

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS JOHN



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Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the New King James Version.

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RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to present the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45-minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN JOHN

Caravaggio's depiction of the crucifixion of Apostle Peter, Rome

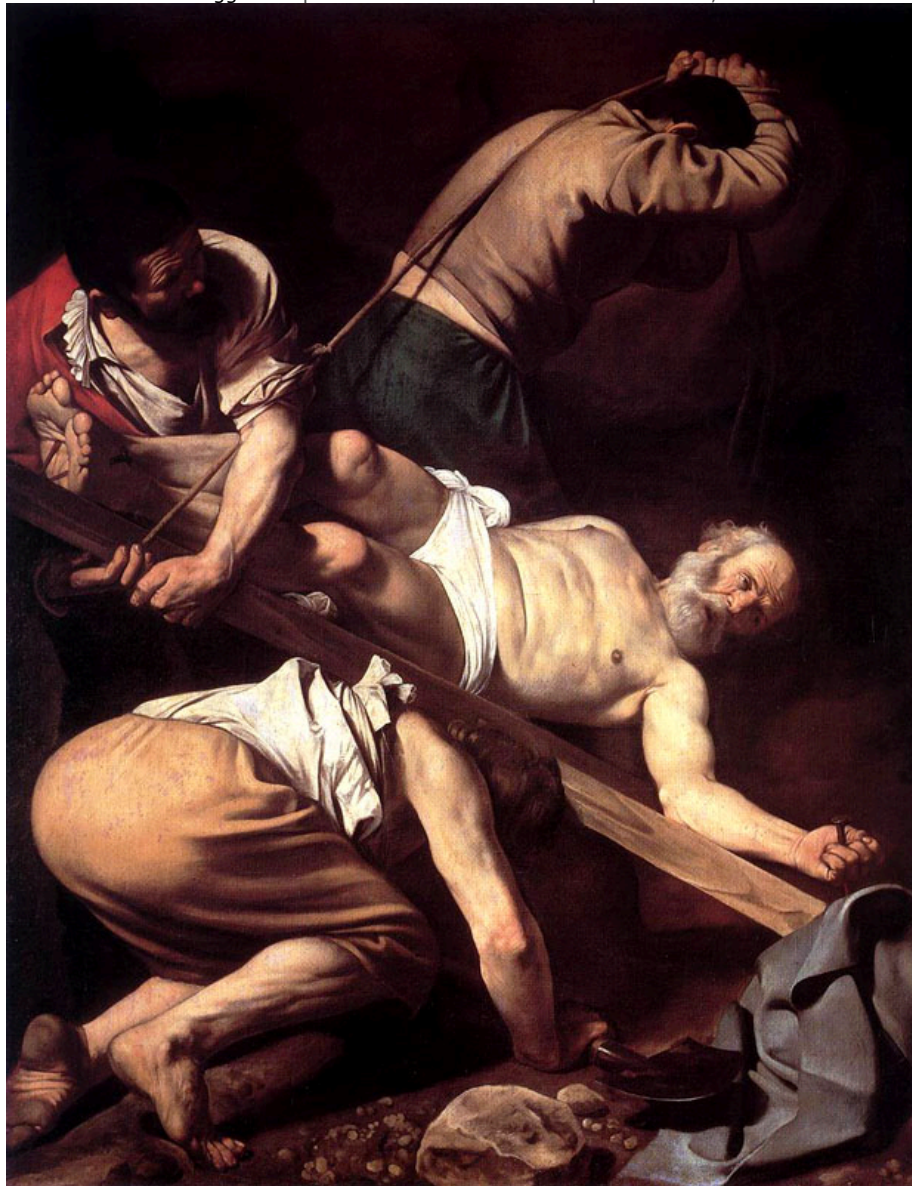


Image Courtesy of Panairjdde~commonswiki - [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caravaggio_-_The_Crucifixion_of_Saint_Peter_-_WGA01687.jpg) (PD-1996)

“MOST ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER,
YOU GIRDED YOURSELF AND WALKED WHERE YOU WISHED; BUT
WHEN YOU ARE OLD, YOU WILL STRETCH OUT YOUR HANDS,
AND ANOTHER WILL GIRL YOU AND CARRY YOU WHERE YOU
DO NOT WISH.”

JOHN 21:18

LESSON 69
The Divine Son
JOHN I

Today we begin a new study in the gospel of John. John will reveal to us Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. John makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is God and was manifested to us as a man. He will use a series of miraculous signs to authenticate the divinity of Jesus. Written with a different focus than the other gospels, almost half of John's gospel is written about the details surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first chapter of this book is a revelation to us of who Jesus is. We do not get a genealogy as with Matthew or Luke but are at once confronted with the truth of His deity. There is hardly a clearer statement in all of scripture concerning the identity of Jesus being divine. There are many cults trying to make Jesus to be less than God, but John's gospel refutes them all, and boldly declares that Jesus is God.

John uses several ways to describe the deity and glory of Jesus. He writes of Him as the **'Word'**, meaning the full expression of the mind of God for all humanity. He declares Him God. He also tells us that He was the creator of all that has been created. This confirms what He is saying, for none other than God can be accredited with the power and work of creation. He then speaks of Jesus being **'Light'**. This means that Jesus is the means by which we can know God, just as light is the means by which we can know and understand the objects around us. Jesus is **Light** in the sense of giving us knowledge and understanding, and He does this through His creation, through the conscience of man, and through the writings of scripture, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

John introduces us to another John, whom we know as John the Baptist. John the Baptist was sent to bear witness to Jesus being the true light that came into the world. However, the people of Israel rejected the light, as they did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah. Many others did receive Him, believing the revelation that Jesus was God's son, and choose to follow Him in faith. These were received by God as His own children and were regenerated by God's power and not the will of man. To become a child of God we must receive Jesus by faith. The new birth is accomplished by God's will and God's power; all we must do is believe what God had revealed to us concerning His Son Jesus.

John testifies that the apostles had seen God's glory in Jesus, and that through Him we have been given grace and truth. In the Old Testament period, the Jews had been given the Law, which revealed God's truth, but had not given God's full plan of grace and redemption. When Jesus came into the world the revelation of God's plan to save men by grace was made more fully known.

John the Baptist was a great man and prophet, and some wondered whether he might be the Messiah that Israel had been waiting for. When asked about his identity, John replied that he was a voice crying in the wilderness. He said the one that would come after Him was much greater than he, and that he was not worthy to even untie his shoes. He then pointed others to see Jesus as God's sacrificial Lamb. John shows us his humility when he draws attention away from himself, and points others to look to Jesus and follow Him. When two of his disciples heard John's testimony about Jesus, they left John to follow Jesus. This shows us the marks of God's true servant, namely one who turns attention away from himself, and leads others to know and follow Jesus as Lord. Not only is the apostle John trying to direct our eyes and hearts towards Jesus, but John the Baptist is recorded as doing so also. All of God's record in the bible is designed to draw us to know and follow Jesus. When men exalt themselves, or draw attention to man's glory, they have missed God's purpose through the revelation of Christ in the scriptures.

Near the end of this first chapter, we find Jesus calling several people to be His followers. There was two of John's disciples, one of them being Andrew, a brother of Simon. Andrew tells Simon about Jesus, and he too becomes a follower of the Messiah. Then Jesus called Phillip to be His follower also. Phillip found Nathaniel, told him about Jesus, and convinced him to follow Jesus. At first Nathaniel is skeptical, but when Jesus tells him that he saw him earlier, when Nathaniel knew no one else was there to see him, he believed and declared Jesus to be the king of Israel.

John's gospel is designed to help us know the identity of Jesus. This is because we need to understand who Jesus is if we are to be saved and go to heaven. If we make a mistake about Jesus identity then we are in danger of believing in another Jesus, who cannot save us. This is what many of the cults have done, by making Jesus to be a good man, a prophet, or a created being. Such beliefs are very dangerous; because they will deceive many into thinking, they have salvation, when they are doomed to destruction. Jesus said that someday people would claim they had done great works in His name, but he would reply to them, "depart from me, I never knew you". Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you believe that Jesus is the Word made flesh, and that the word was God? This is essential to your salvation. Be sure you have placed your faith in the true Jesus of the bible, God's Divine Son!

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the revelation of Jesus as God's Son, God manifested in the flesh. We saw how he was portrayed as the Word, the Light, the giver of Grace and truth, and the manifestation of God's glory. We also saw how John the Baptist did not draw attention to himself but pointed others to follow Jesus. Someone might ask the question, "Do the scriptures teach clearly that Jesus is God?"

The quick answer to this question is yes, the scriptures do teach clearly that Jesus is God, but then we are left to wonder why so many people belonging to cults cannot see this plain teaching. We need to examine carefully with unbiased eyes what scripture is trying to reveal to us. Many cannot see this truth, because the devil convinces them to believe in a false Jesus; or they have a strong allegiance with their religious group and cannot afford to question the doctrines of that group.

The bible is not so difficult to understand that we should find the doctrine of the deity of Christ hard to see or believe. However, if some have another agenda, or are blinded by Satan, then they may not want, or cannot see, this very clear teaching from the bible. John makes perhaps the clearest statement about Jesus deity, but he is certainly not the only one. All writers of the New Testament confirm this truth, and they do this in several ways. You will not find others trying to prove the deity of Christ, but they speak boldly and clearly of His divinity, when they attribute to Him only things that could be true of God. Here are some scriptures that teach clearly that Jesus is God.

(Notes from "What the Bible Teaches" Emmaus course, Lesson #5)¹

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is God in the following ways:

1. *The same words are used in telling us about God and in speaking of Christ.*
 - a. He is eternal. Christ has no beginning (John 17:5; 8:58).
 - b. He is omnipresent. He is with His servants everywhere (Matthew 28:20).
 - c. He is omnipotent. He has all power and authority (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 1:8).
 - d. He is omniscient. He knows all things (John 21:17).
 - e. He is unchangeable. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
2. *Christ does the same work that God does.*
 - a. He created all things (John 1:3).
 - b. He upholds the universe (Colossians 1:17).
 - c. He raised Himself from the dead (John 2:19, 22).
3. *The same title is given to God and to Christ. He is called God.*
 - a. God, the Father, speaks of the Son as God (Hebrews 1:8).
 - b. Men called Christ God, and He did not refuse their worship (John 20:28):
 - c. Demons recognized Him as God (Mark 1:24).
 - d. Christ declared that He was God (John 10:30).

If we were to compare statements made by God or about God in the Old Testament, and then compared these with statements about Jesus in the New Testament, then we would find much more evidence to show that Jesus can be none other than the eternal Almighty God. For example, God is called the "Only Savior" in Isaiah 43:11, and Jesus is also called Savior throughout the NT. In Titus 2:13 He is called God and Savior. When God addresses Moses from the burning bush, He identifies Himself as "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14), and Jesus also said to his opponents that before Abraham was "I am" (John 8:58).

It is essential for all to believe that Jesus is God's Son, meaning they understand Jesus to be God. Without this understanding, we would not believe in the revelation of scripture concerning Jesus. The whole bible seeks to reveal to us the truth of who Jesus is. We need to understand that not only is He truly God, but He is also truly man, and came into this world to be the Lamb of God and die for our sins. This is not simply something that theologians debate, but the basic teaching of Christianity, that determines whether we are truly God's children and going to heaven. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord?

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil 2:10-11

LESSON 70
The Wedding Feast
JOHN 2

In our last lesson, we saw the glory of Christ as we considered His divinity, but John makes a quick transition from His heavenly glory to His earthly glory as we meet Him at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Jesus reveals his glory through his miraculous provision of wine, and many believe in Him.

Jesus and his disciples along with Jesus mother were invited to a wedding feast in Cana. Jesus' mother reported to Jesus that the wine was finished. She perhaps thought Jesus could do something to help provide the wine. Jesus responded to His mother, by asking her what this had to do with Him, for His time had not yet come. From this we know that Jesus understood perfectly well that a time was coming when he would be made known widely to the nation of Israel as their Messiah, and this would be evidenced through his miraculous works. Mary must have had some insight into Jesus' ability to do something miraculous, judging from Jesus words to her. She also advised the servants to do whatever Jesus asked them to do. This is good advice for all of us to follow, just do whatever Jesus asks you to do, for that is the way to receive joy and blessings from God.

Jesus asked the servants to fill six stone water pots full of water, and then asked them to draw some water and bring it to the master of the feast. When the master tasted the water, which had turned to wine, he was very pleased but also quite surprised. He did not know where the wine came from, but went to the bridegroom, assuming that he is the one to provide the wine. He said to him that everyone normally supplies the best wine at the beginning, and when everyone has had plenty to drink, he brings out the inferior wine. However, the master noted that the best wine was saved to last for this wedding feast. We might wonder why Jesus would provide such a large quantity of wine. These 6 pots likely contained 150 to 180 gallons of wine. Some things that will help us to understand this story are; that the Jews, did not just celebrate weddings for just one day, but the feast was a week long, so wine would be needed for several days for those in attendance. It also likely that there were very many guests at the wedding, for Jesus and his disciples were not from Cana, but had come from the Sea of Galilee area. This suggests that people came from other towns to this wedding, and it was not just a small local affair. Perhaps there were hundreds of people present. However, we might still wonder why Jesus was providing wine, when we know that wine can lead to drunkenness and sin. We should realize that wine was the common beverage of the day, and that fresh clean water was not always readily available in all places. This common wine was more like grape juice, and the best wine was usually produced from fresh grapes without time for fermentation, and thus probably had with very minute levels of alcohol in it, if any at all. We must not read into this story a license for Christians to use alcohol excessively. While the Christian is not forbidden, he is wise to abstain from alcohol, especially those alcohols that are strong and quickly lead to intoxication.

