus as we pursue this goal of fruitfulness in the world (13:34–35; 15:27).

The word used here for 'hate' (same word as 7:7; 15:23 and 17:14) is a very strong one, meaning 'to detest, abhor, persecute in hatred'; it suggests a fixed ongoing hatred. Verses 19–20 expand on why the world hates the disciples in this way, giving two reasons: the disciples do not belong to the world and, secondly, they do belong to Jesus whom the world hates.

In verse 19 Jesus stresses the disciples' separateness from the world by repeating the word 'world' five times. The point is that the disciples have been chosen (although intrinsically no better than other people, for Jesus had to choose them out of the world) and now belong elsewhere. If a person belongs to Jesus, the true vine, that person has changed sides. Put negatively, he or she no longer belongs to the world (like Jesus Himself, 8:23); put positively, he or she now belongs to Jesus. So, the primary cause for persecution is the disciples' change of status. When, under new ownership, they love/obey Jesus by loving other believers (13:34-35; 15:1-17), they are in direct conflict

with a world that hates Jesus. The disciples have already seen a mixture of fickle love and hate in the way the world treated Jesus (cf. ch. 5–10; see also 3:20).

The world's hostility towards Jesus is underlined in verse 20 where Jesus points to Himself as the model for the disciples (recalling the words of 13:16). The 'ifs' of verse 20 imply that the hatred is tied to what the disciples have to say about Jesus. Obedience to Jesus' teaching (v. 20b) is held up as the positive counterpart to persecution (v. 20a). In general, the world will persecute the disciples for their teaching just as they persecuted Jesus for His. The world may say it likes or respects Jesus, but if it hates His teaching it hates Him. But all is not totally gloomy! Some from the world will obey the disciples' teaching, just as some from the world obeyed Jesus' teaching. Throughout this first part Jesus has been strengthening the disciples against 'going astray'. If they realise that the world's hostility is directed primarily at Jesus, and that Jesus Himself experienced this hatred, they will be better equipped to persevere and remain in Him. Put differently, persecution from the world is not necessarily a proof of failed discipleship – sometimes it is a proof of faithful witness.

### **21–25 THE WORLD WILL HATE THE DISCIPLES BECAUSE OF ITS HATRED OF THE FATHER**

Verse 21 summarises the opening statements and introduces the new idea that hostility to Jesus indicates hatred of God. The sentence structure here is made by the two 'If I had not ... but now' statements in verses 22 and 24. They both contain these two points: the guilt of the world and the world's hatred of the Father. In 14:10-11 Jesus had taught that the way He made the Father known was through His words and works (the works of Jesus are the works of the Father: 5:17, 19; 10:32, 37-38; 14:10). Here, His words (v.22) and works (v.24) expose the world's guilt. It is not that if Jesus had not come the world would have been guiltless. Rather, that by coming and speaking and acting Jesus has revealed the Father. Therefore, the world's hatred of Jesus' words and works exposes its central and controlling sin: hatred of the Father (cf. 3:19ff.). As has been stressed before, the reason that people reject Jesus is that they do not know the Father (7:28; 8:19, 54-55; cf. 5:23 and 16:3). The disciples should not be surprised at this hatred of the Father – it is written about in scripture. By quoting from Psalm 69:4, Jesus makes the point that if David could be hated for no reason, how much more would God's Messiah (the Son of David) be hated?

Again, the disciples will be far better equipped to keep going and 'not go astray' (16:1), so achieving their purpose of remaining and being fruitful, if they realise these two things: first, that the hatred and persecution are matters of sin for which there is no excuse, and secondly, that while this persecution is conducted in the name of the Father, it is nonetheless hatred of the Father. Those who persecute will be religious people (16:2) who claim to be acting in worship of God, but here Jesus devastatingly exposes their hearts.

### **26–27 THE WORLD WILL HATE THE DISCIPLES BECAUSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ONGOING TESTIMONY TO JESUS THROUGH THE DISCIPLES**

The world may hate both Jesus and the Father, but the Father has not given up on the world. After Jesus' departure He will continue to reach out to the world, using two 'agents' to accomplish His purpose: He will send His Spirit and He will send His disciples (again fulfilling Deuteronomy's two witness requirement). The fact that the disciples have been entrusted with this task is the reason why they cannot simply run away from the world that hates them.

So, the future ministry of the Spirit and of the Spirit-filled disciples will ensure that the Father will still be revealed to the world, and that the world's hatred and sin will still be exposed. Note: the Spirit is not going to do new works of Jesus; He will testify (the same word as is used of John the Baptist), pointing back to the finished works and final words of Jesus. The disciples will follow suit, and will thereby attract the same response as Jesus – some may believe, but many will hate.

### **16.1-4 FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED: THE WORLD WILL PERSECUTE WITH ZEALOUS RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT**

These verses provide us with the explanation of Jesus' purpose in teaching about opposition. His purpose is to 'warn' the disciples (v. 4) and to prevent them from going astray (literally 'stumbling') (v. 1) – i.e. to prevent them from making the same mistake as those in 6:61 who were 'offended' (same word) at the teaching of Jesus, and so walked away from Him. Jesus' concern is neither comfort nor even physical survival, but continuing faith. He wants them to abide (15:1-17), not just to experience a single moment of conversion. As to the nature of the opposition,

this will be exclusion from the recognised religious establishment, and may even lead to martyrdom (v. 2a). The presenting motive for this opposition will be religious (v. 2b), but the underlying reason for it – and the disciples will now be able to recognise it – will be the world’s hatred for both the Father and Jesus (v. 3). So, the world will hate the disciples as they testify to the Father and Son. The disciples might reasonably expect opposition from an atheistic world, but to have hostility and hatred coming from the religious establishment is somehow rather more difficult to understand (even though it is something that Jesus also experienced – more than once!).

All the way back in the Prologue, we noted that part of John’s reason for writing was to assure his readers that the religious establishment’s hatred of Jesus was not a legitimate reason for rejecting Him (1:10–12). This passage picks up that theme and explains why members of the religious establishment will always hate true followers of God: though they claim to love His Son, their hatred of His Son’s teaching reveals their deep hatred of God. When the disciples are hated, they will remember Jesus’ warning (v. 4); rather than being made to stumble, they will therefore be reminded of Jesus’ sovereignty and view their unjust treatment from the perspective of the outworking of God’s purposes in history.

### Key themes

The disciples have been chosen and set apart by Jesus for fruitfulness in the world. They must expect hatred from the world, as they testify to Jesus and His teaching, but they should not stumble on account of it.

- The world’s hatred is the result of the fact that the disciples do not belong to the world.
- It is also the result of the fact that the disciples belong to Jesus and to the Father, whose teaching the world hates and has always hated.
- This hatred comes even from the religious establishment. It may lead to the disciples’ exclusion from society, and even to death.
- It is inescapable because the disciples have a job to do in the world. If they are to testify to Jesus and His teaching, they will have to remain in the world and engage with it.

### Application

**To them then:** In the first instance this teaching is for the benefit of the eleven apostles in the Upper Room. It gives them the explanation for the Jews’ hatred of their message. When, as described later in Acts, they emerge from seclusion and begin to preach and teach about Jesus, they might have easily been unnerved by the absolute rejection of their message by the religious establishment. To John’s readers in John’s day, secondly, these words of Jesus provide clear reasons for continuing to believe in Him, for persevering as His disciples, and for reaching out to the world in evangelism (even when such witness attracts the world’s hatred), rather than withdrawing from the world into a religious ghetto.

**To us now:** Throughout the history of the church the apostles’ teaching has been under attack. Sometimes this attack comes at the hands of the atheistic secular authorities, e.g. the Marxist/Leninist authorities in the Soviet Bloc. But frequently this opposition has come from zealous religious authorities. Carson writes: ‘the most dangerous oppression comes not from careless pagans but from zealous adherents to religious faith, and from other ideologies. A sermon was preached when Cranmer was burned at the stake. Christians have faced severe persecution performed in the name of Yahweh, in the name of Allah, in the name of Marx – and in the name of Jesus’ (p. 531).

Today we should not be surprised when we are hated for speaking about Jesus. Even so-called Christian leaders will vilify those who stand up for the orthodox teaching of the apostles on doctrinal and ethical issues. Nonetheless, we must neither take hatred personally nor withdraw into religious ghettos. We too belong not to the world but to Jesus. We too have a task to do – to bear fruit. And we too must keep at it.

### The aim

The aim of this study is to see that the apostles’ teaching about Jesus will always attract hostility from the world. We should not cease to persevere in Christ, even when this opposition is highly intense and comes from so-called religious people.

## John 16:5–33

### 'I am going to the Father'

#### Context

In this section of the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus has been teaching that God's purpose for His people, as they live in the world now, is that they should persevere in Jesus, God's true fruit-bearing vine. So far we have learned about the disciples' relationships with Jesus and the world. Now we learn of their relationship with the Father:

- 15:1–17**      **Their relationship with Jesus.** His people must remain and persevere in Jesus' words so as to bear fruit and avoid destruction.
- 15:18–16:4**   **Their relationship with the world.** His people will be hated by the world for belonging to Jesus and not to the world. Nonetheless, they must persevere in Him and continue to testify to Him, for the Father has not given up on the world but expects to reach the world through them.
- 16:5–33**      **Their relationship with the Father.** With this third strand Jesus brings the teaching of the Upper Room Discourse to a close by reminding His disciples that He is going back to the Father (vv. 5, 17, 28). Though they may not immediately understand the implications of His going (via the cross), with hindsight they will understand what His death has achieved, and so their grief will turn to joy. His going is for their good, for it will achieve two wonderful things: the sending of the Spirit, which means that they will not be left alone (this passage, verses 5–15, really belongs with (15:18–16:4); and secondly, a new age of lasting joy, because of knowing the Father, and true peace.

#### Structure

- 16:5–15      Jesus assures the disciples that His departure is for their good, because His going will lead to the Spirit's coming:
- 5-7            Jesus' departure is good for His disciples, despite the world's hatred.
- 7b-15        Jesus' departure will lead to the Spirit's coming who will...
- 7b-11        ... convict the world.
- 12-15        ... lead the apostles into all truth and so bring glory to
- 16:16–28      Jesus Jesus' going will bring in a new age of lasting joy.
- 16–19        The disciples are confused.
- 20–22        His departure will cause them grief but this will turn to lasting, irremovable joy when they realise what the cross has achieved.
- 23–28        This joy will be the complete joy of direct access to the Father and full knowledge of the Father because the Father loves them.
- 16:29–33      Jesus' going will bring true peace.

#### Text notes

#### **5-15 JESUS ASSURES THE DISCIPLES THAT HIS DEPARTURE IS FOR THEIR GOOD, BECAUSE HIS GOING WILL LEAD TO THE SPIRIT'S COMING**

#### **5-7 Jesus' departure is for His disciples good, despite the world's hatred**

It is important that we remember the context of this passage. Jesus has just explained how He is the true fruit-bearing vine and how His disciples will face the world's hostility as they persevere in Him. The disciples would be understandably perturbed, knowing that Jesus is about to leave. So, Jesus now returns to the issue of His departure. His 'going', and what it means for the disciples, dominates this final part of the teaching in the Upper Room.