This was Jesus first miraculous sign, and first in a series in John's gospel, that will reveal His glory, and help us to put our trust in Him, as God's Son, and as our Savior. His disciples that were with him that day believed in Him, and their faith proved genuine as they continued with him even to the time of His crucifixion, and later became His messengers of the gospel. There were many others however who also saw Jesus sign, and we are told that they believed in Him. However, the scriptures here are quick to point out that Jesus never committed Himself to them. This is because Jesus knew what was in man. These were not sincere followers of Jesus, and they would fall away from Him when His teachings became hard, or their needs were not being met. It is easy to follow and believe in someone who provides us with plenty of bread and wine, but not so easy to follow him when He is carrying a cross and beaten and despised. Which Jesus are you following? The one who provides all the nice things you want to have, or the one who paid for you sins at Calvary's cross? I do hope you are not following the phony Jesus so many are preaching today, who promises to fill your pockets with money and give you all the treasures of this world. Follow the man of Calvary, who suffered on a cross to pay your sins penalty; he will lead you to heavenly treasures that shall last forever.

While Jesus was in Jerusalem, he visited the temple area and noticed that many were selling animals, and changing money. This scene of merchandising made Jesus angry, for His Father's house was to be a place of prayer and not a place to buy and sell merchandise. It is sad to see that even today the streets of Jerusalem are still filled with vendors selling their merchandise to religious tourists who visit the city. Trying to make money from religion is one thing that God despises. We should be warned that God would severely judge those who practice evil. In His anger, Jesus chased the moneychangers away. The Jews asked Jesus for a sign of His authority, and He told them if they destroy the temple, He would rebuild it in 3 days. They thought he meant Herod's temple which had taken 46 years to build, but Jesus meant the temple of His body, which he would he would raise after 3 days in the grave.

"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."
John 2:11

Today's Bible Question:

Today we saw how Jesus revealed his glory through the miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding feast. We also saw how angry he became when men were using religion to buy, sell and make gain. We also heard Jesus prophecy concerning the resurrection of his body after 3 days in the grave. Someone might ask the question, "Is it okay for a Christian to drink alcohol?"

In today's lesson, we learned how Jesus turned water to wine for use at a wedding feast, and we might use this as an excuse to drink alcohol. We might justify this by saying "If Jesus produced wine for a wedding", then clearly he is not against people drinking alcohol". This is faulty reasoning for as we said in the lesson, the wine of Jesus day likely did not even contain much alcohol, as it was the common beverage of that time, and used when clean water was not easily accessible. The best wine is also likely a reference to the wine made from fresh grapes, and not yet fermented, as this presents the best and sweetest taste. We use the word wine, and automatically think that it means alcohol, but it might just as well refer to grape juice without alcohol. Today wines tend to have rather high percentage of alcohol in comparison to what they would have had in Jesus day. Wine is purposely made with a view of making it into alcohol, but that was not the primary concern of wine making in Jesus day. Certainly, there were those who did ferment the grape juice with a view to making stronger concentrations of alcohol, but for typical use, this would have been avoided.

The bible does not forbid the use of wine, or alcohol, but it certainly warns against drunkenness in several places. Here are a couple of quotations to consider:

Prov. 20:1 *Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.*

Prov. 23:29-35 *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"*

Eph. 5:18 *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,*

Here in Ephesians the bible commands the followers of Jesus not to be drunk with wine, but rather commands being filled with the Spirit. Christians should allow the Spirit of God to control their behavior and not alcohol. If there is any danger in becoming intoxicated, it seems the wisest course to just stay entirely away from the use of alcohol.

Someone might argue that Paul encourages Timothy to use a little wine, and thus the bible does permit the use of wine and alcohol. Paul did advise Timothy to use a little wine, and please notice he advised only a little wine, not much wine, and this was for his stomach problems. Timothy had some illness, and Paul prescribes wine medicinally to alleviate his discomfort. Drinking just water may have aggravated his stomach illness, for he could not always be sure the water was pure uncontaminated water. Having wine would avoid contaminants found in water and provide a nutritious, medicinal help to Timothy. This passage should not be taken as a license for all Christians to drink alcohol for any reason. A discerning Christian will approve the things that are excellent, and therefore seek to please the Lord at all times. Using alcohol could very easily cause a brother or sister to stumble in the faith, giving us even more reason to avoid it. Alcohol is also often associated with drunkenness and sinful behavior. Many people die every year in car accidents that are caused by drunk drivers, and if such evil is associated with drinking alcohol, it just seems wise for Christians to stay away from it.

Some Christians will decide that they have liberty to drink alcohol, because the bible does not specifically forbid it, and they might misuse scripture to support their desire to please the flesh. It is always best to seek how we may please the Lord, and not try to do what we think we can get away with. The Holy Spirit, as well as common sense, will tell us to abstain from all appearance of evil.

"Abstain from every form of evil." 1Th 5:22

LESSON 71
You Must Be Born Again
JOHN 3

In our last lesson, we met Jesus at a wedding in Cana, where he changed water into wine, and revealed his glory. Today's lesson brings a man to Jesus who is looking to understand who Jesus is. Jesus' teaching is difficult for the man to understand but has some of the most valuable information about the gospel of salvation. We do not have to be confused, as Nicodemus was.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, which meant he was a very devoted religious man, and knew the bible very well. However, when he heard about Jesus and His miracles, he had questions that he wanted answered, so he came to visit Jesus at night. He was afraid of his friends seeing him with Jesus, so he went under the shade of night to make his visit private. He certainly knew that Jesus was an extraordinary individual, for he admitted that no one could perform miracles as Jesus had done, unless he were from God. Jesus does not waste time with small matters but goes straight to the message that Nicodemus needed to hear. He tells Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is 'born again'. This terminology really confused Nicodemus, even though he was an important religious teacher in Israel. He was wondering if Jesus meant a man must enter again into his mother's womb to be born once more. Jesus speaks of being born of the spirit and water, and many understand this to mean being born not only physically (of water) but also spiritually (of God). Still Nicodemus was confused with the words of Jesus, and so Jesus explains that the spirit of God is like the wind, for it moves where it wishes to go, but no one understands where it is coming from or where it is going, but we can certainly feel its effects. The Spirit of God enters into our lives and does affect us, by giving us light and understanding about God's love and salvation. Even though we cannot see the Spirit of God, we can certainly see the effects He has on people as they respond to God's revelation.

As Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, he wants him to recognize the danger that he and his Pharisee friends were in, if they did not believe in Jesus. Jesus speaks from a story in the book of Numbers about a bronze snake that Moses fashioned and placed on a pole for all to see. Those who looked at the bronze snake were healed from the plague caused by snakebites, but if any refused to look because they did not believe in God's prescribed remedy, they perished. Then Jesus said in a similar way He would be lifted up for all to see, which was when he would be placed on the cross. When people looked to Jesus as the remedy to pay for their sins, God would cure them from the curse of their sin and give them eternal life. Nicodemus would have remembered that story from the OT very well, and it would help him to understand better God's plan of redemption through Christ, when later he saw Jesus crucified. This was the greatest gospel lesson ever told, but Nicodemus had to be humble enough to realize that even though he was a teacher, he still needed to understand that he needed forgiveness and to be born again.

Jesus explained that men do not come to God for salvation, because they love darkness and their sin. They fear to come into the light of God's truth unless their sins will be exposed, and others will realize how wicked they really are. Unfortunately, this is true of so many religious people, who are hoping in their outward practice of religion to secure them a place in heaven, and never wanting to humbly admit and deal with the sins in their heart. Be warned by this scripture today, that God knows all your sins, even when others cannot see them; but God will judge you someday. Jesus also points out something very important for all of us to understand, and that is that we are all condemned before God until we place our faith in Jesus to save us. The bible says that our condemnation is that we have not believed on the Son of God who came into the world. God has given His Son for our salvation, and now we are expected to respond to His kindness and mercy; but when we do nothing, then we are condemned already. You do not have to do anything more to fix your certain judgment and place in the fires of Hell. Nevertheless, if you want to be in heaven you do have to respond to Jesus in faith. Salvation is available for those who will receive it, but be assured you must be born again, through your own personal response to the gospel message.

The Jews confronted John the Baptist and informed him that Jesus was gaining a greater following than himself. This did not bother John, but he was very happy to know that people were flocking to Jesus and following Him. John's ministry was to lead people to Jesus, and he said that Jesus must increase, while he must decrease. John's attitude of exalting Christ and humbling himself is the very attitude that every Christian and every preacher should adopt, if they are to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus humbled himself to become our Savior. To be His follower means denying ourselves, and pointing others to follow Jesus for their eternal welfare. John provides us with a simple clear gospel message when he says that those who believe in Jesus have life, but those who do not believe in Him shall not see life, and the wrath of God abides on them. Never think it is safe to avoid God's salvation, for the bible teaches that God's wrath rest upon all who reject Jesus as their Savior. Today would be a good day for you to accept Jesus as your Savior, and to become born again by the Holy Spirit.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about how a person can be born again through faith in Jesus Christ. We saw how even a very knowledgeable and religious man like Nicodemus was not above learning his need to be born again. We also learned from John the Baptist the importance of exalting Jesus and humbling ourselves. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know if I have been born again?"

When the bible speaks of being born again, it might seem rather confusing to our minds, after all even wise old Nicodemus was struggling to understand what Jesus meant by this. When Jesus talked about being born again, He was using what we call figurative language. Jesus did not mean that we needed to be literally physically born one more time, as Nicodemus was thinking. What he meant was that when we receive the new life that comes from God, it is similar to experiencing a birth. At birth a new life begins, and therefore new experiences and relationships. When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of them, and God gives them a brand-new life, a spiritual life. This new life will be filled with new experiences and new relationships. The first new relationship is with God himself. Where once the sinner was separated from God, now He is God's child and can address God as his Father. This is a wonderful privilege for each child of God, and we should realize that while sinners can pray, and God does hear their prayers, they are not God's children and there only and greatest need is to cry out to God for salvation.

There are also many new experiences for the Christian, as he now finds that the bible becomes a living book, through which God speaks to his heart, and guides his path. He is drawn to have fellowship with other believers, and so his church attendance is born out of a love for God and for his people, and not from religious duty or family pressure. The Christian also desires to live for God, please God by his behavior, and tell others how they too can be saved and go to heaven. Everything changes in the life of the new born Christian, and so the idea of rebirth is a fitting description of the new life he experiences. If a person claims to be a Christian, and yet they do not know anything about these changes, they might be fooling themselves into thinking that they are one of God's children. They may, in fact, never have experienced the new life of which Jesus spoke. Ask yourself the question, "since I believed and accepted Jesus into my life, has there been a real change in me?" Have you seen your desires change? Do you love God, love His people, love your bible, and hate sin? Do you want everyone to know and follow Jesus? If these are not the attitudes of your heart, then you have to question whether you have been born again, for these are the attitudes which the Spirit of God gives to God's children.

When a new baby is born, we see the signs of life, when we hear them cry, and watch them hunger and thirst, and we fully expect to see them grow, become mature and independent. When a person becomes a Christian, we should expect to hear them confess Jesus as their Savior, to see them hunger and thirst after God, His word, and His righteousness. We should also see them grow into mature and caring believers. The signs of life are evidence of the new birth, and how we may test others and ourselves.

Being born again is of the greatest importance to each of us, for Jesus said unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. We must be careful that we do not deceive our own hearts into thinking that we are God's children, when our bad behavior condemns us, and identifies us as children of the devil and not children of God. Remember that the child of God is different from the rest of the world. The world is running after self-indulgence and pleasure, seeking fame and fortune, and making the most out of the few years, we have to live in this world. The child of God has his hope fixed in heaven, where Jesus is, and therefore this world has almost no appeal to him. He is living to serve God and longing to be at home with the one he loves, his Savior. Where is your heart, in this world, or in heaven? This is a way to know whether you are heaven-bound, or whether you are hell-bound. Please take the words of Jesus seriously, when He said, "You must be born again!" If you want to be born again, then read John 3:16, and put your name in place of "whosoever", and let God open your heart. Trust in Jesus today, and begin the new life that leads to heaven and eternal glory.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2Corinthians 5:17

LESSON 72
Jesus Visits Samaria
JOHN 4

Last week we saw Jesus talking with Nicodemus about the need to be born again. Jesus is still on His mission to see souls enter the kingdom of God and makes a trip through Samaria. Through His conversation with a woman at a well, He convinces not only her, but also many in the town city of Sychar to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel.

Jesus wanted to travel north to Galilee, and although the shortest route was straight through Samaria, the Jews often went the long way around, to avoid any contact with the Samaritan people. The Jews hated the Samaritans, seeing them as those who had mingled with the gentile nations and formed a false worship. Jesus however decided to go straight through Samaria, because he had some important missionary work to do there.

At Jacob's well near the city of Sychar Jesus stopped to rest, and when a woman from the city came to draw water, he asked her for a drink, since His disciples had gone into town to buy food. The woman was shocked that Jesus, being a Jew, would talk with her, a Samaritan woman, for she knew the Jews had no dealing with Samaritans. Then Jesus tells her that if she knew who He was she would ask Him for living water and he would give it to her, and she would not thirst again. She thought Jesus was speaking literally, just like Nicodemus about the new birth. Jesus however was talking about the water of life, that anyone who desires might drink of, and receive eternal life. Again, we see the use of figurative language, which helps us to understand more about the life that comes from God. Every soul is thirsty, because they cannot find satisfaction from this world. The woman was not satisfied with the men of this world; the love she sought for she could not find; and religion also could not answer her longing. She freely confesses that she, and her people, were awaiting the coming Messiah to explain all to them. It is not until we receive the life that comes from God through Jesus Christ, that we can find true satisfaction of our heart's desires. In Him, we can find the perfect answer to the thirst within us to know God and have eternal life.

When Jesus calls for the woman to bring her husband, she confesses that she had no husband. Jesus tells her what she said was true, and that she had had five husbands, and the man she was with now was not her husband. The knowledge that Jesus had startled the woman, and she said, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet'. Since she concluded Jesus to be a prophet, she thought she could discuss the issue of worship with him and try to resolve the problem she had about her religion. She knew the Jews worshipped in Jerusalem, and her people in Mt. Gerizim, as it still is to this day. This troubled her, and she wondered, who then is right? Jesus said the Samaritans were in the dark, and did not know what they worshipped, but that salvation was from the Jews. One thing that is important for us to notice about Jesus answer to the woman, was that he identified that some religion is simply wrong, even though they may claim to worship God, while others religion may have the correct information available, even if the people misuse that information. Jesus said that true worship can be offered in any place, and that God the Father is looking for worshippers who worship in spirit and truth. The discussion that the woman had with Jesus helps us to understand God's desire regarding worship. Men and religion have so often misunderstood worship and offered up false worship, which God hates.

After the discussion about worship, the woman finally admits that when the Messiah would come, he would explain everything. Jesus then told her that He was the Messiah that she and her people were waiting for. This was a remarkable admission, and her heart was ready to believe and accept this revelation. She left her water pot and ran into town to tell everyone about Jesus, who could tell her everything about herself, challenging them to believe that He was their Messiah. The people were interested to learn about Jesus, so they went out to the well to meet him. Meanwhile the disciples had returned to Jesus and were begging him to take some food, for undoubtedly, he was hungry by this time of day. Jesus said to his disciples that he had food to eat that they did not know about. They were confused by his words and wondered if someone had brought him something to eat, but then he explained that his food was to do the will of His Father in heaven, and to complete his work. Jesus spoke to them about the great harvest time, when God would gather to himself many souls. Jesus compares Gospel work to farming and gathering wheat. As people responded in faith to Jesus, they were gathered into God's kingdom, just as wheat is gathered and stored in a barn. As the Samaritans came to Jesus and asked him to stay with them, Jesus was glad to do so, and as a result of his preaching to them, many believed on him, not just because of what the woman had said to them, but because they themselves had heard him, and believed he was the Savior of the world. This story shows us not only the power of personal witnessing to lead others to faith, but how by listening to the word of God personally we can be assured that Jesus is the true Savior. Why not be like the Samaritans who believed in Jesus as their Savior and place your trust in Jesus today to save your soul?

"But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:14

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have considered Jesus revealing His identity as the expected Messiah to a woman and her community in Samaria. We saw how the Samaritans gladly heard him, believed in Him, and a harvest of souls was added to God's kingdom. Someone might ask the question, "What does God think about racism?"

We know from the scriptures we read today, that the Jews had no dealing with the Samaritans. Their hatred of these people stemmed from their intermarrying with non-Jewish people, and from their false religious practices. Most divisions between nations are due to a dislike of people who are of a different ethnic or religious background. If someone is from a foreign country, we usually are suspicious of them, and have reasons to keep separated from them. Certainly, many people divide over their religious beliefs. In some countries, if you are a Muslim you are suspected of being involved with terrorists, and persecuted, while in some Muslim countries you could be killed if you are known to be a Christian.

While differences in religion and race do make us uncomfortable, we should be able to show a love and interest in all those who make up the human family. We are all born from the same mother and father if we go back far enough in history, so we should appreciate that we are of one blood and learn to respect and tolerate each other. The Christian message is one of loving all people of all nations. Jesus showed that he cared about the Samaritan people, even when his own Jewish people despised them. He was able to look beyond the differences, and see people who needed spiritual help, and He was willing to be the answer to their needs. This is what compels Christian missionaries to travel to far countries that are much different from their own, to share the love of God. As Christians, we know that God loves all people, and wants all people to be saved. In fact, we understand that God makes this distinction between people, and that is whether they are His children by faith, or children of devil by disobedience. God seeks no other division among people. We have divided our human family into nations, tribes and tongues, and there are literally thousands of unique people groups in the world today. One day in heaven though, all those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus and are truly born again, will meet together. They will be from every tribe, tongue, and nation, but will all be together as one community in heaven, bound together by Christ's love.

Why is it so hard for people to accept and love all of humanity? Perhaps we fear people that are different from us, or we feel threatened by them. While we may not always agree with the cultural practices or religious beliefs of others, that does not mean we must despise them, or go to war with them. Notice that when Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman, he plainly told her that the religion of the Samaritans was one of ignorance, and that the true message of salvation came through the Jewish nation. While Jesus spoke clearly about the true religion, which came to us from the nation of Israel, he also was willing to reach out to people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to help them find the truth.

God hates racism, for it amounts to hating people who are created in the image of God, and thus actually despising God himself who made them. It is a strange paradox then to see people killing in the name of their religion. If we are to please God, and adopt His mindset, then we shall have a heart big enough to love all of humanity, no matter where they come from, or what religion they have adopted. Christians are to go into all the world and preach the gospel, so people can know God and the salvation, which comes through Jesus Christ alone. That is not racist, but rather a loving response to the grace of God that has been shown to us. When a white man looks down or despises a black man, he is a racist, and vice versa, if a black man hates the white man, he is also a racist, and God can never be happy with this mindset. We often make judgment about a single person based on the color of their skin, the country they come from, or the religion they follow. But this is not a fair way to make judgments, for every individual is unique and made in God's image, and we should not despise anyone simply because of their race, color or creed. One of the saddest realities in our world is that racism is so common, and a leading cause for wars and persecution. Our job as Christians is to demonstrate the heart of God's love for all of humanity by the way we treat and accept all people in the same manner with the love and kindness of our God.

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." Col 3:11

LESSON 73
Jesus Heals at Bethesda
JOHN 5

In our last lesson, we saw how Jesus was willing to share the good news with the Samaritan people, and today we shall see how Jesus healing of a lame man on the Sabbath causes controversy with the Jews. We shall see how Jesus defends himself by the witness of his works, John, and the Father in heaven.

When Jesus was at a feast in Jerusalem he came to the pool of Bethesda. Many sick people always were waiting by this pool for a miraculous stirring of the water by an angel. When someone entered the pool immediately after the stirring, they would be healed. It was merciful of God to provide this place of healing, giving hope to those who were suffering. One man however was lame and had no one to help him into the water when it was stirred, and he had been lame for 38 years. He waited patiently for years hoping and praying that he might have his chance to be healed, but it did not come until the day that Jesus came to meet him. When Jesus saw him, he asked if he wanted to be healed, and the man said that he had no one to help into the pool. Jesus simply told the man to take up his bed and walk, and miraculously he was healed, stood up, collected his mat, and went his way.

This miracle was another clear sign given in the gospel of John to reveal to us who Jesus really is. We might expect that everyone would be praising God because of this wonderful miracle, but unfortunately, some of the Jews contended with the man, because they saw him carrying his mat on the Sabbath Day. Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath, and though the man could not yet identify who Jesus was, the Jews were upset by seeing him carrying his mat. These people could not appreciate a great work had been performed by the same God who had given instruction concerning the Sabbath. If they had just considered the mighty and glorious compassion of God for this man, they would rejoice with him, rather than try to condemn him. When Jesus later found the healed man, he warns him not to sin anymore unless some worse thing happens to him. When the healed man learned that Jesus was the man who healed him, he made it known to the Jews, and then they persecuted Jesus and wanted to kill him.

Jesus confronted these angry Jews and said that he must work like His Father was working, and this made them all the angrier, for they perceived that Jesus was making himself equal with God. To defend himself Jesus tells them that He does the same works as the Father does, raising the dead, and judging. He also said that to honor the Son, was to honor the Father, and those who refused to honor the son, were dishonoring the Father. Jesus certainly does not back down before His opponents or try to water down the issue for which they were so angry. Jesus makes it very plain, that their perceptions of his claims were quite right, for he was indeed equal with the Father, as testified by his works.

Jesus adds the message of the gospel into this discussion, telling them that whoever hears Him, and believes in Him who sent Him, has eternal life, and will not come into condemnation. Here at John 5:24 we have a very important verse for our understanding of the gospel message. Again, we see it is through faith that a person is saved, that God grants them eternal life as a present possession, and that the true believer in Christ, shall never come under condemnation. This verse should help us to realize that when God saves a soul it is forever. Those who teach that a person can lose their salvation are not teaching correctly and are going against what Jesus clearly said here. Jesus also points out that one day the dead will rise at His command, some to eternal life, and some to eternal condemnation. He could not have been clearer by claiming to possess God's power to raise the dead, which testified to His being equal with God.

While these angry Jews did not accept Jesus or believe His words, Jesus said that they were without excuse. It was not simply that he gave his own testimony, but he had the testimony of all his works, such as the lame man healed. He also had the testimony of John the Baptist, who was recognized as God's prophet. Most importantly, he had the testimony of the Father, which could be heard in the scriptures. The bible teaches us that a man's testimony of himself is not enough, but there should be two or three witnesses, and so Jesus is glad to provide His witnesses to this unbelieving people, so that they can accept and believe in Him. Jesus pointed out that Moses was a witness of Himself as well, for he had written about the coming Messiah. These Jews had their confidence in the scriptures, thinking it was by the scriptures that they possessed eternal life, and yet they did not believe Moses, for Moses had spoken of Jesus, and they had rejected Jesus when He was presented to them. Jesus recognized that these men did not have the love of God in them for they preferred the honor of men rather than the honor of God. He told them that He would not judge them, but Moses in whom they trusted would be their judge, even though they did not really believe Moses' testimony about Christ. Today we saw how Jesus' healing a man on the Sabbath brought a hostile reaction from the Jews, who were only concerned about observing the law given by Moses, and not compassion for the suffering. Jesus shows us that true religion is not found in strict observance of rules, but in a heart of love and compassion for others.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." John 5:24

Today's Bible Question:

Today we saw how Jesus in compassion healed a man who had been lame for 38 years, but the Jews were angry that the man was healed on the Sabbath Day. It is hard to imagine how God-fearing men could so blindly align themselves in opposition to the kindness and mercy of God. Jesus defended himself against these men and showed them the way to eternal life. Someone might ask the question, "Is the Law of Sabbath rest still in effect today?"

The Jews were angry with the lame man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath day, which they felt was violating the 4th commandment given to Moses on the mountain by God. God had said at that time,

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it, you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." Ex 20:8-11

Some people today believe that the Sabbath is still God's commandment for all Christians, and should be observed, and therefore they do not work on Saturday, and reserve Saturday as their day of worship. While we take notice of their zeal to respect God's Law, this was a misunderstanding of the scriptures, and used to distort the gospel message. We must remember that the Christian is no longer under the Law. What this means is that the Law is not binding upon the Christian in a covenantal sense. The Jews had to keep the Law, or they would be cursed by God, and suffer his judgments. The Christian on the other hand enters into the New Covenant by faith, and is not condemned, because Jesus bore the penalty of the Law for us. Today we fulfill the righteousness of the Law, not to prevent God's judgment, but because we love God, and He has taken away our judgment. While we are not under the Law, we certainly appreciate the righteous standards of God, and seek to fulfill the righteousness of the Law to please and honor our God. Of all the 10 commandments, you will find that 9 of them are repeated in the New Testament, all can be found in one form or another in the book of Ephesians, with the exception of the Sabbath Day law. The commandments of the New Testament do not come with the condition, that when we fail to obey them, we will be cursed. The Holy Spirit instructs the believer to do what is right in order to honor and please God from the motive of love and not duty to law. Therefore, where once a sinner may have been a thief and has now become a Christian, the bible says he should steal no more, but rather work with his hands to give to others in need. The Christian who wants to please God will heed this instruction because God has saved him from judgment, and his heart has been renewed, so that he wants to give rather than take, to love rather than hate.

So the law is at work in the heart of the believer, and instructions are given for him to fulfill God's righteousness found in the Law, with the exception of the Sabbath Day. This was the only commandment given to the nation Israel that had no intrinsic moral distinction, except that God had commanded it for them. We must remember that the Law was given to the nation of Israel, and that the Sabbath was given to them as a sign of the covenant that God had made with this particular nation (see Eze 20:12-20). It was a good Law designed to test Israel's obedience, and to make Israel recognize the sanctifying work of God. While it is good for Christians to always set aside time to worship the Lord, and also it is a good principle to take time apart to rest, it is not the commandment of Jesus to do so. In addition, we find no instruction in the New Testament to observe the Sabbath. In fact, the New Testament writers foreseeing this as an issue that could arise with gentiles added to the body of Christ, wrote that no man should judge another concerning feasts days or Sabbath days (Col 2:16). This means that Christians have perfect liberty to worship on any day they wish, and Sabbath laws of the Old Covenant do not bind them.

Now if some Christians wish to worship God on Saturday, that is acceptable, but they are wrong if they enforce this as law upon others, which God has not enforced upon Christians.

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." Col 2:16

LESSON 74
Jesus Feeds the Multitude
JOHN 6

In our last lesson, we saw how Jesus healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda, and then had to defend himself before the angry Jews, who thought Jesus was violating the Sabbath Law. Today we shall see another great miracle of Jesus, when he feeds a great multitude of people with bread and fish.

When Jesus was on the shores of Galilee he went up into a mountain, and great crowds of people followed him. He asked his disciples how they could manage to feed this large crowd, and Philip said that even 200 denarii (a year's worth of wages) could not buy enough bread to satisfy everyone in this large crowd. Then Andrew brought a boy who had 5 barley loaves and 2 fish, and Jesus had everyone sit down on the grass. After he blessed the food, and gave thanks, the disciples distributed the multiplied loaves and fishes, so that everyone had enough to eat, and there were even 12 baskets of bread to collect after all had eaten. Jesus shows us that we should not be wasteful when it comes to God's resources but put everything to effective use. This wonderful miracle, seen by thousands of people, was another revelation of Jesus' glory.

Jesus sent his disciples by boat across the sea to Capernaum by night, but because the winds were contrary, they were struggling. Jesus comes to them walking on the water, and tells them not to be afraid, and then they welcome Him into the boat. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, they immediately arrived on the other shore where they were headed. Wherever Jesus went his miracles were a witness of His great power and glory, but still many followed him only to get a free lunch and did not seem to consider or care that Jesus was God's Son.