Jesus remonstrates with His disciples for not having asked Him where He is going. However, in 13:36 Peter had asked just that question. From verse 6 it seems that Jesus is criticising the disciples for being so self-absorbed in their own loss that they have not yet asked really thoughtful questions about His going and what it means for them. Instead of supplying the answer immediately (it comes in v. 28), Jesus explains that His departure, with all that it

entails in terms of His death and resurrection, is for their own good.

### **7b-15 Jesus' departure will lead to the Spirit's coming who will...**

Jesus' going is essential to the Spirit's coming. In 15:26–27 Jesus taught the disciples that the Spirit would testify to the Father, and that they were to testify too. These verses explain how the Spirit will enable the disciples to fulfil this task. He has a ministry both to the disciples and to the world.

#### **7b-11 ... convict the world.**

Just as Jesus exposes the world's guilt, by showing that what it does is evil (e.g. 7:7), so the Spirit will continue this work. The word translated 'convict' has the sense of shaming the world and convincing it of its own guilt, thus calling it to repentance. It is the same word that Jesus used in 3:20. Our understanding of precisely what Jesus means by 'sin, righteousness and judgement' must therefore be governed by the fact that in each case it is the world's exposure and guilt that is under consideration.

The world is guilty of sin (v. 9) because, as we have seen throughout the Gospel, it does not believe in Jesus. The Spirit's ministry is to bring people to acknowledge this guilt as they hear the words of Jesus (the means by which God works). The world is also guilty in regard to righteousness (v. 10): Jesus' ministry has exposed the world's lack of moral purity (3:16ff.); by His light He has exposed the world's darkness and hypocrisy (7:7). Now that Jesus is going, the Spirit will continue this ministry in His absence. Finally, the world is guilty in regard to judgement (v. 11): Jesus' ministry, climaxing in His death and resurrection, has achieved the condemnation and driving out of Satan (12:31ff) – a preview of the Devil's final demise on the Day of judgement. The Spirit will bring people to a realisation of their position regarding final judgement – some will respond by turning to Jesus; others will remain in the world.

#### **12-15 ... lead the apostles into all truth and so bring glory to Jesus**

Hand in hand with His ministry to the world, the Spirit will guide the apostles into all the truth about Jesus and, therefore, about the Father also. This is not a promise of omniscience, and nor does it apply to all believers – it is specifically for the apostles. The gift of the Spirit will enable the disciples both to persevere, since they will have Jesus' words with them, and to accomplish the Father's work of bearing fruit (15:8)/ doing 'greater things' (14:12) / testifying to the world (15:27), etc.. The logic seems to be that it is because the Spirit leads the apostles into all the truth about Jesus (and especially about his death and resurrection) that they are able to remain and persevere. As the apostles testify to what they have received from the Spirit about Jesus, so the world will be convicted concerning sin, righteousness and judgement (cf. 20:21-23).

Jesus has already brought glory to God (cf. 7:18; 17:1, 4). Now as the Spirit takes the teaching, mission and person of Jesus and declares its significance to the disciples, so he speaks for Jesus and brings glory to Him.

Putting it together with what we saw in 15:18-16:4, the Spirit glorifies Jesus by taking Jesus' words (which originated with the Father), and giving them to the disciples who in turn proclaim them to the world to achieve the fruit-bearing work of God in the world. The Spirit's work is to convict, the apostles' work is to testify – and the church's work is to continue that testimony. It is not that there is more new truth for the Spirit to reveal about Jesus (cf. 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10); rather, that He has led the apostles in all the truth about Jesus. (See also 14:26.)

### **16–28 JESUS' GOING WILL BRING IN A NEW AGE OF LASTING JOY**

**16–19 The disciples are confused.** They are unable to understand what He means by saying that He will leave and then come back to them 'after a little while'. Their confusion is understandable; after all, they were expecting the immediate consummation of all the OT messianic promises.

**20–22 His departure will cause them grief but this will turn to lasting joy.** Again, Jesus explains that His departure (to the cross) will not result in their permanent separation from Him. They will be separated for a short while and in that period they will grieve, but their grief will turn to rejoicing when they realise what His death has achieved. There is considerable discussion in the commentaries about whether 'you will see me' refers to His

resurrection appearances, His coming to them in the Spirit, or His second coming. The resurrection appearances must be part of what is in view, but for all the reasons already discussed (see 14:15–27), and in light of the context of verses 5–15, this meaning must then give way to the meaning that He would send the Paraclete to be with them. The main point is that their grief, caused by His imminent departure, will be transformed into lasting joy when they see Him and so realise what His departure has achieved – thus the very thing that causes their pain will also cause their joy. His return will inaugurate a whole New Age – the Age of the Spirit.

**23–28 The joy of direct access to the Father.** As if to emphasise that this is a new age, Jesus speaks of a time ('hour') (v. 25) when the disciples will be taught plainly about the Father. This Age of the Spirit will be characterised by the new phenomenon of direct access:

Direct access to the Father in prayer. The disciples will no longer have to have go-betweens between themselves and the Father (vv. 23, 26). Jesus drives this point home by insisting that they will not have to pray to Him but that they will be able to go straight to the Father (on the basis of His work on the cross). They will ask 'in His name' (because of what He has done); they will not have to take their requests to Him first, as if He were then to 'ferry' their desires to the Father.

Direct access to the truth about the Father. As with the promise of 15:15, verse 25 suggests that the disciples will know the Father's purposes and will therefore be able to ask in accordance with His desires. Understanding follows rather than precedes the cross because a) spiritual blindness is caused by sin (ch. 8-9) and the cross deals with sin; b) the cross makes possible the sending of the Spirit of Truth, the teacher; and c) the cross is the ultimate revelation of the Father. Verse 28 is a very important verse. It answers the question raised by Jesus in verse 5, and so ties together this part of the Discourse. But also, more widely, it summarises the whole mission of Jesus; this is the first really clear statement, in John's Gospel, of what He has come to do. He is telling His disciples that He has achieved what He came to do, and is thereby authenticating all the promises He has made to them, promises that we have read in the preceding verses. In the Old Testament, answered prayer and understanding are both characteristic of the new covenant (e.g. Isaiah 1:15; 30:19-20; 41:17; 65:24; Jer. 31:34). The only people with direct access to God are the redeemed people of New Israel.

### **29-33 JESUS' GOING WILL BRING US TRUE PEACE**

The disciples think they understand, but they don't. Jesus thinks that their confidence in themselves is misplaced and so predicts that His imminent departure will result in their being scattered – they will face the hostility of the world. However, they need to realise that His departure accomplishes the conquest of the rebellious world, and that by remaining in Him they will have true and lasting peace.

### **Key themes**

Jesus has come from the Father into the world and is now returning to His Father. The disciples should not grieve, for His departure will bring about a New Age. In the New Age, His Father will send the Spirit:

- The Spirit will bring the world to an acknowledgment of personal guilt concerning its failure to respond to Jesus, its moral darkness, and its certain judgement
- The Spirit will bring glory to Jesus by guiding the apostles in all the truth about Jesus (and therefore the Father).
- This will enable the apostles to testify to Jesus.

In the New Age, Christian experience will be marked by these things:

- There will be lasting joy as Christians see the risen, ascended, triumphant Christ who has conquered the world through His work on the cross.
- There will be direct access to the Father in prayer. Christians will ask on the basis of Jesus' work on the cross, and their prayers will be answered on the basis of the love that the Father now has for them.

## **Application**

**The Spirit's work in the world.** This is the only place in the Bible where the Spirit is described as being at work in the world, i.e. in the lives of people who are in rebellion against their Maker. All other references to the Spirit concern His work within the believer. It is important for us to realise that God's work in non-Christians is confined to bringing them to a realisation of their guilt, concerning sin, righteousness and judgement, in order that they may repent and believe in Jesus. It is not possible to say that 'the Spirit is at work revealing God in all religions' except to the extent that He convicts the proponents of other religions of the sin of rejecting Christ. Furthermore, the context suggests that the Spirit's work in leading the apostles into all truth is precisely in order that the church (the fruit-bearing vine) may be able to testify to the words and works of Jesus (15:26–27). These verses give us a clear description of God's part and our part in the whole enterprise of bearing fruit: His part is to make Jesus known, through the Spirit's work of convicting the non-Christian and the Spirit's work of leading the apostles into all truth, and our part is to persevere in that truth in a hostile world.

**The nature of genuine Christian experience as we wait for Christ to return.** True, lasting and complete joy and peace are experienced by the Christian in the face of deep hostility and opposition from the world. Genuine Christian experience is always rooted in what the cross has achieved and in an ongoing understanding of Christ's word. This will lead to prayer that will be in accordance with His will. This genuine experience of 'life' in the Age of the Spirit is far removed from much that is taught in the early 21st century.

## **The aim**

The aim of this study is to understand that Jesus' going to the Father is for our good, for the Spirit will be at work convicting the world on the basis of the apostles' message, and believers will experience a genuine, lasting joy grounded in a new relationship with the Father.

## John 17:1–26

### Jesus prays for His disciples

#### Context

The whole of the section beginning with chapter 11 and ending in chapter 20 deals with Jesus' death and its implications, both present and eternal, for His disciples. In chapters 11–12 Jesus taught that His death would achieve life, because His death would deal with sin and Satan. In chapters 13–17 (the Upper Room Discourse) Jesus explains what His death and departure will mean for His disciples. The Discourse divides into two parts: the first deals with the disciples' questions concerning Jesus' departure (Jesus explains what His departure will achieve); and the second deals with the importance of God's people persevering as disciples of Jesus, as they live now, so that they achieve God's purpose for them of being fruitful.

Jesus' prayer in chapter 17, introduced by 'when Jesus had spoken these words', is the conclusion of His teaching to the disciples and draws on all the threads of teaching in chapters 11–20. It can also be seen as the conclusion of the whole book so far. The key themes first seen in the prologue are all seen here: Jesus as the 'sent' Messiah and Son of God (e.g. vv. 1-3), belief in Him (e.g. vv. 8, 20), word (v. 17), light (e.g. v. 6), life (e.g. v. 2), love (vv. 23–26), glory (e.g. v. 1), witness (e.g. v. 20), the world's opposition (e.g. v.14) and yet the gospel for the world (v.6a, 23).

In His prayer Jesus has one major concern: it is that the Father should be glorified through the completion of His eternal plan, the plan to call out a people who 'know and believe' the Father, and also the Son whom He has sent, and who thus have life. To this end, Jesus prays first for the completion of His ministry as the Son; secondly, for the keeping of His apostles so that their ministry is achieved; and finally, for the ministry of all who will believe the apostles' message, so that through the church's ministry the 'world' will come to believe.

#### Structure

Jesus prays that His Father would accomplish His plan to call out a people ...