Some of those who had eaten of the loaves and fishes were anxious to find Jesus the next day, but could not find him at first, so they headed across the sea since they had seen his disciples go earlier by boat. They found Jesus in Capernaum, and asked how he had come to the other side of the lake? However, Jesus reads their hearts, and says that they only sought him because they had eaten bread and were looking for another free meal. They asked Jesus to show them a sign, just as Moses had brought manna to the people long ago. Jesus could see that they were pushing him to produce more bread, so he told them that He himself was the bread that comes down from heaven, and they must eat this bread if they want to have eternal life. These words confused the crowd, but since they thought he was offering bread to them, they asked him to give them this bread, but Jesus has to explain that the bread he was speaking about was his flesh, and unless they ate his flesh and drank his blood, they would have no life in them. At this, many of them left from following Jesus, for they found his words too hard to accept. What Jesus was saying to them, was that they had to believe in Him to receive life, but they could not understand. His words were not to be understood literally, but spiritually, just like when Jesus said to Nicodemus 'you must be born again'. It is important as we listen to the words of Jesus to ask for the Holy Spirit's help so we can understand Him and obey His words. Some have misread John 6, understanding it to refer to the Lord's Supper. They believe that those who participate in the Lord's Supper will thereby have the life of Christ in them. However, the words were meant to be understood spiritually, and refer to believing in Jesus as the means to finding spiritual life, just as eating bread supports physical life.

After the crowds depart, Jesus asks his remaining disciples if they also wanted to leave Him, but Peter said 'Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life, and we know and believe that you are the Christ the Son of the Living God'. By Peter's confession, we can see that he and the other apostles had believed in Jesus, and thus had partaken of the bread from heaven. Jesus then says to the 12 remaining, that He had chosen them, but one of them was a devil. He was referring to Judas Iscariot who would later betray Him to His enemies. To say he was a devil meant that Judas was a child of the devil, and never had placed His faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

This story in our bibles teaches us something very important about how people can become a Christian through faith in Jesus Christ. Believing in Jesus is compared to eating bread. When we eat food, the nutrients that sustain life enter our bodies and keep us alive. Without food, we would soon die. Spiritual life comes when we take Jesus into our lives by faith. It cannot just be a one-time decision that we forget the next day, but a life long commitment to Jesus in faith. It is only when we believe in Jesus that God can impart to us eternal life. Some had difficulty believing in Jesus even when He was doing so many extraordinary miracles, because they were just focused on filling their bellies and enjoying life. The one that gives eternal life has helped us to believe by giving us many miracles that testify to His being the Son of God. We should be like Peter, who recognized that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life, and therefore choose to follow Him in faith.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." John 6:47

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have seen how Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people from just 5 loaves and two fish. We also saw how he could walk on top of the sea and move a boat full of men miles across the water instantly. Someone might ask the question, "What is the correct motive for following Jesus?"

In our lesson today we found thousands of people were flocking to Jesus to hear Him speak. Many of them had seen or heard how he was healing people, so they wanted to seek him out to learn from Him; and perhaps some were looking for healing. They followed him into a remote place, where no food was available. They earnestly wanted to learn from Jesus and to gain from His power to heal. When Jesus climbed a mountainside near Tiberias with this large crowd of people, He realized that it was getting late and the people were hungry. Jesus was glad on this occasion to provide for these hungry people, because their motive was to find spiritual food, and since they needed some physical nourishment. When the people learned that Jesus had power to miraculously provide bread, they diligently sought him out so they could get some more food to eat. They had lost their appetite for spiritual food, and now were only interested in filling their bellies. Jesus was a miracle worker that could provide an easy meal for them, so they were attracted to Him for that reason. Today many are still looking to Jesus with the same motive of filling their bellies. Many have found that if you invoke the name of Jesus, or preach in that name people will give money, and therefore can fill their bellies. This is why so many are peddling the word of God on street corners, to make some fast cash. Jesus is not happy with people whose motive to follow Him is to simply to fill their own belly, when they really do not care about spiritual matters.

By contrast, we find Peter and the other apostles who believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Even when Jesus words were not easy for them to understand, they still had enough sense to realize that Jesus had the words that lead to eternal life. They made their choice to follow Jesus, and not just because that meant a free meal. In fact, following Jesus meant to suffer some hardships, as we saw when they were struggling to make their way across the lake. But in their struggles, they found that Jesus came to their rescue and helped them make it safely to their destination. For those who seek Jesus with a desire for eternal life, they will find that Jesus is a faithful friend that will guide them safely through life until they reach the shore of heaven.

When our heart has the right motive, we shall learn that Jesus is not simply a means to a happier or more comfortable life while we live in this world, but He is the giver of eternal life. So many people have adopted Christianity as their religion because of what they feel it offers to them for prosperity in this world. They believe if they pray and give to the church, or the pastor or prophet blesses them, they will gain money, opportunity, perhaps marriage, or blessings for their business. This motive is a selfish pursuit for riches in this world, with little interest in heaven's riches. Jesus wants to provide us an abundant life, but that abundant life is not one of selfish indulgence, but a life of love, sacrifice, and service, which will find reward in heaven. The reason we follow Jesus is not for the pleasure, money and advantage it might provide to us in this world, but rather because we desperately needed to be saved. Because of sin, God's wrath and judgment hang over every sinner, and we need to seek forgiveness and cleansing. This can only happen through humbling ourselves before God, admitting our sin, and seeing Jesus dying on the cross to pay for our sins. When we come to the point that we are fearful of God's judgment, and desperate to be forgiven, we shall cry out as the Philippian Jailor did and say, "what must I do to be saved". Christianity is not a religion to join for personal gain; it is the answer for desperate sinners who need a Savior. The right motive then to follow Christ, is to be washed from our sins, to be forgiven and made right before God. Then our following Jesus will be our reward, our honor, and that which is motivated by our love and gratitude towards God who saved our souls. Why are you following Jesus? Is it for some few coins in your pocket, as Judas Iscariot did, or are you following your Savior, because He purchased you with His own blood, and love compels you to serve Him as your Lord?

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Phil 3:18-20

LESSON 75
The Great Debate
JOHN 7

In our last lesson, we met Jesus in Galilee where he fed thousands miraculously, walked over the sea, and contended with those who were only seeking him to get free food. Today we meet Jesus back in Jerusalem when He went up to a feast. During the feast days, a great debate results between him and the Jews, and among the people because of Him.

Jesus' brothers had not placed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah at this time and were taunting him about going up to Jerusalem to make himself more publicly known. Jesus does not follow their advice but waits for God's direction to lead Him. After His brothers had gone to the feast at Jerusalem, he followed secretly, and people were asking about him at the feast time, for they expected that he might make an appearance. The people were already debating about who Jesus was, and there was quite a stir among the people as to whether He might be their expected Messiah, or a prophet. Some contended that He was a deceiver of the people. Clearly, Jesus was making an impact on the Jewish people, and they all were wondering about Him.

During the feast, Jesus waited until about the middle of the feast days, and then stood up to speak in the temple area. As he taught them, they marveled at his knowledge, for they knew he had not formally studied under any of the rabbis. Jesus made the claim that his doctrine was from above, and those who do God's will, would know that His doctrine was from God. Jesus also contended with the Jews about men seeking to honor themselves, about keeping the law and the Sabbath, judging rightly, and then said that they were trying to kill him. Some in the crowd accuse Jesus of having a demon, but others marvel that the rulers are allowing him to teach without arresting him. This leads some to the conclusion that maybe their leaders believe Jesus was the Christ, but others argue that no one knows where the Messiah will come from.

Jesus said that they knew where He was from, but they did not know the one who had sent him, and that they wanted to kill him. Jesus adds that He would be going away to a place where they could not follow Him, but His words confused them, and they wondered what He meant by this. On the last day of the feast Jesus cried out to the crowds that all who are thirsty should come to him and drink, so that rivers of water may flow from their heart. He was talking about receiving the Holy Spirit, which would allow the message of grace and forgiveness to flow freely from those who put their faith in Jesus as their Savior. Only a drink would result in flowing rivers. This is a beautiful picture of how God only expects us to come to him in simple faith, and if we do, He will abundantly bless our lives with His overflowing grace.

The people were divided in their opinions about Jesus, some thinking He was a prophet, some thinking He might be the Messiah, and there was great controversy and debate among all the people. When the chief priests question the men, who were sent to take Jesus, as to why they did not arrest him, they replied "no man ever spoke like this man". Jesus so impressed these men with His words and wisdom, they just could not bring themselves to arrest Him, and this made the Pharisees get all the more agitated by Jesus' influence upon the people. Even one of their own, Nicodemus, whom we met back in chapter three, is wondering why they seem so determined to condemn Jesus. He asked them if the law would judge a man before it hears him and knows what he has done. At this, the other Pharisees become upset with Nicodemus and chide him, asking him sarcastically if he were also from Galilee. They said he should investigate to see if any prophet came from Galilee. What is rather ironic about these proud religious men, who were chiding with Nicodemus, simply because he wanted them to give Jesus a fair and just consideration, was that they were quite wrong about their assumption that no prophet had come from Galilee. In fact, at least two prophets were Galilean, namely the prophet Jonah, and the prophet Nahum. Therefore, while these men were chiding with their fellow Pharisee and mocking him for his apparent lack of knowledge of the scriptures, they were actually putting on display how ignorant they themselves were of those very scriptures. How sad when men allow their pride to blind their eyes, and assume they know more than they do. It is wise to always take the position of assuming that we do not know so much as we might think we do, for we are never above learning and instruction from others, and in particular from the scriptures. If we become so proud that others cannot teach us, then we will likely also not even allow God to teach us through the word. Here was God in the flesh teaching the people, and yet the Pharisees, with all their knowledge of the scriptures, were not able to identify Him as God's Son. At least Nicodemus had the sense to think and consider if Jesus was indeed their Messiah.

Today we have seen how Jesus created much controversy and debate among the people, as they tried to figure out who He really was. Some believed and many did not, but the truth was available to those who would humble and sincerely seek for it. What do you believe about Jesus? Do you believe He is God's Son, do you believe He is the only Savior? Do you believe and accept Him as the Lord of your life? Why not invite Jesus to come into your life today, and place your confidence in Him to receive the gift of eternal life?

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.'" John 7:37

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson, we saw how Jesus' identity had caused a great debate among the Jews. Some thought he might be the Messiah, and yet the rulers wanted to kill him. When men wanted to arrest him, they found themselves so impressed by his teaching, that they could not take him, and even one of the Pharisees was reluctant to cast judgment against Jesus. Someone might ask the question, "Didn't the OT scriptures plainly teach where the Messiah would come from?"

As we saw in our lesson the people were greatly divided about the identity of Jesus, and some thought he was likely their Messiah, while others were fiercely opposed to this idea. The controversy about whether Jesus was their Messiah centered on the Messiah birthplace. They had different opinions about what the scriptures taught about this. Some thought that no one could know where he was from, others were sure that he was to be from the town of David called Bethlehem, and some were arguing that no prophet ever arose from Galilee. There seemed to be much ignorance both about Jesus and about the scriptures that spoke about the Messiah. Jesus was not born in Galilee, as some of them were thinking. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. If they had simply done some investigations, as Nicodemus had done, when he went to visit Jesus at night, they might have learned that Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem. The prophet Micah had said, *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting"*(Micah 5:2). Some knew the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem for they knew this prophecy from Micah, but not everyone accepted this either, for some contended that they could not know where the Messiah was to be born.

What we can learn from this is that it is important to study our bible in detail and ask the Holy Spirit's help to understand what God is revealing to us through the scriptures. God is not trying to hide His revelation from us, but He makes it most accessible to those who sincerely seek His truth with the right motive. Many of these Pharisees prided themselves in their knowledge of scripture, but only to use that knowledge to exalt themselves and rule over the people, and not to serve the spiritual interests of others.

Often the answers to our many questions can be found in the scriptures if we are willing to take the time to prayerfully seek those answers. Sometimes we say we want to understand or receive an answer from God, when all the while we are being deceived by our own hearts, for we really do not want God's answer, but we just want to please ourselves. For instance, someone might say that they want to know the will of God about marrying a certain person, who is not a Christian. Their pastor tells them that they should not marry because the bible forbids Christians from marrying unbelievers. However, you might really love that person, and be convinced in your own mind that God would allow you to marry them. You could even find some verses in the bible that appear to support what you want. People do this all the time with the bible, making it support what they think, or what they want, because of their own pride and lust. If we truly want to follow the word of God, we must be ready to submit to the Lord in faith and obey whatever He tells us through His word. When our hearts are sincere in seeking God's answer, and not our own answer, then God is pleased to guide us by His truth in the scriptures.

The bible is not a book that we should have to debate, as though its' message is so unclear. The bible is very plain and clear to those who are exercised to obey it. The proud person will fight with scripture, and contend with Christians, because they refuse to submit to the Lord's authority. One thing that is very plain in the bible is that we all need to be saved from the penalty of sin, and the only answer to our sin is Jesus Christ. When He died on the cross and paid the full penalty for our sins, God was satisfied that the judgment for sin had been fully met in Jesus. Therefore, God offers a full and free pardon for those who will admit their sin and receive Jesus as their Savior. Today is your opportunity to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." John 7:38

LESSON 76
Full of Grace and Truth
JOHN 8

In today's lesson, we once again find Jesus in Jerusalem contending with the Jewish people, who were looking for reasons to accuse and condemn Him. As He tries to reveal His identity to the people, it is clear that they were not ready to believe or accept His claims and were confused about Him. When He finally told them clearly that He always existed, even before Abraham, they were ready to stone Him.

This chapter begins with a wonderful story of grace. The bible tells us that Jesus came to us full of grace and truth, and we see both of these virtues vividly displayed in today's lesson from John 8. The Jews brought an adulterous woman to Jesus hoping Him to judge the case, and then find cause to accuse Him. Jesus at first tries to ignore them, as if to say, *'why do you need me to judge, for you have already made up your minds, and you have God's word to guide you, why are you troubling me with this matter, especially since you do not believe in me, or recognize my authority as being from God'*. We are just imagining this is what the Lord is silently thinking, though we do not know. When they continue to insist on Jesus involvement, He finally addresses the crowd, and wisely answers them by saying, "He who is without sin let him be the first to cast a stone at her". These words could not have more perfectly revealed the hearts of all present, for all men are sinners, and worthy of judgment, not just this woman who they caught in her sin. One by one, they all left as the conscience was smitten by the words of Jesus. Jesus had diffused their evil plot to condemn the woman and find reasons to accuse Him. When at last no one was left to accuse the woman, Jesus graciously says that He also did not condemn her, and that she should sin no more. We should take notice of the fact that Jesus was the only sinless person present, and had every right, and the authority to judge the woman, but choose the path of mercy and compassion, and gave her instructions to sin no more. By this he upheld justice, for while she did not have to face judgment, Jesus was prepared to face her judgment for her when He would go to the cross. This is a wonderful look into the kindness and grace of God towards sinful humanity. How that woman must have so loved and appreciated the grace that rescued her from a horrible death, to pardon, peace, and freedom. This is available to sinners who come to Jesus confessing their sin, for He is ready to freely pardon.