17:1–5	... through the completion of the Son's ministry.
17:6–19	... through the completion of His apostles' ministry.
6–10	He prays for His apostles, affirming them as being authentic and reliable.
11–19	He prays that His apostles may be protected and set apart for the Father's use.
17:20–26	... through the impact of all believers' ministry.
20–23	He prays that they may all be united in the Father and the Son.
24–26	He prays that they may go to dwell with Him in glory for ever.

#### Text notes

#### 1–5 JESUS PRAYS THAT HIS FATHER WOULD ACCOMPLISH HIS PLAN ... THROUGH THE COMPLETION OF THE SON'S MINISTRY

**Verses 1 and 5:** These two verses, opening and closing the first part, contain the same request, that the Father should 'glorify' the Son so that the Father will be glorified. Jesus prays that His Father should acknowledge His work by returning Him to His position of heavenly glory. The prayer of verse 1 could either be taken to refer to the cross, as in the prayer of 12:28, or it could be a prayer for Jesus' exaltation, as in verse 5. The verses in between, verses 2–4, speak of God's purpose in sending His Son.

**Verse 2:** Jesus refers to the authority over all people that His Father had given Him before time began. The purpose had been that the Son should give eternal life to God's own people. It had been God's eternal plan to call out a people to eternal life through the ministry of His Son on earth. It was to this end that Jesus had come down from heaven. Verse 2 is matched by verse 4.

**Verse 3:** At the heart of this part, in verse 3, Jesus defines 'eternal life'. Notice that knowing God is eternal life – it is not the way to eternal life. Just as being shut out from a relationship with God was central to the Fall, so entering back into a relationship with Him is the very definition of eternal life now. Thus Jesus' prayer is that God's glory should be manifest through the achieving of His eternal plan, His plan to reverse the effects of the Fall by

calling together a people who know Him through His Son. This is the complete opposite of the scene in Genesis 3, with Adam and Eve guiltily hiding from their Creator.

**Verse 4:** We are reminded of how this eternal plan is to be put into effect. As in the rest of the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus speaks as if the events of the cross are already completed. The plan will be put into effect through the going up of the Son to His Father via the cross.

## **6–19 JESUS PRAYS THAT HIS FATHER WOULD ACCOMPLISH HIS PLAN ... THROUGH THE COMPLETION OF HIS APOSTLES' MINISTRY**

**6–10 Jesus prays for His apostles, affirming them as being authentic and reliable.** Jesus begins by identifying the subject of His prayer. He is praying particularly for His apostles; not for the world nor even for all believers (v. 20 makes this point again). By defining the apostles from two different (complementary) angles – God's initiative and humanity's response – Jesus confirms that they are genuine followers of His.

**God's initiative.** The apostles are undeniably God's people, for their status is entirely dependent upon His work in them. Jesus can say not only that they were God's, v. 6 but that they are His, v. 9. Although the Father has given them to the Son, this leads to them obeying the Father's word, and so the Son has won them for the Father. Jesus' people are God's people, (v. 10a), glorifying Him as they glorify Jesus (v. 10c cf. 5:23) and God has no other people (v. 10b cf. 14:6). Moreover God has been fully revealed to them by Jesus.

**Humanity's response.** The apostles have received His words, (8a cf. 1:11-12) they know, v8, everything God has given Jesus (probably words and works), and believe, v8, that God has sent Him. (This must mean that the 'kept your word' of v6 is believing the gospel rather than obeying the law.) In other words, Jesus confirms that they are the people He spoke about in verses 2–3 – they have been called by God, and they have responded to Jesus – and that their message is therefore trustworthy for others.

**11–19 Jesus prays that His apostles may be kept by His Father for their mission.** Since He is departing to be with His Father (vv. 11, 13), He prays for His apostles, asking His Father for their protection (vv. 11, 15) and also their unity (v. 11), as they embark on their mission in a hostile world (v. 17). The themes of this part of the prayer are familiar to us, for Jesus is praying about the doctrine and application that He has already taught in the Upper Room Discourse.

**Protection.** Jesus wants the Father to protect His people. So far Jesus has kept God's people on earth and guarded them in His name. In biblical thought a 'name' encapsulates a person's whole character, work and action. Jesus, therefore, has kept His apostles through His whole being while He has been on earth (v. 12). Judas is lost, but this is because he was never one of those God gave Jesus; God's people have been absolutely safe. They are now God's people who 'know ... the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [He has] sent' (v. 3), through His word. Because they no longer belong to the world, the world hates them, and yet they need to persevere in the world (v. 14). So Jesus prays that God will continue to keep them, now that He is going (v. 15), in accordance with His name (v. 11).

**Unity.** The purpose of being kept is unity like that of the Father and the Son (v. 11) which is only possible for those who share something of God's character. There will be more about the nature and source of genuine Christian unity in verses 20–26. Here, Jesus' prayer implies (v. 15) that the evil one will seek to destroy the apostles' unity which has been created through His 'name', i.e. His revelation of the character of the Father through word and work.

**Mission.** The word 'sanctify' stems from the same root as 'holy' and means 'to set apart or to make holy'. In the Bible as a whole the word 'sanctify' certainly has moral overtones, but it also includes the idea that the holy God makes His people like Himself, in purpose and mission. In this passage it is the latter idea that dominates. This is clear because of v.19, where Jesus uses the same word of Himself (translated consecrated in the ESV) and He is holy already. However, whereas Jesus can set Himself apart for service, the disciples must be set apart by Him – by the word of God and of truth (v. 17 cf. v. 14) and the sacrificial death to which Christ now commits Himself (v. 19). Now

Jesus explains that He is setting them apart for the task of going into the world on mission (v. 18). He is not praying that God should remove His apostles to the monastery, but that He would protect them and their unity while they remain in the world (vv. 11, 15). In this part of the prayer that concerns His apostles, Jesus' desire is that they be enabled to fulfil their mission as they go into the world, taking the word He has taught them. They will be sent as messengers (13:16) to testify as eye-witnesses (15:27), authenticated by the unity of their loving service (13:34-35). This is spelt out in v. 20-26. As this prayer is answered, so God's eternal plan will be accomplished.

**Joy.** The disciples are not, however, left behind for the good of others and without any benefit for themselves. Jesus' purpose in saying 'these things' is that 'they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves' (v.13). If Jesus is referring to the whole Upper Room Discourse, a primary cause of joy will be the loving relationship with the Father which includes loving relationship with each other in obedience to Jesus' commands (15:11). If He is referring just to the prayer, then the focus is what it reveals of Jesus' relationship with the Father (v. 1-5), their relationship with Him (v. 6-11) and the way in which Judas' betrayal and the world's opposition are consistent with God's eternal plan (v. 12, 14 cf. 13:18, 15:25). In the light of v. 20-26 the joy may also include the work of world evangelism. This was in itself a great joy that He wanted them to share (cf. 4:34-38).

### **20–26 JESUS PRAYS THAT HIS FATHER WOULD ACCOMPLISH HIS PLAN ...THROUGH THE IMPACT OF ALL BELIEVERS' MINISTRY**

There is a threefold parallelism between v. 20-21 and 22-23. In each case there is a prayer that belief (20, 22a) will lead to unity amongst believers (21a, 22b-23a) and thus to the world believing (21b, 23b).

**20–23 He prays that they may all be united in the Father and the Son.** The prayer extends to encompass all people who belong to Jesus through all time. It covers two areas:

**Unity.** Jesus' prayer is that His people be united. This unity is the same as the unity that the Father and the Son share (v. 21). It is not just a unity with each other; it is primarily a unity with the Father and the Son. The Father and Son's unity is a unity of purpose and intention, guaranteed by the Son's sacrificial and obedient self-giving. This unity is further defined as coming from 'the glory' that the Father gave the Son (v. 22). The glory that the Father gave the Son is the glory of the gospel message which brings about the reversal of the Fall. And so the basis for His people's unity is to be the gospel of eternal life. This is not some sort of sentimental unity that comes from abandoning the truth.

**Evangelism.** The purpose of this unity is evangelistic (v. 21c, 23b). Jesus' desire is that the world should see His people's unity in the truth as it is worked out in relationships within the church, and that people in the world would, on account of this, come to believe the message for themselves.

**24–26 He prays that they may go to dwell with Him in glory for ever.** Jesus prays that, through the glorification of the Father and the Son (vv. 1–5), His people, called together through the witness of His disciples through all generations, may reach the place prepared for them in His Father's house. Jesus' definition of evangelism does not simply stop at a person's conversion; His desire is that disciples should dwell with Him in glory forever. This is the reason why He continues to make Himself known to His people, through His Spirit: He wants them to reach heaven.

This section of the prayer, like the others (1-5, 6-19) ends with Jesus referring to His own work (cf. 4-5, 19, 26). Jesus is not going away so that His disciples can finish the task without Him. Though His work on earth is as good as finished, v. 4, His work of revelation will continue, v. 26. In the immediate context He may be referring to the revelation of the cross. In the wider context, His revelatory work through the Spirit will continue until the last day (as the apostolic gospel is made known) so that God's self disclosure in Him won't be just an intellectual truth of history, but a present experience. In v. 13 He promised His joy to believers. Here He promises His love and continuing presence (cf. 14:23). 'The crucial point is that this text does not simply make these followers the objects of God's love (as in v. 23), but promises that they will be so transformed, as God is continually made known to them, that God's own love for His Son will become their love.' (Carson).

### Key themes

- It is Jesus' desire that God should be glorified through the completion of His purpose, that of calling out a people who know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Therefore He prays:
- that the Father would glorify the Son in order that the Son may finish His work of bringing His people to eternal life.
- that He would protect His apostles, sent into the world with the message of Jesus' words and works, from Satan's desire to lead them away from God. This protection will be necessary because:
  - the apostles will be hated by the world.
  - Jesus, who has been protecting them, is now returning to the Father.
- that He would unite all who believe in the apostles' message.
  - They should be united with Jesus and the Father, not just with each other.
  - The truth of the apostles' message is what will unite them.
  - The closeness and unity that Jesus and the Father have should be theirs too.
  - The joy and love of Jesus will also be theirs.
  - The purpose of this unity among believers is that the world may understand and accept the gospel.

### Application

Jesus' main priority, as He goes towards His death, is that His Father should accomplish His eternal plan, reversing the effects of the Fall and calling together a people who will belong to Him forever. The major impact of this upon us, therefore, should be to challenge our understanding of Jesus' mission and purpose. If this priority is His major concern and chief goal on earth it should be ours too. His prayer for His apostles and for us should focus the challenge for us: is our unity a unity grounded in the apostles' message? Are we 'one' in the Father and the Son, so gripped by, united in and obedient to His gospel purpose that the world around us is being impacted by our witness?

### The aim

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus' chief desire is the Father's glory. This glory is achieved through the calling together of a people who know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and this calling is effected through the Son's work, the apostles' message, and the believers' united witness.

## John 18:1–27

### 'Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'

#### Context

The material of chapters 11–20 may be set, broadly, under two major headings: the theological implications, for Jesus' disciples, of His death; and the developing narrative – the plot to put Jesus to death. In chapters 11–13 the two strands were seen side by side, but during the Upper Room Discourse (chapters 13–17) the narrative development was placed on hold as Jesus taught His disciples in considerable detail about His death, about what it would achieve for them, and about 'life' after Jesus' departure and before His return. Now, as Jesus leads His disciples into the olive grove, the narrative is resumed. The opening words of the chapter, however, link it closely with the discourse. Jesus has been explaining why He must leave and now He takes the initiative and departs. He has consecrated Himself (17:19) and now He makes the sacrifice. Further, chapter 18 completes the narratives of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial as all three prophecies of chapter 13 are fulfilled, one after the other.

However, with seventeen chapters of theological explanation and teaching already written, this narrative development should not be read simply as a record of events. As he tells the story John loads the narrative with comments and asides, indicating that he expects the reader to interpret the narrative in line with the theological explanations already given in the preceding chapters. This does not mean that we are free to speculate in our interpretation of the narrative events; on the contrary, we should understand what is happening to Jesus in the light of what we have already been taught. This is to be the climax of Jesus' mission, the hour of His glory.

In 18:1–27 John shows us that despite appearances, Jesus remains in sovereign control of the events surrounding His arrest, trial and crucifixion. He is not a mere victim, but deliberately hands Himself over to His accusers in order to 'drink the cup' of His Father's wrath against human sin. The High Priest's questioning of Jesus is placed after Peter's first denial, with the second and third denials following, a storytelling device that emphasises both Peter's failure and the apparent failure of Jesus' cause. But John wants us to see through this appearance of failure, and he reminds us, before he records the first denial, that Jesus' death is to be on behalf of the people. This reminder shows us the link between the drinking of the cup of God's wrath and substitution. (This idea of a sacrificial substitute, satisfying the wrath of God against the sinner, is technically known as 'propitiation'.)

#### Structure

- 18:1–11**      **Jesus' death is propitiatory.** Divine and in control, Jesus goes to His death in order to drink the cup of His Father's wrath that His Father has given Him.
- 18:12–27**    **Jesus' death is substitutionary.** Alone and innocent, Jesus goes to His death on behalf of His people.

#### Old Testament ideas

'... the cup the Father has given me ...': The idea of drinking from a cup given by the Father is one which has both positive and negative connotations from the OT. In the Psalms it is used to refer to God's blessing (Ps. 23:5) and salvation (Ps. 116:13). But there is also a strong emphasis, in the Psalms and elsewhere, on the cup given by God being the cup of His wrath (Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15–29; Ps. 75:8). These references stress the significance of drinking from this cup: the cup contains the full measure of God's wrath, not just a part of it. It is a cup filled to the brim and overflowing, and it must be drained to the dregs. This is what Jesus is referring to, at the time of His arrest, as He sets His face towards His trial and death.

**Substitutionary atonement:** The matter of dealing with the sin of God's people is so significant that the OT uses several pictures to show us what God will do, how He will take away sin. Probably the most significant is the idea of a substitute dying in the place of the people, bearing the penalty for their sin (which is death), and in this way removing God's wrath from His people (see Lev. 16). Later, the prophets looked forward to a time when God would finally deal with the people's sins through a 'servant' acting as a substitute (Isa. 53).

## Text notes

### 1-11 JESUS' DEATH IS PROPITIATORY: DIVINE AND IN CONTROL, JESUS GOES TO HIS DEATH IN ORDER TO DRINK THE CUP THAT THE FATHER HAS GIVEN HIM.

This 'arrest' scene (although the arrest itself does not come until v. 12) breaks into 3 parts: (i) the scene is set (vv. 1-3); (ii) the exchange between Jesus and the arresting officials (vv. 4-9); and (iii) Peter's act of violence and Jesus' subsequent rebuke (vv. 10-11). But the main point of this passage comes in verse 11 – Jesus is going to His death in order to drink the cup of His Father's wrath.

In advance of v. 11, John makes clever use of the preceding narrative to emphasise Jesus' divinity and sovereignty. We are not to see Jesus as 'a pathetic martyr buffeted by the ill winds of a cruel fate' (Carson), but as one who voluntarily and purposefully heads towards His death in full knowledge of what is about to befall Him. Thus the narrative enacts out the truth expressed in 10:17–18; it also emphasises Jesus' voluntary obedience (5:19ff) and His willing service of His people (10:11; 13:1–11).

**His control.** Jesus' control is evident as He takes the initiative, going out of the olive grove to meet the detachment sent to arrest Him (v. 4). Using words reminiscent of chapter 13 (vv. 1, 3), where John emphasised Jesus' 'knowledge' of all that was going to happen, John reminds us that Jesus knew what was going to take place. For a brief moment in verse 6, the true status of the characters involved is revealed: the massed representatives of the world's powers – Roman forces (up to 600 of them!), Jewish guards and betrayer draw back and fall to the ground. Jesus is the last man standing. Again, in verses 7–8 He takes the initiative in giving Himself up for His sheep, asking the soldiers and officials a second time whom they want. Notice also that the role of Judas is highlighted – he is mentioned by name three times (vv. 2, 3 and 5) – a reminder of Jesus' prophecy that He would be betrayed by him.

Then in verse 9 Jesus is seen to be in absolute control of His sheep; the care He takes to save His men from trouble with the authorities exemplifies His far greater care for them, in not letting one of them perish or be snatched out of His hand (ch. 10 – see also his refusal to answer the question about his disciples at his trial in v. 19). He will be laying down His life on their behalf (cf. 10:15, 28) in order to achieve this. So what might appear to be an incidental detail turns out to be highly significant: Jesus is authenticating His promise in 6:39, 'I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day.'

In verse 11 Jesus' words show that He is determined to do exactly what His Father has commanded Him. Throughout the Gospel account Jesus has insisted that it is as He goes to His death that His disciples and the world will be given the clearest proof that He is the one He claims to be, the 'I am' (8:28; 13:19; 14:29). This emphasis on His controlled purpose in going towards the cross has the effect of highlighting His perfect obedience to His Father's plan (3:16); it also convinces us of Jesus' love for the Father – 'the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me' (14:31).

**His divinity.** Jesus' power and authority are displayed, in contrast to the power and authority of the armed soldiers and the officials who come out to arrest Him (v. 3). In verses 5–6 He announces Himself in divine language (cf. Exodus 6:2; Isaiah 42:8) and they fall to the ground, powerless. Three times the theologically laden words 'I am He' appear in the narrative (vv. 5, 6, 8). Some may have understood Jesus to be saying little more than, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are seeking.' But after so many allusions to the divine name earlier in the Gospel (e.g. 4:26; 6:20; 8:28), John's readers are in no doubt about the full significance of Jesus' words. Remember that earlier in the Gospel (13:18-19), Jesus predicted Judas' betrayal in order that when it happened, His disciples might understand that, 'I am He.' Overall, the point being made is that this is the divine Son who is giving Himself up; He will, voluntarily, drink the cup that His Father has given Him.

**Peter's failure.** Peter's failure to understand what is going on throws into relief the main theological point of this passage. Peter has still not learned the lesson of 13:7–8 and 13:37–38; He wants to take dramatic physical action on behalf of Jesus in order to protect Him. But Jesus rebukes him and tells Peter that He must drink the cup He has been given. In the light of His coming trial and death, the 'cup' referred to can only be the cup of His Father's wrath. Peter has still not understood that the way Jesus will 'lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the

last day' (6:39 and 18:9), is by drinking this cup in His death.

### **12-27 JESUS' DEATH IS SUBSTITUTIONARY: ALONE and INNOCENT, JESUS GOES TO HIS DEATH ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE**

Here the structure of the narrative, with Peter's denials coming before and after Jesus' first interrogation, emphasise what is apparently the absolute failure of Jesus' mission. But John's 'narrator's comment' in verse 14 (recalling Caiaphas' words from 11:48) enables the reader to make sense of what is going on.

In verses 19–24, Jesus is questioned about His disciples and His teaching. His integrity and innocence are clear as He points out that His teaching is a matter of public record, v. 20 and challenges them to produce witnesses, v. 21, 23. The authorities were concerned both that He was blaspheming (19:7) and that He would gain such a great following that 'the Romans will come and take away both our place [temple] and our nation' (11:48). Ironically, the denials of Peter show this second concern to be utterly unfounded at this point: verses 15–18 and 25–27 show that Jesus has been deserted by His followers. This, in conjunction with the questioning by Annas, presents an apparently failed Jesus. He is being falsely accused and He appears powerless as He stands, bound, in front of those who will resort to physical abuse in the absence of sound argument (vv. 22–23). His disciples won't stand up for Him and His cause appears to be on the rocks. He is innocent, but powerless and isolated.

Before this incident is related, and afterwards too, the narrator shows Peter to be 'warming himself' by the fire and denying Jesus. In 13:37 he had been quick to offer to lay down his life 'on behalf of' Jesus, and in 18:10 he was quick to defend Jesus physically. But now he fails completely and denies Him: the cock crows, as Jesus said it would. Note the contrast between Jesus' bold statement, 'I am', and Peter's response to questions, recorded so precisely by John, 'I am not.' Peter's failure to keep his word contrasts with the exact fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy about him. 21:15-17 suggests that Peter's failure was lack of love; he is warming himself by a fire while Jesus suffers for the world.

On the morning after the Passover meal, therefore, the reader has a picture of human failure and human inability to stand by Christ. At the same time John shows us that Jesus is alone, innocent, falsely accused, bound and on the way to His death. It appears to be a desperate picture until the theological explanation of verse 14 is put in place. Verse 14 ties this passage to the previous one Jesus is advancing towards His death, in full control, in order to drink the cup of His Father's wrath against the sinfulness of the human race. He does this in order to die 'on behalf of' the people. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36).

(There is an interesting comparison with the Synoptic Gospels here. John records this interrogation by Annas in place of the trial before the Sanhedrin. This is not because John's account is unhistorical (contra Lincoln), it is because, in John, the trial of Jesus has already happened. The word of the Father, the works of the Son, and the witness of the Baptist have all testified in Jesus' favour. But the Jewish authorities would not give Jesus a fair hearing (cf. 7:51). Instead, they reached a snap verdict about Him and decided to take His life (e.g. 11.48-53).

### **Key themes**

#### **Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is advancing towards His death:**

- He is in full control of events and knows exactly what is going to happen to Him; He is aware that He is the divine 'I am'.
- He knows He must drink the cup of His Father's wrath against the sin of the world.
- He is in chains and apparently powerless before His guilty accusers.
- He is quite isolated, deserted by His followers and with His mission apparently in tatters.
- He goes to die on behalf of the people, in complete fulfilment of Isaiah 53:1–8; as the Lamb of God He will take away the sin of the world.

### **Application**

John shapes the narrative in order to show the reader that the death of Jesus is for the express purpose of drinking the cup of His Father's wrath on behalf of the people – even failing people like Peter. The major application must

therefore be that we understand this point about penal substitution, that Jesus is suffering the death penalty in the place of others. Jesus is in full control of events, announcing Himself as the divine Son, in divine language (vv. 5, 6, 8), and He is innocent, but He is also deserted, alone and falsely accused: all these things are for the express purpose of His taking God's wrath on Himself, so that His people may be raised up for eternal life.