After this, Jesus was speaking to the crowds, and said He was the light of the world. The Pharisees argued that His witness is of himself and thus not true, but Jesus said that His witness was true, and that His Father also gave witness to Him, though the Jews did not know His Father. Jesus warns the Jews that they will die in the sins, if they do not believe Him as the "I am". Jesus used this title "I am" 3 times in this discussion. At first, they do not seem to understand what he is trying to say, but the third time they understood and were ready to stone him. At first when Jesus used this title, they asked him "Who are you", but Jesus said he had been telling them all along who he was, but they could not hear or understand His words. Jesus also said then when they lift Him up, they would know Him as the "I am". As Jesus spoke these remarkable words about His own identity, many of the Jews believed in Him. Jesus then challenges them to let His word abide in them, so that the truth will set them free. At this, they are confused and said they had never been in bondage to anyone. This was not true, for historically they were in bondage many times to other nations, and currently were under Roman occupation and authority. However, Jesus was not talking about political freedom, but moral freedom from the clutches of sin, which is the worst form of slavery, keeping men in bondage with no hope of escape, and leading them to destruction. Jesus further confronts the crowds saying they were trying to kill Him, and while they may be the offspring of Abraham, they did not behave like Abraham. Jesus said their true father was the devil, whose behavior of lying and murdering they followed. He challenges them to convict Him of sin, saying they could not hear Him because they were not God's children. When Jesus said this, the Jews responded by saying He was a Samaritan, (Jews hated Samaritans), and that he had a demon. Jesus then boldly claims that if anyone keeps His words, they would not see death. By this, the Jews were more convinced that he was possessed of a demon. They asked Jesus if He was greater than Abraham and the prophets who were dead. To this Jesus replies that Abraham had rejoiced to see His day. The astonished crowd asks if Jesus, who was not yet 50 years of age, had seen Abraham. Jesus then makes a very clear statement about His identity, when he said before Abraham was, "I am". Now He had already spoken this to them, and they were not clear what He had meant by this, but now there was no mistaking who He was making Himself to be, and they picked up stones to throw at Him. Jesus hides from them and leaves the temple area. Jesus clear statement about His divine identity only brought hatred and judgment from the people, for they were not at all prepared to believe that Jesus the man, was the great, "I am". The great controversy in this chapter has to do with believing if Jesus is God. Today many still find it difficult to believe this. However, as Jesus said to this crowd, unless you believe that "I am" you will die in your sins. Do you believe that Jesus is the eternal "I am", God manifested in flesh?

"Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." John 8:58

Today's Bible Question:

Today's lesson showed us how Jesus displayed God's grace to a sinful woman, and how the truth of His identity was revealed to a hostile and unbelieving crowd. As Jesus speaks to the people, they become increasingly angry with Him, because they were not prepared to accept the revelation that Jesus was more than a man, more than a prophet, and greater than Abraham. Someone might ask the question, "Why would Jesus bother arguing with people who were not prepared to believe in Him?"

When Jesus went secretly to the feast in Jerusalem, His desire was to teach and preach to the crowds. During the feast, he did preach at the crowded temple area. Jesus knew the Jews wanted to arrest Him, and that the crowds would not respond well to Him, as they were trying to come to terms with His identity. Even so, Jesus was willing to face them. We might wonder why He did not just stay away from Jerusalem, when He knew the people would not respond well. Why bother engaging in arguments, if it was only going to lead to His persecution and eventual death. We find the answer to these questions when we hear Jesus telling those who believed in Him to abide in His word, and that the truth would set them free. Jesus was not just looking out for His safety, or convenience, He was searching for souls. He threw Himself into a lion's den to rescue those who were willing to hear and obey God's word. His mission of rescuing souls continues to this day. When missionaries risk their lives to tell others about God's salvation, they follow the path of Jesus by reaching out with the same love that compelled Him to face His opponents.

Christians do not preach the gospel message to make others feel good about themselves, or to win favor with the people, but to see souls converted. This is not only challenging work, but often dangerous, because the devil does not like seeing Jesus gaining more followers and will resist those who preach the gospel. The Christian preacher must arm himself with the same love for souls that Jesus had, and recognize that people may often respond in hostility to the message, which condemns sinners.

When Christians try to reveal the gospel message to others, and meet with opposition, they might think that they should back off and not create any offense. This is not what we learn from the Lord Jesus in this chapter. The more the crowd became upset with Jesus words, the more He seem to add to their hostility by saying things that offended them. Jesus did not purposely want to offend, but quite often, the truth hurts. The word of God is like a sword piercing, and wounding those who encounter it. Knowing how Jesus responded to the hostile Jews, and how the word of God brings offense, should help encourage preachers to be faithful, and to be bold in presenting the message of the cross to sinners. It is not popular, and will likely bring a bad reaction, and for some it may even cost them their very lives to preach the truth. If people like your preaching too much, then you have to wonder if your preaching the truth of the bible, or just something to make people feel good, so they will be more inclined to give into the church collection.

Throughout the bible we see how faithful men who taught God's word, or prophesied were persecuted, and killed because of their boldness to confront people with God's holy word. John the Baptist is a good example of a man true to God's word. His ministry was controversial, loved by some, but hated by others, and eventually lead to his losing his life. Jesus did not come to tickle people's ears with nice words; He came to seek and to save the lost. Just as a surgeon must cut the patient to fix the disease, so Jesus needed to inflict the sword of the word to bring about conviction, repentance, and faith.

We must be careful when witnessing to others that we do not confuse speaking the truth in love, with prideful displays of knowledge. Some people enjoy putting on display their expertise in the bible, so they can appear to be knowledgeable and puff up their pride. Some will argue with others only to win the argument, as though that has won some victory for Christianity or the kingdom of God. While Jude calls us to earnestly contend for the faith, once delivered to the saints, that does not give us license to purposefully offend others or despise others who disagree with us. Our aim must always be to help people see and accept the truth with a heart of love and compassion for their souls.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." 1Peter 3:15

The Blindness of Sight

JOHN 9

Our Last lesson saw how grace and truth beautifully unite in the Lord Jesus, today we shall consider how Jesus healed a blind man, and how those who say they can see are actually blind. Spiritual sight is granted to those who believe God's testimony through Jesus Christ.

As Jesus and his disciples were walking through Jerusalem, they noticed a blind man, and the disciples asked Jesus who had sinned that this man was born blind. It is often our assumption that when bad things happen to people, that God is upset with them or some curse is upon them, but this was not so in this man's case. We should be careful not to make judgments about why someone is sick or struggling. Often God uses bad circumstances to test and strengthen our faith, and it does not necessarily mean that it is a judgment from God against sin. Jesus said the man's blindness was so that God's work could be manifested. As people see God working, it should lead them to place their trust in Him.

The man was told to wash in the pool of Siloam, which was a steep climb down from the city, and would have challenged his faith and resolve, but he went, and his faith and obedience were rewarded when he miraculously was healed. This miracle created quite a stir in the city, for those who had known him were questioning him about how he was healed, and he told them it was Jesus who healed him. They brought the man to the Pharisees, who also questioned him about the healing, but the Pharisees were convinced that Jesus could not be from God for he healed the man on the Sabbath day. When the Pharisees questioned the healed man's parents, they admitted that he was their son, and that he was born blind, but they did not want to say anymore about how he was healed. They feared that they might be cast out of the synagogue, for this threat was given to anyone who followed Jesus. Religion often controls its adherents by threats and oppression, but Christ gives liberty and power to those who believe in Him.

When the Pharisees had questioned the blind man, he said that he did not know about Jesus moral character, but one thing he did know was that once he was blind, and now he could see. The new Christian may not know very much about the bible, but he can still testify to what he knows, that once he was lost but now he is saved, he was a condemned sinner, but now he is forgiven saint. Every Christian should be able to provide some simple testimony, like this man, as to how and when the Lord saved their soul. If you do not have any testimony to speak of, then how can you claimed to be a Christian?

The Pharisees again ask the man how he was healed. The man is wondering why they continue to resist the plain facts that he was blind and now he can see. He tells them it is obvious that the man who healed him must have come from God, for no one had ever been able to cure a man born blind. The Pharisees were indignant with the healed man, and in their pride, they chided with the man and thrust him out of the synagogue. Jesus later finds the healed man and asked him whether he believed in the Son of God. The man asked who He was so that He could believe, to which Jesus replied that 'you have seen Him, and it is he who is speaking with you'. At this, the man placed His faith in Jesus. This must have been such a glorious sight to this man. How thankful he must have been to gain his sight, having lived his entire life without ever seeing anything. Now he entered into a completely new world, a completely new life. Now he could find a job, work and support himself, perhaps marry and have children, which would have been very difficult if not impossible while he was blind. This is a picture of what it is like to become a Christian. It is like our eyes our opened and we see everything differently, everything is sweeter, and we see and understand things that we never knew before. When someone becomes a Christian, they rejoice to discover Christian fellowship, sing Christian songs, and learn from the bible, which is all new. Prayer is a new relationship that is real and effective. Yes, becoming a Christian is entering into a new sight of the world, and with a clear vision of heavens glory. In addition, a new Christian can labor for God in a sincere and effective way. He can enter true spiritual relationships and have spiritual children as he wins other souls for the Lord. The man not only gained his sight, he gained a brand-new life, and finding Jesus was the greatest discovery of his life.

Jesus said that he had come into the world so that those who were blind could see, and those who could see would be made blind. The Pharisees perceived that he was talking about them, and so they asked Jesus if he thought they were blind also. Jesus said that because they said they could see it proved indeed that they were blind. What Jesus was talking of here was not physical blindness but spiritual blindness. People who encounter God's true revelation from the bible, but due to their pride or religious bias cannot hear, understand or believe the revelation are spiritually blind. Some things are obvious to our senses, and we should be able to discern them, but people often refuse to accept the obvious, because they prefer to live in in darkness. May you also come to see the truth that is found in Jesus, and give your life to Him in faith.

"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2Corinthians 4:6

Today's Bible Question:

Today we learned how Jesus healed a man who was born blind, and how the Pharisees questioned him, and refused to believe that Jesus was sent from God. These proud religious people proved that they were spiritually blind by refusing to believe the clear revelation of God's power displayed in Jesus. Someone might ask the question, "How should we think about, and treat, handicapped people?"

We all encounter people who have various handicaps. Perhaps you know someone who is blind, deaf, crippled or is mentally unfit. We might be inclined to make judgments about them such as the disciples tried to do in the case of the blind man. They were thinking he or his parents had sinned, and this resulted in his blindness. However, it is not our place to make such judgments about others, for we really cannot discern with any certainty why others are afflicted with various ailments. No one can say that a blind man is under the judgment of God, or that a deaf man has been cursed. To say such things is very cruel and unkind, when we really do not have the knowledge or authority to make such claims. Any who make such claims are certainly not speaking from Holy Spirit. As we watch the Lord Jesus move among men, he constantly was healing those with sicknesses and handicaps. He took compassion on them and wanted to release them from these afflictions. There were times when the affliction was from Satan, who bound them. The scripture indicates this, but that does not make it the fault of the individual, for it may have just been in God's will to allow the affliction for a greater and higher purpose, as was the case with the blind man in today's story.

Our response to those who suffer should always be to show compassion, love, and sympathy. The Christian should demonstrate love for all human beings, no matter what has afflicted them. Some people are afflicted with the AIDS virus, and this might have been clearly the result of violating God's laws concerning sexual behavior, but this does not give us license to judge and condemn. The Christian will always sympathize and offer love and compassion, even when they are aware that the disease is a direct result of sinful behavior. By showing love and compassion, the believer has the opportunity to help the person find their way to God, who can forgive sins, and offer healing of the mind, soul and body.

When we meet people, whose bodies have been damaged or crippled, it should stir our hearts compassion for them, especially if God has granted us a good measure of health in our own bodies. All the suffering we see in the human family had its source in sin, because sin entered into the world way back in the Garden of Eden. From that point on the world has been under a curse, and all that lives will die. God gives wholeness, beauty, and purpose to life, but when rebellion entered, then the effects of sin began a process of decay and death. The results of this are seen in a suffering and damaged creation. If a boy is born blind, it is not his fault, but is the result of sin upon all of creation, and we who have eyes should feel the pain and sorrow of the sin that created this, offer assistance and encouragement to the person damaged by sin.

When we act as a judge upon others, and refuse to offer them love and compassion, then we are making ourselves better than they are. We think we deserve our health and prosperity, while the handicapped person deserves what he has. If we act with indifference, not caring about others that suffer, then we do not acknowledge the responsibility we have to one another and prove the hardness and coldness that is in our hearts. A Christian should find it most difficult to pass by a crippled man who is begging, without offering something to assist him. If we can pass by hurting humanity and not offer the love of God to them, it demonstrates that we have little experience in knowing God's love in our own lives. If you see someone begging because they are blind, or they are crippled, then do not turn a blind eye, or excuse yourself because you cannot afford to help. Just be grateful that God has blessed you with eyes to see and legs with which you can walk and go to your work. Show compassion, show love, and then Christ will be magnified, and you will find a joy in being his hands and his heart to those who need to know that God loves them, and has not cast them off. Jesus always showed compassion to those who suffered, and if we are to be his disciples, then let us do the same as He did.

"Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them." Matthew 15:30

LESSON 78
The Good Shepherd
JOHN 10

In our last lesson, Jesus healed a blind man, and the Pharisees still could not perceive that Jesus was sent from God. The conversation with the Jews continues in today's lesson, where Jesus will use the analogy of sheep and shepherds to show that the Pharisees were false shepherds, but He was the good shepherd.