Our understanding should focus on the authority and power of Jesus, the love of Jesus in handing Himself over, the failure of Peter to understand the nature of Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial of Jesus, the culpability of the Jewish authorities and the apparent failure of Jesus' mission. But John's ultimate concern is that the reader should grasp what all these things add up to – the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God who is about to take away the sin of the world and that He is now being handed over to die. Our understanding of the points above should enhance our understanding of this core truth.

The passage ought to provoke in us a profound sense of awe that God has chosen to give His Son on behalf of the world, and that His Son, fully in control, is going to die, willingly and obediently, as our substitute. He is the Good Shepherd. Even though we, like Peter, fail Jesus, He is willing and able to wash us clean (cf. 13:8).

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus goes to His death completely in control of events; He knows that He is the Son of God who will die on behalf of His people, in order to save them from God's wrath and keep them for eternal life.

## John 18:28–19:42

### 'I find no basis for a charge' ... 'Crucify Him!'

#### Context

Chapters 1-17 provide the reader with the theological framework within which we are to understand the events of Jesus' arrest, interrogation and execution in chapters 18-19. Four elements are of particular note:

- Jesus' absolute sovereignty and control in all the events leading up to and including His death (10:17–18). He is the King who has come from God and is going back to God (16:28).
- His coming into the world in order to accomplish God's eternal plan of rescue for His people, as revealed in scripture (1:23, 41, 45; 2:16ff; 5:39,46).
- His death as the substitutionary Passover Lamb who drinks the cup of the Father's wrath in order to take away the sin of the world (1:29; 11:50–52).
- The kingdom of Jesus is not earthly or materialistic (see, for example, 6:15, 27; or again His entry into Jerusalem on a donkey in 12:12-16; or again 18:10-11 – all 3 episodes are set at Passover time and emphasise that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world).
- The charges in the trial are that Jesus claimed to be Messiah/King (18:33) and Son of God (19:7) – cf. 20:31. The question of Jesus' kingship has been raised in 1:41; 6:15; 7:26-27, 41-42; 12:13 etc and His heavenly origin as Son of God in 1:34; 3:16; 5:18; 8:58; 10:33 etc.

John's desire to emphasise these theological truths determines his selection of material. He places repeated emphasis on Jesus' death as a fulfilment of Scripture because he wants us to believe and to go on believing that, despite appearances, expectations and misunderstandings, Jesus is dying as God's long-awaited Passover Lamb (see 18:28; 18:39; 19:14). He is both King and Servant.

At the same time, John uses irony to highlight the guilt of the Jews. They emerge from the trial with their victim, but they have rejected God's heavenly king and affirmed their allegiance to this world (19:15). This picks up on a theme that runs throughout the Gospel (cf. 8:31–37; 11:48).

one key question in this section is who is really on trial. A surface glance at the events of Jesus' arrest, trial and execution suggests that He is being tried by the world. In reality, of course, God is, in Jesus, trying and judging the world, and driving out the Prince of this world.

#### Structure

This is a long passage, and therefore it may help to outline the structure in some detail:

##### **18:28-19:16a Jesus' trial before Pilate**

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 18:28–32    | The irony of the Jews' situation: in order to eat the earthly Passover the Jews give up the opportunity of eating the heavenly Passover. |
| 18:33–38a   | Jesus, the heavenly king, has come to testify to the truth.  |
| 18:38b–19:7 | Three times Pilate announces that Jesus is innocent; three times the Jews demand that He should die anyway.                              |
| 19:8–16a    | The one in charge is God Himself, but the Jews affirm their loyalty to an earthly king.  |

##### **19:16b-42 Jesus' crucifixion and death**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 19:16b-22 | God's king is crucified.                                       |
| 19:23–37  | God's king dies to fulfil God's plan as revealed in scripture. |
| 19:38-42  | God's king is buried.  |

## Old Testament ideas

**Passover:** The Passover was an annual festival instituted by God to ensure that His people remembered His miraculous rescue plan. The death of the Passover Lamb ensured that His people were set free and did not come under the judgement of God. Throughout the Gospel Jesus has drawn close links between His death and the Passover (e.g. 6:4, 53; 12:1–11). (See 6:41–70.)

**‘Not one of his bones will be broken’:** one of the requirements for the Passover Lamb, whose blood marked out the Israelite people for rescue out of Egypt, was that its bones should not be broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). In quoting this passage John is confirming the fact, for the last time, that Jesus is the Passover Lamb.

**Isaiah 53:** The prophet looks forward to the coming, from God, of a suffering servant who would die a substitutionary death on behalf of the nations, in order to pay the price for the sin of the world. The servant would be innocent and would be suffering at the hands of God’s enemies. In chapters 18 and 19 the two OT ideas of Passover and the substitutionary death of God’s suffering servant are brought together in the suffering and death of Jesus.

**‘They divide my garments ...’:** Psalm 22 contains an execution scene in which the executioners distribute the victim’s clothes (v. 18). But the psalm also contains God’s promise that He will vindicate His suffering ‘afflicted one’ (Psalm 22:24). In quoting this psalm John is reminding his readers that Jesus’ death is part of the whole fulfilment of the OT, and also that God will vindicate His servant.

**‘They will look on the one they have pierced’:** Zechariah 12:10 anticipates a day when all of Jerusalem and the people of God would weep and mourn as they look on the one they have killed. That day would be one in which there would be a fountain of forgiveness for God’s people (Zech. 13:1) through the striking of the shepherd of God’s sheep (Zech. 13:7ff). In quoting this passage John is reminding his readers that every detail of the crucifixion is happening according to God’s explicit will; the horrific event, to which such details belong, is the means by which He is accomplishing His eternal purpose and solving humanity’s greatest problem, which is sin.

## Text notes

### 18:28-19:16a JESUS’ TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

**18:28-32 The irony of the Jews’ situation: in order to eat the earthly Passover the Jews give up the opportunity of eating the heavenly Passover.**

In this section John continues to magnify the guilt of the Jews. They will not enter Pilate’s headquarters so that they can remain undefiled and share the Passover meal. But they are willing to engineer the death of an innocent Jew – the one who fulfils the very ceremony that they are so determined to keep! So John is showing us that in order to eat the earthly Passover the Jews are giving up their opportunity to eat the heavenly Passover. This point is evident from the narrative. Throughout John, these Jews have assumed the guilt of Jesus and their own innocence, and they do so again here. As was the case before Annas (in 18:19–24 where they resorted to violence instead of argument), they do not want a trial (they mention no charges in v. 30) – what they really want is an execution (v. 31). But Jesus has not lost control (v. 32). Back in 12:32–33 He told his disciples that He would die by crucifixion – an exclusively Roman punishment. Thus we know that it is He who is really pulling the strings in these chaotic events, not the Jews, and not Pilate.

### 33-38 Jesus, the heavenly king, has come to testify to the truth

In verses 36–37 Jesus establishes the nature of His kingdom. First, it is not political or regional, but heavenly. By reminding the reader of Jesus’ eternal and heavenly kingship (cf. 3:3), John establishes the fact that this substitute, who is intent on drinking the cup of His Father’s wrath, is an eternal king; he forces the reader to think beyond merely physical images of Jesus and towards eternal issues (cf. John 6; 16:28). In this way the reader is reminded that Jesus has a heavenly agenda, not a materialistic one, and also that Jesus, though a king, can yet still die. He is not an earthly king, but the Messiah. The way His kingdom is described echoes the picture of the shepherd from ch. 10, with its OT messianic meaning. Jesus’ people are those who listen to His voice (18:37 cf. 10:27) and Barabbas is a ‘robber’ just like those of chapter 10.

The principal way in which Jesus attracts subjects to His eternal, heavenly kingdom is through testifying to the truth. Truth is what Jesus tells us about God and eternity through His words and works. This is why He has come. And so, while both the Jews and Pilate think of themselves as innocents, their attitude to the truth show them for what they really are. The Jews produce false testimony (18:30) and by the end Pilate cynically dismisses the whole concept of truth (18:38). Pilate thinks he is an objective judge sitting in trial on a local political matter, but in reality he is being judged himself. By showing Pilate (and the reader) the nature of His kingdom, Jesus issues him (and us) with a challenge to listen to Him and become part of His kingdom.

**18:38-19:7 Three times Pilate announces that Jesus is innocent; three times the Jews demand that He should die anyway**

**Jesus' innocence.** The choreography of Pilate's going in and out of the palace helps to make the point. Three times he comes out and insists that Jesus is innocent of all charges of being an earthly king (18:38; Is. 9:4,6). It is vital that the innocence of Jesus should be established in this way, for to be the true Passover Lamb and an adequate substitute for His people, He must be innocent and blameless. (For the stipulations regarding the original Passover lambs, see Exodus 12:5.) The mocking and torture described in verses 1–3 further identify Jesus as the true substitute (see Isaiah 53:1–12).

**The Jews' guilt.** By establishing Jesus' innocence Pilate forces the Jews to declare their real motive for wanting Him put to death. They state it plainly in verse 7, bringing out in the open the whole issue of Jesus' kingship. The Jews know that Jesus is claiming to be the eternal and heavenly Son of God (v. 7), but they have determined to reject His rule – they are not on the side of truth, and they do not want a part in His kingdom. They are even willing to let a guilty man go free (v. 40) if it will help them to get the Innocent one killed (v. 6).

The repeated use of the word 'king' ensures that the reader gets the point – this is God's king. He is innocent but He is being despised, rejected, oppressed and afflicted by a people intent on rejecting His heavenly rule. The Gentiles are also implicated in this guilt; verses 1–3 show them tormenting the one who is in fact their own king. The whole human race, therefore, is represented in this rejection of God's Messiah.

**19:8–16a The one in charge is God Himself, but the Jews affirm their loyalty to an earthly king.**

Verse 11 reminds us again that God is in control of all that is happening – this is no tragic end to an otherwise wonderful life; it is for this very reason that Jesus has come (3:13–16; 12:31ff; 16:28). [In the context, 'he who delivered me over to you' probably refers to Caiaphas, the representative (as high priest) of the whole Jewish people, who had sent Jesus to Pilate, rather than to Judas.]

But even though God is in charge, the Jews' loyalty lies elsewhere. Not only are they rejecting God's king by putting Him to death, but now they are swearing allegiance to the enemy Roman 'king', Caesar. Both Pilate, who rejects the heavenly king out of fear of an earthly king (v. 12), and the Jews are seen to subjugate themselves to an earthly king in preference to submitting to Jesus' kingship. Thus Jesus' teaching about the Jews' true identity in 8:31ff is proven. Meanwhile, God's heavenly king is led away to His death.

NB 18:28 and 19:14: 'Problems' with the exact time of these events, in relation to the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper in the other Gospels, are removed when it is realised that the term 'the Passover' could refer to the combined feast of the supper plus the ensuing Feast of Unleavened Bread, and all that went on in Passover week (see Luke 22:1 and Carson, pp. 589 and 603ff).

**19:16b-42 JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH**

The main focus in this account is contained in verses 28–30, when Jesus proclaims that His work is accomplished. Before and after this high point John includes a number of other incidents and details. Interestingly, none of these details especially emphasises the physical suffering of Jesus, nor do they play on the emotions of the reader. It is important to ask why John has included these particular incidents. It seems that each part of the story underlines the fact that God's purposes are being sovereignly accomplished, despite the supreme effort of both Satan and the people to thwart them.

This means that we should read the crucifixion narrative not with a sense of failure and tragedy but, as John insists we should, with a sense of awe and triumph, as we see how God's eternal purpose of rescuing His people, revealed in scripture, is accomplished in history (cf. 17:2–4).

### **16b-22 God's King is crucified**

Jesus' kingship has been a constant theme throughout the passion narrative. At the crucifixion, with Jesus appearing far from regal, John reminds us once again who He is. The fact that the sign attached to His cross is written in three languages means that the whole world may recognise Him as 'The King of the Jews'. Pilate appears to be taunting the Jews by declaring the pathetic figure of a crucified Jesus to be their king, but notice the sharp irony, for in reality he is proclaiming Jesus' kingship to all nations (cf. 12:21,32).

Like Caiaphas before him, Pilate's words cause him to serve God's purpose unwittingly as he confirms Jesus' kingship. And since this incident follows hot on the heels of the trial, the reader is reminded that He is king of an eternal heavenly kingdom (18:33–38).

### **23–37 God's king dies to fulfil God's plan as revealed in Scripture**

**23–27 His death fulfils the sovereign plan of the Father.** Just as the reader needs reminding that this dying figure is king, so the reader also needs to realise that God's sovereign plan is being accomplished. God foreordained the death of Jesus before the beginning of time and revealed it in the Old Testament. Now, as Jesus dies, apparently helpless, we see that even small details connected with His death were in God's eternal plan (v. 24). The quotation from Psalm 22, in addition, reminds us that God will vindicate His king (see OT notes).

We do not know precisely why verses 25–27 are here. It may be that John wants to show the reader that the Son of Man, who came from heaven, returns to heaven with no human obligation unfulfilled. In accomplishing the mission His Father has given Him He does not violate the law in any respect. Instead, even as He hangs dying, Jesus ensures that His mother is cared for. This poignant exchange also shows the reader that John definitely was there. His account is that of an eye-witness, so that credibility combines with the impact of scripture being fulfilled. John is letting the reader know that God's eternal plan was being fulfilled and that he was there to witness it. It definitely did happen!

**28–30 'It is accomplished!'** The three words 'finished' (v. 28), 'fulfil' (v. 28) and 'finished' (v. 30) all come from the same Greek verb, *teleo*. It is the same word that Jesus used in His prayer in 17:4 and it would probably be better translated as 'accomplished'. The plan and purpose of God in sending His Son to earth, to die on behalf of sinful men, has now been accomplished (v. 30).

In verse 28 it is hard to know exactly which scripture Jesus is fulfilling (Ps. 22:15 is most likely), but John wants us to know that Jesus, in full obedience to His Father, is accomplishing God's eternal plan of redemption as revealed in scripture. Here is the climax towards which the whole of the Old Testament – all God's revelation and activity – has been moving.

This is the key event in God's eternal plan, His plan of calling together a people who would 'know Him' in eternal life. Even in death Jesus is seen to be in charge; John records that He 'gave up' His life – no-one took it from Him (cf. 10:17-18).

**31–37 He is His people's Saviour accomplishing His people's rescue.** The main point of this passage is contained in verses 36–37: Jesus is God's perfect Passover Lamb, without blemish and without broken bones. John makes the point by recalling the Exodus and Numbers requirements for the Passover Lamb – that the bones should not be broken – and by quoting from Zechariah 12:10 (see OT notes). By emphasising that he saw the incident with the spear (v. 35) and that his testimony can be relied upon, John shows the reader that the scripture really has been fulfilled, and the fountain of forgiveness has been opened.

Verse 35 identifies for us the main application of this passage: addressing the reader directly, '... so that you also may believe', John makes clear his intention in recording these specific events of the crucifixion, which is that his reader should believe, and continue to believe, that Jesus is the long-awaited Passover Lamb.

### **38–42 God's king is buried**

The witness theme of verses 31–37 is continued here as John makes it plain that Jesus really is dead. This is most important, for the fact of Jesus' physical death is central both to His being the true Passover Lamb (the lamb must die) and to the possibility that He should be physically raised – there will be more on this in ch.20. The fact that it is Joseph and Nicodemus who retrieve the body of Jesus gives us hope that at least some of the Jewish establishment will turn to Him, even after the widespread rejection of chapters 5–10. The great weight of spices show that Nicodemus deemed Jesus worthy of unusually great honour (cf.12.1-8). Whereas before he could not see the kingdom (3:3) it seems that after the Son of Man had been lifted up (3:14), he could.

### **Key themes**

#### **The identity of Jesus – the obedient Son of God.**

- He is God's heavenly king whose kingdom is not of this world.
- His kingdom is established by truth and His subjects enter that kingdom by listening to the truth He teaches about God.
- He is the innocent Passover Lamb who is despised and rejected by men.
- He is invested with all the authority of God's king and is subject only to His Father's will.

#### **The Jews' response to God's king.**

- They are so concerned with their religion in this world that they turn their back on God's Passover, His truth and His heavenly king.
- Their perversion of justice and their insistence that Jesus be killed (the alternative to accepting Him as the Son of God), expose their real position: they are not on the side of truth.
- They will not accept Jesus as the Son of God and king; they would prefer Caesar's rule.
- Pilate and the Roman officials are also implicated in the rejection of Jesus, since they have heard His claim to be the king of a heavenly kingdom.

#### **The achievement of the cross.**

God's eternal, sovereign rescue plan is accomplished through Jesus' death on the cross.

- Jesus dies and yet He is God's king – no-one, at the time, can see this.
- In everything that happens, the OT is being fulfilled, even at those moments when it seems that Jesus is not in control and that His enemies are triumphing over Him.
- His death is not a failure but the point at which He accomplishes what He had come to do, dying in the place of God's people as the Passover Lamb, achieving their rescue and opening for them a fountain of forgiveness.

### **Application**

**To them then:** The trial of Jesus quickly becomes the trial before Jesus. As Jesus explains the nature of His kingdom so Pilate and the Jews are put on trial. They are convicted of choosing Jesus' death in order to avoid submitting to Him as king. The implications of this rejection are made clear by the irony of their situation: they have forfeited their part in the heavenly Passover, and they have stated their allegiance to Caesar. In contrast, John wants his readers to 'believe' the real meaning of the cross.

**To us now:** John narrates the events of Jesus trial and execution to force a decision from his readers. It is a decision either to reject Jesus, and so show that one is not on the side of truth and not part of His kingdom, or else to listen to Him and accept Him as king, and so show that one is part of His kingdom. We must realise that rejection of Jesus' kingship does not leave a person in neutral territory. Rejection of Jesus means forfeiting eternal life in heaven, and giving allegiance to earthly masters now.

John wants us to 'believe' in Jesus and go on believing in Him. Verse 35 reminds us (as does 20:30-31) that John selects his material deliberately for that purpose. Specifically, therefore, we are to believe:

- Jesus, though weak and dying, is in reality God's king, accomplishing God's eternal purpose of rescuing His people from God's wrath.
- God is therefore sovereign through all time: thousands of years in advance He had planned Jesus' suffering, even to the most minute details.
- Jesus is the Passover Lamb. Because His death has opened the fountain of forgiveness, there need be no fear of judgement, no earning of forgiveness ... but rather praise and worship of God's king who has been lifted up.

**The aim**

The aim of this study is to see and believe that Jesus' death, far from being a tragic failure, accomplishes God's eternal plan of rescue for His people. People's reactions to the Passover Lamb expose their ultimate motivation and determine their ultimate destiny.

## John 20:1–31

### 'We have seen the Lord!'

#### Context

The resurrection of Jesus is the sign that closes this section of John's Gospel. It is paired with the raising of Lazarus (ch. 11), the sign that opened the section. Jesus' words in this chapter (vv. 17, 21–23, 27–29) encourage the reader to look back and combine the sign with the explanatory words in chapters 12–19.

The major theme of the section has been eternal life which is achieved by the death of Jesus. John has recorded how Jesus explained this achievement (chapters 11-12, 18-19), and also explained what this eternal life would be like now for those who belong to Him and wait for His return (13-17).

**The achievement of Jesus' death.** As a result of Jesus' death, God is glorified through the revelation of Jesus' love for His Father, and of the Father's love for the world – both of which are in contrast to the world's hatred of God. Further, judgement will come on the world that rebels against God (a rebellion that climaxes at the cross), Satan will be driven out, and all kinds of people will be drawn to Him (12:31–32). It will make it possible for Jesus to prepare a place for His people in heaven (14:1ff), and it will also enable His people, here on earth, to know the Father (17:3). His death will effect the 'washing' of His people (13:8), after which the Spirit will be sent from the Father to His people, in order to bring them eternal life (3:5; 14:15–21). The Spirit will remind the apostles of everything that Jesus has said to them, so that their message will be both accurate and sufficient for the bringing of eternal life to others (14:26). No further revelation is required.

**The experience of eternal life.** For those who belong to Jesus this will mean an intimate personal relationship with both Father and Son through the Spirit, a relationship that will call for their loving obedience to God as they await Jesus' return (14:15ff). Living this life will also call for perseverance, as they face suffering at the hands of a world that hates Jesus' people (15:18ff). But Jesus' people will experience love, joy and peace as they engage in active mission to the world, living as His messengers (16:22, 33).

Chapter 20 contains more than the end of the story. In chapter 19, at the crucifixion, the voice of the eye-witness was plainly heard – eye-witnesses first appeared in chapter 1, verses 34, 46, 50 – and now, in chapter 20, it dominates the narrative, announcing a conclusion in verses 30–31. The emphasis on eye-witnesses, combined with the emphasis on the achievements of Jesus' death and resurrection, has the effect of urging the reader to come to a decision. It has been shown that Jesus really has achieved all that He promised, and that the apostles really have seen 'heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man!' Everything that was said of Jesus in the Prologue has been seen to be true. Jesus is the true Israel, God's true Son, who has come from the Father and is returning to the Father. Anyone who receives Him will gain the right to become a child of God – it is time to listen and believe.

#### Structure

20:1–9	Peter and John see the empty tomb and John believes.
20:10–18	Mary Magdalene sees Jesus and He sends her to tell the apostles that He has accomplished His mission of bringing eternal life.
20:19–23	The apostles see Jesus and He assures them of His forgiveness and sends them into the world with the assurance that their message is the message of life.
20:24–29	Thomas sees Jesus and believes. Jesus states that seeing is no longer necessary for belief, for the apostles' message is sufficient for belief.
20:30–31	Summary.

#### Old Testament ideas

**Jesus had to rise from the dead:** There are specific references in the OT stating that God's Messiah would live

forever (e.g. Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 9:6–7). Furthermore, Isaiah 53:10ff implies that the Suffering Servant will rise from the dead. John has shown us in his Gospel that Jesus combined both these OT types, which is why he says confidently that Jesus had to rise from the dead (v. 9).