Jesus will talk about sheep and shepherds because looking after God's people and caring for them has similarities to a shepherd caring for sheep. Jesus tells the Jews that a false shepherd does not enter the door of the sheepfold but climbs in another way and proves that he is a thief and robber. The true shepherd enters through the door, the sheep recognize him, and he leads them willingly for they hear his voice and follow him. It is known among shepherds that their sheep respond to their voice alone, and even if others should try to call them, they will not respond. The Jews listened to Jesus, but did not understand what he was talking about, but Jesus continues to explain that He himself was the door for the sheep, and that if anyone enters by Him, He will be saved, and go in and out finding pasture. What Jesus is telling us here, is that those who come to Him in faith, trusting in Him as their Lord and Savior, will be making Him their shepherd. He will save His followers from judgment, just as shepherd protects his sheep from wild animals. He also would cause them to dwell safely and be well fed. Those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord, find that he looks after them, and provides for them spiritually and physically. False Shepherds only seek their own welfare, and run in the face of danger, but the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. Jesus was saying that others do not truly love the sheep and are not willing to sacrifice and suffer to ensure the welfare of the sheep. Jesus was the good Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for the ones He loved and showed this love when He went to the cross and died for us.

Jesus also mentions to the Jews that He has other sheep, which would be added to his sheepfold, and it seems best to understand that those he was talking about, were the gentiles who would hear the gospel and believe. When Jesus speaks of giving His life for the sheep, He also said that He had power to lay down His life and power to take it up again. This is a very important statement that Jesus made, and helps us to know that Jesus life was not taken away from Him by men, but He Himself laid down His life. It also teaches us that Jesus had power to raise himself back to life. This is another declaration in John's gospel of the deity of Jesus Christ, for only God has power to raise the dead.

As the Jews listened to Jesus, they debated among themselves about Jesus, for some thought he had a demon, while others said how could a man with a demon give sight to the blind? When Jesus was at Solomon's Porch near the temple some of the Jews asked Jesus to just tell them plainly if He was the Christ. Jesus responded by telling them, that He had already shown them the answer to their question, and that His works testified to His identity. Jesus points out to those questioning Him that He is the giver of eternal life, and that no one can snatch God's children from His grasp or His Father's grasp, and He and the Father are one. The Jews again perceive that Jesus is making himself to be God Almighty, but they did not believe that He was more than a man, so they picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus asked for what good work were they stoning Him, but they said it was not due to His works, but because He made Himself to be God. Jesus then told them that even the scriptures refer to men as gods, so why were they so upset by Him saying He was the Son of God. Jesus said that His works should have convinced them to believe in Him. When they tried to lay hold on Jesus they could not, and He manages to escape from them.

We can learn many important things from this chapter, but one of the most important for us to understand is that once a person is in the hands of Jesus and of the Father, meaning they have become a true believer, then they are held secure, and shall never be lost. It is a wonderful assurance bringing peace to God's children to know that their eternal security does not lie in their own efforts, but in God who can never fail. Another important lesson for us to learn is that Jesus truly loves His sheep, namely those who have trusted in Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus laid down His life for us, and greater love has no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends. No one has ever loved you more than Jesus has, that should lead you to trust in Him as your Savior, and we who know Him should love and worship such a great friend as Jesus.

When Jesus went to the area where John was baptizing, many of the people saw Jesus, and recalled that John had spoken about Jesus. They took notice of the fact that John did no miraculous signs, and yet all that he had said about Jesus was true, and this led them to trust in the Lord. This teaches us that a good minister of the gospel does not need to perform miraculous signs to authenticate his ministry. Leading people to place their trust in Jesus as their Savior is the true test of being God's servant. Why not place your trust in Jesus as your Savior today, and follow Him as the Good Shepherd?

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." John 10:28

Today's Bible Question:

Today we heard Jesus describe Himself as the good shepherd and referred to false shepherds who do not love the sheep, who are thieves and robbers, and leave the sheep when dangers come. Once again, we have seen how the Jews were looking for a clear confession from Jesus about His identity but were not prepared to believe that He was God. They wanted to stone Him when He said that He and the Father were one. Someone might ask the question, "How can I find God's true shepherds?"

Many people go to church looking for someone who will genuinely care for their soul, and someone who is prepared to shepherd them. In fact, we all need that father figure, who can advise us, guide us, and help us through all the struggles and trials of life. Today many people flock to hear a preacher in a large church gathering, where they could never even talk with the preacher or share the burdens of their heart. Some places have become so corrupt that they charge money to visit the pastor, or to have him pray for special help or blessings. Church has become big business and has lost its true character as a place where needy souls can find spiritual care from true shepherds.

If you are looking for a true shepherd in the church, you probably will not find him in one of these churches where the pastor seems to be a celebrity, and gathers as many people as possible, so he can collect as much money as possible. If you belong to a small group of believers, where the bible is taught faithfully, and you meet men who make sacrifices for the people of God, then you are in a place where you will likely find some true shepherds. Shepherding is not about making money, as Peter tells us in the 5th chapter of his first letter. Shepherding is about loving God's people, guiding them by the word of God, serving their various needs, and helping them to follow Jesus faithfully.

Here are a few things we can learn from John 10 that will help us to identify those men who are God's true shepherds, and those to whom we can entrust the care of our souls. The true shepherd will be humble, not looking for applause and the praise of men. In addition, a true shepherd works among the sheep, that is the shepherd knows his sheep, and the sheep know their shepherd. In many churches today the pastor at the front is disconnected from the people who hear him preach, and he has little to do with their lives. A true shepherd will be aware of those under his spiritual care, and know where they live, where they work, and what the problems are in their lives. A true shepherd will make sacrifices to help those who look to him for spiritual care. Not only is the shepherd a man of love, and a man of hard work and faithfulness, he is also a man who loves his bible and is always ready to teach and use the word to guide, correct and comfort others through the word of God.

Very few men live up to the biblical model of a true shepherd. Those who try to fill this role in the church are just small reflections of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the only one who truly loves our souls, and who paid the greatest price for our eternal welfare. We should first cast our burdens and spiritual needs upon Jesus, as He will never let us down, where men so often do. If you are fortunate to belong to a church where there are godly men who care for your soul, then praise God for them, encourage, and support them for their faithfulness to the Lord. But beware of all the false shepherds who are really wolves in sheep's clothing, only seeking to take advantage of God's children, rob them of their money, and flee when faced with the struggles and sorrows of the people. We must remove from our minds the notion that going to church is about making the preacher or pastor rich and famous. It is not about the preacher at all. It is about Christ's love being ministered through His true servants, who hide behind the cross, and serve selflessly the spiritual needs of God's people.

If you do not know the good shepherd, then why not call upon Jesus today, and ask Him to save your soul. He is waiting now for you to come to Him, so He can wash away your sin and give you a home to heaven.

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly." 1Peter 5:2

The Resurrection and the Life

JOHN 11

At our last lesson we learned about the Good Shepherd that laid down His life for the sheep, and today we will find out why Jesus is called the Resurrection and the Life. When Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, is sick his sisters send a message for Jesus to come, but Jesus delays and Lazarus dies, but when Jesus finally does come, He raises Lazarus from the grave, and reveals once again His true identity and glory.

The news of Lazarus' sickness reached Jesus, and the message was simple, "the one you love is sick". The sisters thought that this message alone would be enough to convince Jesus to come. Intimate friends do not need long explanations or time to argue and convince, for love speaks in few words but with much action. When Jesus learned of Lazarus' condition, he did not go right away but stayed another two days. He did this intentionally for He knew what he was going to do, and how it would bring glory to God. After two days, Jesus then tells His disciples that He is going back to Judea. The disciples raise a concern about this, for they spoke about the recent desire of the Jews to stone Jesus. To this Jesus said that men must work while it is daylight, for the night is coming when no man can work. What Jesus appears to be saying, is that while I have opportunity to fulfill the work which my Father has given me, I will do so and not fear whatever may befall me, for the night of my rejection and crucifixion is coming, and then I will not longer be able to do these good works. Thomas bravely said to the others let us go and die with Him. Thomas here seems loyal and ready to lay down his life, but we find later that all the disciples run off when fear strikes their heart, and Jesus is arrested.

Jesus and his disciples go to meet Lazarus' sisters in Bethany about 2 miles from Jerusalem. When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she went out to greet Him, and said, Lord if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. Jesus tells Martha that He is the resurrection and the Life and that whoever believes in Him, even though he dies, shall live. Martha does confess her faith in Jesus as God's Messiah, and she does believe that her brother will be raised up at the last day, sometime in the future. Then Jesus says if you believe, you shall see the glory of God. This teaches us something very important about coming to Jesus in faith. Many people struggle to put their faith in the Lord and want some miraculous sign to convince them to believe in Him, but Jesus said that attitude of doubt will not be rewarded. Only those who are willing to accept the testimony of God through the scriptures and placing their trust in Jesus will then have their eyes opened to see the truth. Christians can attest to this fact, that before they believed they did not see or understand God's salvation, but then after they took the step of faith to trust in Jesus, then they were able to see things clearly, and find assurance of their salvation.

Mary also heard that Jesus had come, and she too says the same as Martha had said and is weeping with the other mourners. Seeing the grief and tears of the sisters, caused Jesus to groan in His spirit, and weep. This caused others to say, "Behold how He loved Him". We know Jesus was going to raise Lazarus in just a short time from this, but He still feels the pain and sorrow of the sisters, and also enters into their grief. This shows us that sharing in the grief of others is important and proves our genuine love. It also teaches us that even if we know the outcome will be fine, that does not exclude us from feeling the pain and sorrow that we suffer along the way. Soon we shall be in heaven with the Lord, and all will be well, but that does not mean that we shall never shed a few tears along the way, as we encounter the sorrows and struggles on the pathway that leads us to heaven and home.

At the tomb, Jesus asked the stone to be moved away from Lazarus' tomb, but Martha was concerned that Lazarus had been buried four days, and the body would stink. Jesus reminded her, that if she believed she would see the glory of God. Then Jesus prayed so all could hear him pray, asking that God would glorify Him, and let all know that He was sent from God. The prayer was answered, when Jesus called in a loud voice for Lazarus to come forth. Lazarus came from the tomb, and Jesus instructed the people to unwrap his grave clothes and let him go. As a result of this remarkable miracle, many placed their faith in Jesus, but others reported this to the Jews, and they took counsel together about this matter. They reasoned among themselves saying if this man continues everyone will become His followers. Then Caiaphas the high priest spoke with a measure of sarcasm, saying they knew nothing, and then advised that it was expedient that one man should die, rather than the whole nation perish. They were concerned the Romans would take away their nation, and more importantly their religious positions. Caiaphas was speaking prophetically (unknown to himself), for indeed Jesus would die for the people, but not because they willed it, but because God willed that He should die for our sins. The Jews from this day onwards sought opportunity to kill Jesus, so Jesus did not walk publicly among them again. It is ironic that the priests and religious rulers wanted to put to death the man who could raise the dead. We would expect them to show some appreciation or seek his help and counsel. Today's lesson should convince you to place your trust in Jesus, as many others did when they witnessed Him raise the dead.

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."

John 11:25

Today's Bible Question:

Today we saw the power of God manifested in Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the grave. Once again, we find that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, because they feared the Romans would take away their nation and religious rule. It was clearly more important to them to preserve their selfish and temporal interests, then to take time to consider if Jesus, who opened the eyes of the blind and raised the dead, might be their Messiah, and the answer to eternal life. Someone might ask the question, "Why don't people take more interest in eternal life?"

It is amazing when we read the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave, that the Jews were not happy, and praising God for such a wonderful miracle. We would expect them to sit at Jesus feet and marvel and worship, but instead they want to kill him. We learned from our lesson today, that they were interested in preserving their political and religious status. So important was their interest in their immediate circumstances that they made eternal issues of little or no importance. They might have had religious notions about eternal life, but their actions proved that it was not their main concern.

It is remarkable how these people were blinded to who Jesus was, and what they could have received through Him, had they just not been so preoccupied with their own agenda, and religious authority. The same problem is widespread among us today, for so many who call themselves Christians are far more interested in their education, career, and building up their wealth and status in life. This is far more important to them than attending a church service on Sunday morning, or even if they go, they are not really listening with keen interest, for their mind is on their money and their own affairs.

It seems that people are living for their immediate gain in this world, with very little concern for what will happen when they die and face God's judgment. We must remember, that the life we are living now, is limited, and soon we must leave this world. We do not know the day of our departure, and we hope it will be some years before we must leave, but we could be taken out of this world at any time. Are we ready, and are we interested or concerned about our soul's destiny? In talking with many people about how to receive eternal life, it is amazing how they laugh about it, as though it were not a serious issue. There could be nothing more important than our concern about eternal life. No matter what else we may do in life, we must be certain that we will be taken to heaven when we die and not have to suffer God's judgment in Hell. One reason why we do not take eternal life more seriously is that we convince ourselves that God will take us to heaven no matter what. Do not believe this lie for even a moment. We are not all going to heaven, and in fact, very many souls are perishing and on their way to the fires of Hell. Jesus helps us to see this when we read of those religious people who claim to have done miracles and prophesied in His name, and are crying to the Lord to open the door and let them in, but Jesus must say to them, depart from me I never knew you.

Please take this subject seriously. This is not some game, and there are not going to be second chances to make it right. Get it right now, and do not delay. Find out how to be sure you will go to heaven and do everything necessary to acquire it. When Jesus spoke a parable one day, he said the kingdom was like a pearl of great value, and when the man found it, he sold everything he had, so he could buy the precious pearl. This is what our attitude must be like when it comes to receiving eternal life. It must mean the world to us, for there could be nothing more important or more valuable than the gift of eternal life. Listen if you want to have eternal life, realize that God wants to give it to you, and it will not even cost you anything, but you should want it more than you want air to breathe. Do not let the cares and concerns of this life distract you from what is the most important issue in your life. Take Jesus as your Savior, trust in Him to cleanse and forgive you of your sins and receive God's free gift of eternal life today. Too many people are perishing, because they are more worried about their bank account balance, or their place of honor in this world. What a sad and pathetic exchange, and how sorry they will be when they find themselves in Hell suffering, and with no way of escape. Please do not let that happen to you!