## Text notes

### 1–9 PETER AND JOHN SEE AND JOHN BELIEVES

In Jewish law the witness of two men establishes credible evidence (Deuteronomy 19:15). Peter and John provide such credibility concerning the empty tomb; John's record of what they saw is highly detailed, suggesting authenticity. So the two witnesses establish that the tomb was empty. This evidence on its own does not prove the resurrection. However, when taken with the rest of the chapter it confirms that the body seen by Mary Magdalene and the disciples was the same physical Jesus who had been dead and buried. This is important proof that the resurrection of Jesus was a physical, bodily resurrection, not just some kind of 'spiritual experience' or 'imagining' that the disciples were caught up in.

When John enters the tomb in verse 8, he 'saw and believed.' [Although John did not see Jesus Himself, vv. 8-9 suggest that the empty tomb alone was enough to convince them of what they should have known from the OT (see OT notes).] John's reaction in v. 8 establishes a pattern that recurs through the chapter – Mary reported to the other disciples that she had 'seen' the Lord (v. 18); the disciples themselves rejoiced when they 'saw' the Lord (v. 20); they told Thomas, 'We have seen the Lord' (v. 25); Thomas demands that he personally be able to 'see' the Lord (v. 25); finally, it is when he 'sees' that Thomas comes to believe (v. 27-28). The normal pattern at this stage seems to be that 'seeing is believing'. This observation prepares us for the shock of Jesus' rebuke to Thomas in v. 29, and the purpose statement in vv. 30-31. There may also be a further element to the pattern, those who 'believe' then 'tell' others. We noted this pattern in the disciples in chapter 1, in the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, in the man born blind in chapter 9, and it recurs here. As people come to believe, so they are commissioned as God's witnesses to the world (cf. 15:26-28 as well as the commission of verses 21-23).

### 10–18 MARY MAGDALENE SEES JESUS AND HE SENDS HER TO TELL THE APOSTLES THAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED HIS MISSION OF BRINGING ETERNAL LIFE.

The most significant point of this passage is in verse 17. Mary is told to go and pass on the message to Jesus' apostles that He is returning to His Father. When she sees them she reports that she has seen the Lord and then passes on this message. The full significance of the message can only be understood in the light of all that has been said throughout the Gospel about Jesus' coming to earth and returning to His Father. Each time this theme appears (see 3:13–16; 13:3; 16:28; 17:4–5) it presents a summary of God's purpose in sending His Son, that His Son should accomplish His eternal plan and rescue His people; the theme also includes God's vindication and glorification of Jesus. Jesus' message about returning to His Father would have reminded the disciples that His death and resurrection (His 'going') was for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness for His people; this was how the gate of heaven was to be opened, this was how a place would be prepared for them in heaven.

By emphasising the words 'your Father ... your God' Jesus points to the new relationship that now exists; through His wrath-bearing death He has made it possible for His people to have the same access to God that He Himself has (cf. 14:20, 23; 16:25–27). Again we are left marvelling at the grace of God – each one of these disciples has failed and abandoned Jesus; even so, the death and resurrection of Jesus enables them to know God as their Father – truly they have received the right to become children of God (cf. 1:12-13).

### 19–23 THE APOSTLES SEE JESUS AND HE ASSURES THEM OF HIS FORGIVENESS AND SENDS THEM INTO THE WORLD WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT THEIR MESSAGE IS THE MESSAGE OF LIFE.

Jesus shows the disciples His hands and side (v. 20) in order to remind them of the events of the cross: 'the risen Lord is none other than the crucified sacrifice' (Carson). This gesture, together with His words, helps them recall His teaching in chapters 13–17. There are two main themes:

**Assurance.** With the greeting 'Peace be with you', and by breathing on the apostles, Jesus reminds His disciples of all that His death has achieved for them. As the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', He has washed

them clean through His wrath-bearing death, and now He is able to impart to them God's Holy Spirit (see Context for notes on the achievement of His death). Previously, God could not indwell sinful individuals, but now that sin has been dealt with, God can 'make His home' with His people (14:23). The greeting 'Peace be with you' is an everyday greeting, but by repeating it (v. 19, 21) Jesus reminds His disciples of His promise of peace in a world that hates Him, and them too. Through His death and resurrection He has now obtained their forgiveness; He has 'overcome the world' and secured their place in heaven. As they remain in Him, they will now experience the peace He had promised them, with His Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

NB Some people have used verse 22 to support their theology of a two-stage Spirit baptism. Carson has useful comments that show the flaws in this argument (pp. 650ff). His conclusion is that 'Jesus' 'exhalation' and command 'Receive the Holy Spirit' are best understood as a kind of acted parable pointing forward to the full enduement still to come ...; like the foot-washing which anticipated the spiritual washing achieved through the cross, Jesus' action here is a symbolic anticipation of the events of Pentecost.

**Commission.** The words of the commission in verses 21–23 remind the apostles of all that Jesus had said about His people's responsibility to bear fruit (see notes on 15:9–17). This fruit, together with the 'greater works' (14:12), was seen to be the spreading of His message of forgiveness to a world in rebellion against Him, through the teaching of His powerful, Spirit-inspired, word. This could only be accomplished with the empowering and enabling of the indwelling Spirit, who would not only enable them to testify, but also guarantee the accuracy of their teaching. In verses 21–23 the risen Lord commissions His apostles, who will receive His Spirit, to set about the task of bringing this accurate message of forgiveness to the world (cf. 17:18ff). Verse 21 is often abused by those who want the church to be involved in the world of social action. It is worth highlighting therefore that verse 23 specifies and defines the task for which Jesus 'sends' the disciples in verse 21. He does not tell them to launch political campaigns or to transform society – He tells them to proclaim the message of forgiveness.

Verse 20 gives further evidence that this is the physically risen Jesus, but in view of His greeting, 'Peace be with you', it appears to be here to remind us that Jesus is the Passover Lamb who has been pierced.

### **24–29 Thomas sees Jesus and believes: Jesus states that seeing is no longer necessary for belief, for the apostles' message is sufficient for belief**

Initially, Thomas refuses to believe the apostles' witness – although we can understand that Thomas might feel left out (everyone else has been able to 'see' Jesus before believing in Him), Jesus rebukes him. To his credit, however, when presented with undeniable, tangible, scientific evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas does not close his mind to Jesus (as the Jews did in chapters 5–10), but responds to Him correctly: the response of Thomas in verse 28 is the climax of the Gospel! It provides a model response for the reader to follow as Thomas acknowledges that Jesus is Lord and God (cf. 1:1–18). This is what the reader should make of the resurrection.

Jesus' promise in verse 29 takes further what has already been taught about the nature of 'belief'. Throughout the Gospel, John has been encouraging the reader to make a right response to the miraculous signs by focusing on them and accepting Jesus' words about them (cf. 2:23–25; 4:48; 6:26): the result of this right response is eternal life. Now Jesus restates this fact: real favour with God (being blessed) does not depend upon being able to see Him, but on trusting the words of the apostles. Further signs or revelation are unnecessary, for these words alone are sufficient to bring someone to eternal life (vv. 23, 31). Thus there has been a great movement, even since the start of the chapter. Seeing is no longer believing, hearing is! Thomas saw the risen Jesus so that we would not have to.

### **30–31 Summary**

Finally, we reach John's purpose statement – not just of chapter 20, but of the whole Gospel. He has set out to provide us with sufficient evidence (in the form of the significant signs) in order that we might believe that the Christ is Jesus, and so receive life in His name. If we have believed, we have life.

The commentaries discuss whether John's purpose is evangelism of the unbeliever or edification of the believer. Such a distinction is out of line with Jesus' teaching within the Gospel. He has said that His gospel message brings eternal life to the unbeliever (i.e. it is the means of entry into life, see 5:24) and also that it sustains the believer in

eternal life (i.e. continuing to listen to His words is essential to remaining in Him and to persevering as a believer; see 10:27 and 15:7). Therefore, to separate the two purposes is to create a division of which the Bible knows nothing.

### Key themes

Jesus' resurrection is attested by the empty tomb, by three appearances in front of multiple witnesses, and by the conversion of Thomas.

The words of the risen Jesus show that God's eternal plan of rescue has been achieved:

- He is the Son who has come from the Father and is returning to the Father.
- Through His death as the Passover Lamb He has satisfied His Father's wrath.
- Having 'washed' His apostles He can send them His Holy Spirit.
- Then He commissions them to take His message of peace to the world.
- He is Lord and God!

The right response is to believe the apostles' words about Jesus. They are sufficient to bring life. Demands for further evidence are discouraged.

### Application

**Evidence for the resurrection.** John provides us with sufficient well-documented and carefully observed detail to show that the resurrection of Jesus was a physical, bodily reality.

**Accomplishment of God's eternal plan.** Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene and the disciples resonate with His teaching in the Upper Room, and take us back to the lessons learned there. His words assure us that He had come from God, that He has now obtained the forgiveness of sin, that this drinking of the cup of the Father's wrath has enabled Him to send His Spirit to His 'washed' people, and that therefore His commission to His apostles, that they should take to the world the Spirit-taught message about the finished work of Jesus, will result in the True Vine bearing much fruit.

**The nature of belief.** Jesus' words to Thomas teach us that true belief and true favour with God come not from physical sight but from faith in the apostles' words about Him. These words are sufficient for belief and no further proofs or revelation are necessary. Some rely on evidence outside the Bible as the grounds for their belief/evangelistic message – they are out of step with John's gospel.

### The aim

The aim of this study is to believe the apostles' witness that Jesus has risen, and so to believe His words that God has accomplished His eternal plan to rescue the world and bring life through His Son.

## John 21:1–25

### 'Feed my sheep!'

#### Context

All known textual traditions of John's Gospel contain chapter 21 – it is to be seen as an integral part of John's work, designed to further the purpose of 20:31, rather than an independent anti-climactic ending.

Any number of interpretations have been read into the account of the miraculous catch of fish – some more speculative than others! However, if we stick with the pattern that John has already established in the rest of the Gospel, many of the supposed difficulties are ironed out. With all the other signs in the Gospel, John has provided an interpretation of the sign in the discourse that follows; this sign is also followed by a discourse. The subject of the discourse between Jesus and Peter concerns the feeding of Jesus' 'sheep', His future disciples. Jesus has just fed His disciples with fish from the miraculous catch of fish. Thus the subject matter of the final chapter is all centred around this event of the feeding of Jesus' apostles. Jesus feeds His apostles and reinstates Peter – as a representative of all the apostles – so that he and they may feed His people.

Notice how tightly this sign fits with John's purpose statement. By recording Jesus' feeding of the apostles, Peter's reinstatement, and Jesus' inference that He has a task for John to do, John is once again providing substantial evidence for the reader as to why he should take this written account seriously. Here is the risen Jesus re-commissioning His apostles for their task of testifying to Him. (In context, this is Jesus' own explanation of the commission in 20.21, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' The mission of the apostles is the word mission of feeding Christ's people). Jesus' emphasis on the authenticity of the apostles' commission has been one of the major thrusts of the Gospel (especially since ch. 14), and now, as he ends his account, John selects one final sign and discourse to show the reader that this commission still stands. In the light of the apostles' wholesale desertion of Jesus, the reader might be tempted to doubt the apostles' words. However, the apostles are now fed miraculously by the risen Christ and are given the task of feeding the risen Christ's people.

Furthermore, given that this sign is 'unpaired', there is the suggestion that Jesus' work is to continue in the age between His 'going' and His return: as the apostles proclaim His word, His 'lambs' will be fed. This was one of the major emphases of the Upper Room Discourse.

Finally, it is worth noting an *inclusio* on the theme of 'witness' with chapter 1. In chapter 1, John the Baptist 'witnessed' to Jesus (1:7, 8, 15). That torch has now been passed to the apostles in general, and to John in particular (21:24). There has been a strong link between 'belief' and 'witness' throughout John – the true believer is the one who speaks up for Christ (e.g. Samaritan woman, man born blind), but here in chapter 21, it is the apostles' witness that is primarily in view.

#### Structure

21:1–14	Jesus feeds His apostles.
21:15–25	Jesus calls His apostles to feed His sheep.
15–17	Peter is reinstated as an under-shepherd.
18–22	As Peter follows Jesus and feeds His sheep, it will cost him his life
23–25	John will live long enough to record Jesus' words and works, feeding His sheep in a different way.

#### Text notes

##### 1-14 Jesus feeds His Apostles

The purpose of these verses is to 'reveal' Jesus – note the *inclusio* between v. 1 (twice) and v. 14 (cf. 2:11; 17:6 – see also 1:31). The miraculous catch of fish reveals Jesus as 'Lord' (cf. 13.13) first to the beloved disciple (v.7) and then to all the disciples (v. 12). We will learn much in this passage about the mission of Jesus' apostles, but we must not

forget that this resurrection appearance and sign are here to teach us about Jesus – the one who commissions the apostles is none other than the omniscient (v. 6), risen (v. 14) Lord.

Perhaps the most common of the many interpretations given to the story of the miraculous catch of fish is that Jesus is giving the disciples a symbolic anticipation of the great harvest of 'fish' that they are going to gather in, on His behalf, as He turns them into 'fishers of men'. This gives rise to the classic three-point talk on this passage: 'Fish, Feed, Follow!' The trouble with such an interpretation is that there has been no prior reference to fish in the Gospel – apart from chapter 6, the feeding of the five thousand with bread and fish.

New disciples have been symbolically alluded to as fruit on a vine (15:16), or as sheep (10:16), but never as fish! John could easily have included Jesus' words to Peter and Andrew recorded in Matthew's Gospel (4:19), but he didn't. Therefore, it seems much safer to understand this sign according to the explanation given in the following discourse, in which Jesus commissions Peter to feed His sheep. (In this way we will be abiding by the pattern of sign-plus-explanation that John has maintained from chapter 2 onwards.)

In the light of this, the sign shows the disciples failing to catch fish, but Jesus miraculously providing for them. When they land (notice Peter's eagerness: he may have been out-run on the way to the tomb, but he definitely wants to be the first to the shore!) they find that He has already got a fire going with fish cooking on it; He invites them to breakfast and feeds them, first with these fish and then with fish from the miraculous catch.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has been concerned with the feeding of His people. The Good Shepherd has promised both to keep and to feed His sheep, as they listen to His words (10:27–28). It has been established that these words are Jesus' teaching about His words and works on earth (14:8–21). And the accuracy of these words has been guaranteed through the promised sending of the Spirit to the apostles (14:25ff; 16:12–15; 20:22–23). Now, in this final sign of the Gospel, we see the risen Christ miraculously feeding His apostles, and so assuring them that they are now equipped to go out and feed His people.

So, this open-ended finish to the Gospel shows that Jesus' concern, in the post-resurrection era, will be with the feeding of His people through what He has fed His apostles. It is a summary statement of much of the Gospel and a final authentication that the apostles' witness is genuine.

This interpretation of the sign doesn't rule out the possibility that John intended the miraculous catch of fish to recall the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 6. Both the geographical setting and much of the language in the narrative recalls the memory of that sign. If this is John's intention, then that sign and its following discourse will bring back, for the reader, the message that is to be the apostles' food, namely, that Jesus is 'the bread of life' and that 'if a man eats of this bread, he will live for ever'. Many of the major themes of the Gospel are thus recalled: the nature of Jesus' heavenly kingdom, in contrast to the world's desire for a material kingdom, the necessity of Jesus' death as the Passover Lamb, the importance of belief, and the inevitability of division.

### **15-25 Jesus calls His Apostles to feed His sheep**

This passage has three main emphases:

#### **15-17 Peter is reinstated as an under-shepherd.**

The repetition of the question 'Do you love me?' deliberately recalls Peter's three denials. The fact that Peter was 'grieved' (v. 17) at the repetition adds weight to the link with his past failure. But now his failure in the high priest's courtyard is put behind him and Jesus graciously calls him back into service. This reinstatement is done in public, in front of the other disciples. And Peter is taught that loving Jesus involves feeding His people. The repetition of 'my sheep' emphasises that the sheep that are to be fed belong to Him, and from the rest of the Gospel the reader knows that feeding these sheep will involve teaching them about Jesus' words and works. Prior to the death of Jesus, Peter had no understanding and no message for Jesus' sheep. Now there is no boasting, but instead a humble appeal to Jesus' perfect knowledge of him. He is beginning to understand he has the message of forgiveness and eternal life to bring to God's people, as he teaches them about the words and works of Christ. Once again the implication is that the reader can trust the apostles who have been given this specific commission

to feed Jesus' people.

**18–22 Peter is told that for him feeding Jesus' sheep will mean following Jesus to the point of death.**

In chapter 18, John highlighted a heavy contrast between Jesus and Peter. Jesus remained faithful to His Father to the point of death; Peter, on the other hand, although he made big promises (13:37), denied Christ three times. Now, however, that contrast is replaced with a comparison as Peter is commissioned to shepherd the sheep of the Good Shepherd. He is told that the manner of his death will be similar to that of Christ's death. The purpose of this part, about the manner of Peter's death, is probably to add further weight to the reinstatement of Peter, as an apostle whose witness could be trusted. Nevertheless, the irony of the situation is clear. So too are the lessons about discipleship. Before the crucifixion Peter had bragged that he would lay down his life on Jesus' behalf; now, after the crucifixion, Peter is called to do just that, to lay down his life on behalf of the risen Christ and so glorify God. Now that he has been served, Peter is ready to serve. It is a call to the type of discipleship that Jesus talked about in 12:25–26.

This part of Peter's reinstatement recalls Jesus' original call to His disciples, back in 1:43. The open-ended nature of the chapter, with just one sign and no 'pair' to close the section, suggests that, from now on, this is to be the pattern of discipleship and service to which all readers of the Gospel are called. The risen Jesus still calls for this kind of fruitful service from His disciples; if they are prepared to lose their lives and follow Jesus, they will be honoured by the Father (12:25–26). This conclusion is further strengthened by the portrayal of Peter not just as a typical apostle, but as a typical sinner for whom Christ died and to whom Christ gives a new identity. Until the end of chapter 20 the question has been 'who is Jesus?' That has now been answered. Instead it is replaced with another one – for us as much as Peter - 'do we love Him?' Loving Him will involve lives devoted to serving Him, regardless of the cost. It will involve the service and loving unity of ch 13-17. It will inevitably result in witness to the world.

**23–25 John may not die as a martyr but will live to record Jesus' words and works, feeding His sheep in a different way.**

John's inclusion of a reference to himself makes it clear that not all Jesus' apostles will be called to lay down their lives. Some, like John, have been commissioned to feed Jesus' sheep by recording, for them, His words and works (vv. 24–25). Nonetheless, all disciples are to be ready to follow Jesus to the point of death if that is the path chosen for them.

The narrator again highlights the truthfulness of John's witness, as he did at 19:35. Only three characters have had the truth of their witness underlined in the Gospel: God the Father (5:32; cf. 8:17), Jesus Himself (8:13-18), and now John. The written witness of the apostles is as reliable as the witness of God Himself, Father and Son. But of course, John's testimony (like Jesus') is not independent. The Father revealed Himself truly to the Son who in turn revealed Himself truly to John. John's true record is therefore an authentic 'revelation' of the truth about God Himself.

**Key themes**

The miraculous catch of fish is a sign that indicates the risen Christ's intention of feeding His apostles so that they may feed His people.

- Miraculously, He feeds His apostles.
- He reinstates and re-commissions His apostles to feed His people.
- His people can trust His apostles' words about Him.

At the same time, the risen Christ indicates that His apostles will face different ends. As Jesus' disciples follow Him, the task of feeding His people is to be continued even to the point of death.

In this life His people are called to walk different paths. Peter glorifies God by following Christ and feeding His people to the point where he must die a martyr's death, but the beloved disciple does not die in a noteworthy way. Dying and not dying are equal. We serve and love best by walking the path He has allocated to us.

## Application

The sign and the discourse establish that Jesus' key priority, now, is the feeding of His sheep through the words of the apostles. He commissioned His disciples to engage in this task and to follow Him in it even to the point of death. There are two levels of application:

First, if Jesus' priority, for the period between His resurrection and His return, is that His people should be fed, through hearing His apostles' teaching, we should make it our priority to feed on that teaching ourselves. The authenticity of this teaching is guaranteed for us, not least by the re-commissioning of Peter and the recognition of John's role in recording the Gospel: we can trust the apostles' record of Jesus' words. We should make sure, therefore, that we belong to the kind of church where we can feed on His word ourselves, and also serve others by helping them to feed on His word. Only then will God's work be done (14:8–14).

Secondly, if Jesus' priority is the feeding of His sheep – those who know His voice and follow Him – we should make it our priority to ensure that His sheep are fed. Whatever our role within His people, we should be clear that His chief concern, now, is that His word should go out to His people. If we are teachers ourselves, we can be encouraged by the reinstatement of Peter after such a great fall; at the same time we need to remember that the people we teach are His, not ours to rule over. All God's people have a role to play in the spreading of this word to those who have not yet heard His voice; each of us have gifts, given by Him, to use in advancing the ministry of gospel proclamation. As His people pursue this ministry, so the True Vine will bear 'much fruit'.

Finally, we are asked, 'Do we love Jesus?' Peter made great claims about his own discipleship (cf. 13:37), but when given the opportunity to bear witness about Jesus to a servant girl, fear overtook him (cf. ch. 18), just as it had overtaken the parents of the man born blind (9:22). Now, as Peter is recognised as a disciple who loves Jesus, so he is tasked with telling others about Him. The pattern remains today.

## The aim

The aim of this study is to recognise that the apostles' testimony to Jesus is trustworthy, and also that Jesus' priority for His disciples is that they should be fed, so that they in turn may take on the responsibility of feeding His people, whatever this may cost.