"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." 1John 5:11

LESSON 80
A Christ Honoring Home
JOHN 12

We are now half way through John's gospel, and we have seen numerous signs of Jesus miraculous power, which identify Him as the Divine Son of God. Whereas many of the Jews did not believe in Jesus and wanted him dead, there were a few dear and close friends that loved Him and recognized Him to be their Messiah. Today we meet a family whose home welcomed and honored Jesus.

The home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was a place where Jesus was welcome, greatly loved, appreciated, and worshipped. We recall from our last lesson how Lazarus was brought back from the grave by Jesus miraculous power. What joy must have filled the home of this family as they recalled the great gift of life that had been granted to them in the raising of Lazarus? They held a dinner to honor Jesus, and Lazarus was one who sat at the table with Jesus to dine with Him. This pictures for us how believers are raised out of death into a new life to enjoy fellowship with the Lord. What a great honor it is for the children of God to dine with the king of kings. Then Martha was the sister who was busy serving. She had a house full of guests, and wanted to be sure everyone was comfortable and well fed. She is a picture to us of another aspect of the Christian life, which is the joy of serving the Lord. To know Jesus is essential to get to heaven, but to serve Him only adds to our joy, as we anticipate the rewards of heaven for faithful service rendered. It should be our hearts desire to serve our Lord and Master, when we realize all that He had done for us. Then we also see Mary, who takes some costly spikenard oil and uses it to anoint the feet of Jesus and wipes His feet with her hair. Her hair represented her glory, which she placed at the feet of Jesus. This is our proper and humble place of worship, where man's glory is found at the feet of Jesus. The fragrance filled the whole house. When true worship is offered to Jesus, the fragrance of that sacrifice has a lingering and spreading affect, for God delights in those who worship with a sincere heart. Some complained about Mary wasting this expensive oil, which might have been sold and the money given to the poor. The complaint came from Judas, who did not care for the poor, but was in charge of the money and often stole from their resources. Jesus defends Mary's act of devotion, saying that she had kept the oil for His burial. Jesus knew that his death and burial were imminent, and it appears that Mary may have had some good sense about the upcoming events, as her actions seem to show.

We now move from the house in Bethany towards Jerusalem, and Jesus is riding on a young donkey towards the city. A great multitude gathered to meet Jesus. Many of them heard others testify that Jesus had raised up Lazarus from the grave, and so they all came to meet and welcome Him into the city and hail him as their Messiah. They waved palm branches, laying down their garments for him as he made his way into the city. They shouted out, "Hosanna, blessed is he how comes in the name of the Lord." Hosanna means "Save Now", which helps us to see that the people were expecting a reigning king, who would overthrow their oppressors and liberate Israel. Their hope for a reigning king would be disappointed when Jesus would be rejected, crucified, and buried.

The Pharisees who saw all this attention Jesus was getting were indignant and complaining to each other. Two Greek men wanted to see Jesus, but Jesus just spoke of his hour coming for him to be glorified. Jesus gives further instructions to the Jews, saying that a grain of wheat must be buried and die, before it produces more grain. He added that to lose one's life was to gain it, but keeping it meant losing it. He also said that His Father would honor those who serve Him. He then expresses His troubled soul, wishing to be spared from impending suffering, but He also knew this was the purpose He came into the world. Jesus asks the Father to glorify His name, and a voice from heaven is heard, saying that He has glorified it, and will glorify it again. Some heard the sound and thought it was thunder, while others said an angel had spoken. Jesus said the voice had come for their sakes. Jesus spoke of judgment coming and the ruler of this world being cast out, and that when He was lifted up, He would draw all men to Himself. This was clearly a reference to his death by crucifixion, and how this would bring judgment, and defeat Satan's power and dominion. Some of the Jews argue that the Messiah remains forever, but Jesus says that the light will only be with them for a little while, and they should take advantage while the light is with them, for soon darkness would overcome them. He calls on them to believe in the light, and to become sons of light. Jesus here is using light as an illustration of himself and his ministry in the world. Some of the rulers believed in Jesus but would not admit to it publicly lest the Pharisees put them out of the synagogue, for they wanted man's praise more than God's praise. Jesus cries out to the crowd that, whoever believes in Him, believes in Him who sent Him, and He who sees Jesus has seen the one who sent Him. Jesus referred to himself as light and says those who believe in Him will not walk in darkness. He also adds that His mission was not to judge, but to save, but in the last day, His words would be used to judge those who did not believe in Him. Jesus said His words and authority belong to the Father who sent Him, and his command is everlasting life.

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Jn 12:25

Today's Bible Question:

Today's lesson took us into the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, and then with Jesus for his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, where many hailed him as their king and Messiah. We also heard Jesus talk about his coming crucifixion, and warning to the Jews to take advantage of His light while it was available by believing in Him. Someone might ask the question, "How can I honor Christ in my home?"

We were privileged to have a look within the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, where Jesus was loved and honored as their special guest. We can learn from their example on how we can make our homes into a place that both welcomes and honors the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you want to live in a home where Jesus Christ is the head, the honored guest, and the one who is served and worshipped?

Our homes can reflect our ungodly desires for riches and luxury. We covet the pleasures of this world, and heap to ourselves all kinds of things to make us happy and fill our lusts. It is so clear that most homes are centered around self-interest, and not honoring the Lord.

To honor the Lord in our homes, we must view our homes not as our own palace where we sit as king, but a provision from the Lord, where He is the rightful king and ruler. If we make Jesus the ruler of our home, then we shall listen to and learn from His word. Having daily bible reading and prayer in our home, and learning to obey the Lord, will make our home a place where Jesus is welcomed, and honored.

The home we saw in today's lesson was glad to welcome Jesus and supply a meal to him and his disciples. When we use our homes to serve the needs of others, then Jesus will be honored. We also saw how Lazarus enjoyed fellowship at the table to with the Lord. When we use our home as a place where the bible is open and discussed, and Christians are always welcome, then our home will also be a place that honors Jesus. We also should make our homes places of worship, by giving of our substance and income to the Lord and His work. We can also fill our homes which things that speak of Christ and draw attention to Him. Playing Christian music in your home will send a message to any that visit, that you love the Lord and enjoy His praises. Many Christians prefer the music of the world, and fill their heads, hearts, and homes with the ungodly sounds of the contemporary styles of music that associates itself with every form of sin.

When people visit your home, what do they encounter? Do they sense that they are in a Christian home? Do they see Christian attitudes or find Christian literature and music? Can people find the Lord in your home? Could they discover the gospel message, or would that be difficult for them to find in your home? Our homes should be places where people can discover Christ, and be led to faith in Him, but that is difficult if our homes are filled with ungodly music and movies.

If Jesus came to your house today, would he be comfortable with what He would see? Would he feel at home, or would you want to get rid of a few things before He arrived? If you know Jesus was coming to your house for a visit, would you change the way you treat your wife, your husband, your children, and your parents? As we think about whether Jesus would be glad to visit your home, it will help you to see if your home is a home that honors Jesus.

While we think how we may honor the Lord with our homes, we should remind ourselves that life is not about collecting lots of nice things for our own personal enjoyment. To honor our Lord, we must be willing to make investments into His kingdom. So, if the Lord has blessed you with a nice home, or extra money in the bank, then think of ways to use your blessings to help others and advance God's kingdom. Do not build up wealth and luxury just for selfish pursuits of seeking a comfortable life, or proudly displaying your riches. It is amusing to see big homes that have razor wire all around the house to protect it from intruders. What this suggests is an attitude of 'what is mine is mine, and I am not going to share it, but protect it from others who might want to take it'. The Christian attitude should be 'Lord allow the blessings you give to me be used wisely and liberally for the welfare of others'. This is how to make a home where Jesus is honored.

"He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live." Proverbs 15:27

LESSON 81

The Humble Servant

JOHN 13

In our last lesson, we learned about having a Christ honoring home, as the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. We also saw the people welcome Jesus into Jerusalem with high expectation that he was coming to reign as their king. Today we will not meet Jesus as a reigning king, but as a humble servant.

We have now entered the final days before our Lord Jesus would be crucified, and on the night he was arrested, He met with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast with them. During these few hours together that evening, they celebrated a new memorial dinner, which today we know as the Lord's Supper and is regularly practiced by millions of Christians around the world.

When supper was ending, Jesus rose up from the dinner, put on the clothes of a common servant, and began to wash his disciples' feet. This was a normal custom in Israel, because of the open sandals and dusty roads. Normally washing feet was done by the lowly servants of a household, and certainly would not be a job for the head of the home. As Jesus began to take this low place of washing feet, Peter had an objection, and said 'Lord, you shall never wash my feet'. Peter thought it was not proper that his Lord and Master should stoop down and wash his feet. However, Jesus warned Peter that if he did not allow Him to wash his feet then he would have no part with Him. Peter then suggested that the Lord should also wash his hands and his head, but Jesus said that was not needed for they had already bathed, and just their feet that needed cleaning.

Jesus was teaching His disciples about humble service. They are expected to follow his example of willingly lowering themselves to help others in need. This world is full of the stains of sin, and as believers in Jesus, we must be willing to stoop down and help wash away the stains of sin from any sinner. Believers have been washed clean from the penalty of sin, but we can still be defiled by walking in a world that is full of the filth of sin, and we need to ask Jesus daily to cleanse us from this defilement.

Jesus makes it plain, that one his disciples would betray Him, and this created much concern among them, as they all wondered whom it was that could do such a thing. They questioned among themselves, and were anxious to know of whom he spoke, not imagining that any in their company could act so wickedly. Here we learn that one's true character can be hidden from our eyes. We may have honored and respected those, who in the end are found to be faking their Christianity. It is always a very sad and shocking thing to see the downfall of someone whom assumed was a true friend of Christ.

When Jesus spoke to Judas and said "what you are about to do, do quickly" the other disciples did not understand what Jesus meant, and simply thought he was telling him to buy something for the feast, or to give some money to the poor. While man's understanding and knowledge are limited, we see here that Jesus knowledge was perfect. Not only did he know about Judas' betrayal, he also told Peter how many times he would deny Him that very night.

When Jesus begins to speak of his departure, Peter is troubled, and asked why he could not join him, for he was prepared to die with Him. Peter may have thought that he was brave enough to die with His Lord, but Jesus told him that he would deny him 3 times before the rooster crowed. Jesus needed Peter to understand the limits of his own love and loyalty. By speaking of Peter's denial before it took place, it would help Peter later to appreciate His Master's forgiveness and restoration. We all might be inclined to think of ourselves as better Christians than we really are. We think we shall be true to our Master and remain faithful while others fail. This attitude comes from pride in our hearts, and though we would hope to do well, as Peter had hoped, the Lord would have us see the weakness of our own love and loyalty. When Jesus was being arrested, all His disciples forsook Him and fled. We might think that we could never deny our Lord like they did, but under the threat of harm and death most of us would run for safety. None of us is as brave or noble as we might think, but praise be to God, Jesus still loves us!

In contrast to our own weakness, we see how the Lord Jesus was prepared to face His enemies and give His life for us. We can be so grateful that our Lord Jesus was loyal to us, and loved us entirely, and did not back down when danger and death confronted Him, even knowing that weakness that was in us all.

Although in this chapter we do not find any miraculous signs, we do find more evidence of Jesus divine character, as He demonstrates His omniscience, knowing all that was about to take place, and all about what was inside of his disciples. He even knows us better than we know ourselves. Sometimes we might assert our confidence in ourselves, but from what we have learned about Peter, we should have a humble opinion of ourselves, and just look to the guidance and example of our Lord Jesus.

"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." John 13:15

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about taking the low place of humble service as our Lord Jesus did when He washed His disciples' feet. We also learned that our love and loyalty for Jesus may not be as strong as we think, but Jesus' love for us is perfect, even when we fail Him. Someone might ask the question, "How can I follow the Lord's example of humble service?"

After our Lord Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He said to them, that they should do as He had done and follow His example. It certainly is not in our nature to take the low place of service. Often, we see how people leave others to do the serving and are glad to have others serve them. Sometimes in a restaurant, a customer will speak down to the server, as though they were better than the one serving them. Just because someone's job is to serve, that does not make him or her less of a person, or less valuable, or someone we can speak down to. That is an ungodly way to think and behave, and yet we see it all around us daily, as men like to take the place of honor, while others serve them. The way of Christ is much different than the way of this world. We find Christ putting himself in the place of being the humble servant. He, who is the Lord of heaven, stoops to wash dirty feet of sinful men. The picture of this should not only shock us, as it did to Peter, but also humble our hearts to realize none of us are better than our Lord. If He was willing to stoop so low, then we have no right to exalt ourselves above others. True humility is seen in how low we are willing to go for the sake of others. It is an honor to serve at a king's table, but how many enjoy serving children. Yet, in the kingdom of God serving the humblest of beings is highly regarded. Remember that Jesus said, to give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in my name, shall not lose its' reward (Mt 10:42).

So how can we be humble servants for our Lord? We need not wash feet since most people wear socks and their feet are kept clean enough. There are, however, many needs of the people around us, and as we give ourselves to the care and needs of others, we honor our Lord. We might be guilty of thinking about our own needs before the needs of others. If we are to follow the good example of our Lord Jesus, we will take time to see the needs of those around us and try offering any assistance we can. Sometimes we might be busy with our own affairs, and so we think we can excuse ourselves from offering help to others, but that is just another way of acting selfishly. To be like Jesus, we must be willing to make our own affairs less important so that it we are not hindered in doing good to others who need help. Mothers are a great example to us, as they selflessly serve the interests of their children. They do not receive much honor in this world for caring for their children, but as we have seen, offering service to those in need is highly prized by our Lord. Mothers can take encouragement from this, that when you look after the needs of your children you are following in the footsteps of Jesus, and you will have great reward from Him if you indeed make Jesus your only trust to reach heaven.

We must all recognize that for the Christian his greatness is not how well he is known by his church or by the community, but how much he serves others. Some Christians do not seem very significant in this world, or even in the church, and yet their names are honored in heaven, because of their humble service. Some people put themselves in the low place to serve at the church. These are they who stay and cleanup when everyone else has gone home. They visit the sick or give money or meals to the poor. They do things that get little notice by others, but Jesus is watching and will reward such acts of servitude that are done in His name. It is not for our own glory that we serve, but to make the love of God known to others, that He may be glorified, and others lead to trust in Him. There is no message more powerful than our willingness to humble ourselves in selfless service for the benefit of others. The lower we are willing to go, the clearer it is that Christ is at work in us.

How can we be humble servants? Look for that job that no one else wants to do but needs to be done in service for God's people and do that job. No one enjoys washing the dishes after the meal is finished; but are you content to have others wash the dishes, when you could have done it for them? The Christian who humbles himself, will always want to do service for others, rather than have others do service for them.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

LESSON 82
I will come Again!
JOHN 14

Today's lesson continues with Jesus and his disciples meeting in an upper room in Jerusalem, on the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus uses this occasion to comfort and teach his disciples in preparation for all that was about to take place. The most comforting words he gave to them were, "I will come again".

Jesus told his disciples not to let their hearts trouble them, to believe in Him as they believed in God. He said that he would be going away, but thereafter he would come again to receive them forever into His Father's house. This passage supplies not only comfort for those disciples so long ago, but to all who have put their faith in Jesus, for we are all waiting for His return to take His church home to heaven.

The disciples were confused by Jesus words, and did not know where he was going or how to get there, but Jesus tells them that they do know the way, for He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He added that no one could come to the Father except through himself. This statement clearly shows that no other religion or way can get us to heaven. It is through Jesus alone that we may enter heaven. You must believe this, or else you make Jesus into a liar, for He said himself, that He was the only way.

Jesus must explain to Philip and the others that He and the Father are one, so that any that had seen Jesus were really seeing the Father. Jesus was in the Father, and the Father in Jesus. He asked his disciples if they believed this and said they should believe based on the works that he did.

Jesus provides them with words of comfort, assurance, and exhortation. He says that those who believe in Him would do even greater works than He did. By this, he meant the salvation of 3000 souls on the day of Pentecost, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, and preaching of the apostles. Jesus did many mighty miracles, but today His word and influence have spread around the world through the efforts of God's children, and in this sense of the spread of the gospel the works of the church are greater in scope. Jesus said that those who love Him would keep his commandments. He also mentions that the Holy Spirit would be sent as a comforter to his disciples. When Jesus said that he will come to them and the world will not see him, but they will see him, this brought more confusion to His disciples. Jesus explained that when his disciples love him and keep his word, He and His Father would take up their abode with them. By this, he meant their presence would be known through the indwelling Holy Spirit, whom the world would not know or recognize, but they would know Him and His power in their lives.

Jesus speaks further about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and how he would come to them and teach them and help them to remember everything concerning Jesus words. This work of the Holy Spirit helped the apostles and prophets of the New Testament to write down everything we now have in our New Testament. The Holy Spirit lives inside of every believer, and can help him to understand what he is reading in the bible, and guide him away from sin, lead him in prayer and worship, and bring assurance of salvation, and power to preach the word of God. It is a remarkable thing to consider that God would live inside all believers, and supply guidance, help, comfort, and power through the Holy Spirit. What a great and merciful God we serve.

Jesus not only promises the Holy Spirit will come to comfort and help them, but He also gives them His peace, and again says that they should not allow their hearts to be troubled. When a person knows for sure that they are saved and going to heaven, it brings a sense of peace to their heart that is unlike any other peace. It is a holy calm that can endure through the most difficult storms in life, and still smile with assurance, for Jesus will carry us safely through the storm and into heaven at last.

Jesus tells his disciples about everything that was going to happen, so that when it did happen, they would believe. We should realize that the reason so much of the bible is prophecy, is because God is showing us that He knows the future, and has revealed it to men, so that they can be assured that it is He, God alone whom they can trust. Be careful whom you believe, many call themselves a prophet, but while they try to tell you of your future, they likely cannot tell you what you ate for dinner the night before. These are fakes, who are after your money, and really do not know anything of the future, except what God has shown us in the scriptures.

Jesus mentions that the ruler of this world was coming, by this, He means Satan, but Satan had nothing in Him. Satan had no power or authority over Jesus, and there was nothing in Jesus that Satan could appeal to make Him sin. Jesus then said to His disciples that it was now time for them to arise and go, so that the world may know that He loved the Father. What compelled him to give His life was love. Love for the Father, and love for our souls, so that we might be saved and go to heaven. If you know the way to heaven is through Jesus Christ, why not trust in Him today as your only way to heaven.

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jn14:6

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the final hours before Jesus would be arrested and lead away to be crucified. During these hours Jesus comforted and encouraged his disciples with promises of his coming again, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide, teach, comfort and abide with them forever. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know if the Spirit of God is living within me?"

When Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come as a comforter and abide with them forever, it was a remarkable promise, but how could they discern his presence among them, for He was a spirit, and we cannot see a spirit?

On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, and the apostles were suddenly and miraculously able to speak the wonderful works of God in many languages simultaneously. As they spoke all the people in Jerusalem gathered to hear and wondered how it was that these band of Galileans were now speaking in many languages so that everyone could hear the message in his own language and dialect. It was a remarkable miracle that day in Jerusalem and was God's way of authenticating the power and presence of the Holy Spirit coming upon the newly formed church. This original baptism in the Holy Spirit sealed the believers with the Holy Spirit, who would never leave them, but would be their power and protection to preach in the name of Jesus. As a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, not only was the church born, but the word of God spread through the testimony and preaching of the believers. Some were able to perform miraculous signs through the power of the Holy Spirit. This bore witness to the Holy Spirit's work, and therefore His presence in the believers through whom the miracles were done.

The Holy Spirit does not grant miraculous power to every Christian. Miracles were performed until the scriptures were completed. The witness of miracles was to be superseded by the better witness of God's word.

The Holy Spirit works in ways that may not prove miraculous manifestations, and yet still supply evidence of His presence and power at work in the life of the believer. The Holy Spirit will take up residence in anyone who will trust in Jesus as his or her personal Savior. When that happens, the person experiences a new birth, and becomes a completely new creature in Christ. The Holy Spirit gives them new desires and turns them away from sinful desires. A new believer will learn to love reading his bible, and will be drawn to pray, and to fellowship with other Christians. In addition, the Spirit of God teaches the Christian to hate sin and love righteousness. The Holy Spirit gives guidance through the scriptures, and Christians ought to be humble and obedient to the word of God if they are responding to the Holy Spirit's work in them. All these are evidences of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life of the believer. The first Christians began to give away their money and possessions to help others less fortunate than themselves. They also went about telling others about Jesus and salvation and were very bold in their witnessing for Jesus. There was a close bond of fellowship, which meant they enjoyed taking their meals together and serving and helping one another. These evidences may also be seen today when the Holy Spirit is directing Christians.

We might be misled into thinking that the Holy Spirit's presence and power is manifested in a church meeting when people start shaking, chanting strange sounds, or falling on the floor. But while we might see these things in the church, be careful not to associate it with the work of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit never acted this way as recorded in the bible. We are best to take our guidance from God's word, and not from the experiences of man. Realize that Satan is also a spirit and can do some signs to deceive you into thinking you are seeing something from God, when all the while its' source is another spirit. When we see Jesus name exalted, people turning away from sin, learning to love, serve and give, then we are seeing the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work. It may not be so evident to you if the Holy Spirit lives inside of you, but if you continue to read the scriptures, the Holy Spirit can teach you and assure you through the scriptures that you are indeed God's child. This witness is very important; for you would not want to fool yourself into thinking you are a Christian when you really are still Satan's child. May the Lord help us to discern the true work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to give us assurance that we belong to God.

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Romans 8:16

LESSON 83
Bearing Fruit!
JOHN 15

In today's lesson, Jesus is continuing his talk with His disciples to prepare them for His upcoming departure. He explains that He is like a vine that can produce fruit in their lives, so long as they abide in Him. It is Jesus desire that all of God's children bear the fruit that will bless others and testify to their life in Christ.

In this chapter, Jesus describes himself as the true vine, and his Father as the one who prunes the vine. When Jesus followers do not abide in the vine, they would be fruitless, but if they abide in Him, they would produce much fruit. This analogy is taken from looking after grapevines. If the farmer wants a good crop of grapes, he must cut away all those branches that are sucking life from the vine, but not producing anything. When the useless branches are cut away, then the ones that are producing will produce much fruit. The farmer is happy when he sees much fruit on his vine, just as God is happy when He sees his children producing evidence of the life of Christ in them. God is not happy though with those who might seem to be Christians, but everything about them shows that they are not at all like Jesus, and therefore they are cut off, and thrown into the fire. This is a great warning to all who are only Christians in name, and not in practice. God expects His children to produce evidence that they are true followers of Jesus.

Jesus explained to His disciples that His love for them was just the same as the Father's love for Him. He said to them, if they would keep His commands, they would abide in His love. If a young woman wants to abide in her husbands love then she will seek to please him by her respect and obedience to him. The same is true for Christians who would like to walk in close fellowship with the Lord. Jesus words were given to the apostles to give them joy. Jesus commands His followers to love one another, as He loved them. When we love our Christian brothers and sisters, by serving them and showing interest in them, we are producing fruit for God, because Jesus love is produced and seen in us.

Jesus said that the greatest love was for a man to give his life for His friends, and calls His disciples His friends. He did not treat them as servants, but as His friends by revealing to them all things that He had heard from His Father. Jesus is certainly the greatest friend we could ever have, for He did lay down His life for us. We should be so honored to call Jesus our friend, but we must also remember that our friendship is based upon our willingness to obey whatever he commands us to do. He said, 'you are my friends if you do whatever I command you'. Jesus told His disciples that they had not chosen Him, but He had chosen them, and appointed them to bear fruit, and commands them to love one another. It is a marvelous thing to realize that God sought us when we were not seeking for Him. Because He has loved us so much, it should cause us to share that love also with others. Though Jesus commands us to love, it should be the delight of our heart to obey this command since we have received his great love.

Jesus also explains to His disciples how the world would hate them because the world hated him. Those who hated Jesus also hated the Father who sent Jesus. Those people who saw Jesus and the works that He did in His Father's name, and yet still hated and rejected Him, are without excuse. They had such a strong witness to know that Jesus was God's Son, and their Messiah, but they chose to be blind to the clear evidence. Today people are still rejecting Jesus. Some despise and use His name reproachfully. Some mock Him and His followers. The scripture says 'they hated me without a cause'. Clearly, Satan was energizing their vicious hatred of the Son of God, for they had no other good reason to despise Him.

Jesus then tells them more about the Holy Spirit's ministry when He would come to them. The Spirit would teach them and testify to them about Jesus. One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to help people see and understand who Jesus is. His work is to glorify the Son of God, and when he is working in a believer the believer will learn to love and worship Jesus for all of His glory and goodness. In addition, the disciples would bear witness of Jesus. This would take place after the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. They became witnesses of Christ resurrection and understood God's plan of redemption through Christ's sacrificial death. They proclaimed the good news of salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit. They became His witnesses, and through them, the world would hear, and thus they would bear much fruit for Him, and glorify God.

Are you bearing fruit in your life for God? Can people see the evidence that you are joined to Jesus, and His life is in you? Can they see it by the way you talk and behave, by the places you go and the things that occupy your interests and time? Remember if you are fruitless Christian, your profession is useless, and you will be cut off and cast into the fire. Make sure you know that your life is in Christ through the evidence of spiritual fruit in your life. If you want to be a fruitful Christian, then you must start by accepting Jesus as your Savior, so that the Holy Spirit can come and live within you. It is only when the Spirit of God lives within a person that they can live a life that is fruitful and pleasing to God.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." John 15:13

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about bearing fruit by abiding in the Vine. Jesus is the vine that gives true spiritual life to those who believe in Him, and continue to obey His commands. He commands His disciples to love one another, and as they fulfill this command, they are bearing much fruit and glorifying God. Someone might ask the question, "What did Jesus mean by abiding in Him?"

When Jesus said that His disciples needed to abide in Him, just as a branch abides in the vine, He was providing us a vivid illustration of spiritual life. Spiritual life begins when we trust in Jesus as our Savior, when we are born again by the Spirit of God. Thereafter we have an on-going living relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. We hear Him speak to us in His word, and we speak with Him in prayer. As we learn what He wants us to do, we are glad to obey Him for we acknowledge that He is now the Lord of our Life. This new connection between the believer and Christ is what Jesus meant by abiding in Him. Before a person comes to Christ in faith, they are not connected to His life; they are still enemies of God. Once a person becomes a Christian then all the blessings of God can begin to flow in to the life of the believer, and he can produce much fruit that shows he is a true Christian and linked with Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

Abiding is something that every Christian ought to enjoy, but sometimes believers get cold in heart and drift away from the Lord. This does not mean they have stopped being a Christian, they are simply not nurturing their spiritual life through prayer and the word, and they have lost that close intimate walk with the Lord Jesus. The Lord is never happy when one of God's children has wandered away from His loving embrace, and he will seek after the wayward sheep, to bring them back into the blessings of fellowship with Himself.

Some people once professed that they were a Christian, but after sometime they drifted away from the Lord, and have been content in their sin. Their life is lacking in prayer and without any concern about their eternal welfare. When someone talks to them about religion or Christianity, they just make light of it and do not seem to care. A person like this was likely never a Christian at all, for a true, Christian will abide in Christ, and if they get away from Christ will be miserable until they return to happy fellowship with him. A person who is a Christian will not be happy living in sin, and will desire to make things right with the Lord.

When talking of abiding in Christ, recognize that there are several possible categories of people referred to. 1.) There is the Christian who knows the Lord and is seeking to live in close fellowship with the Lord. This person needs to abide in the sense of continuing to feed upon Christ in His word to sustain his spiritual life and joy. 2.) There is the Christian who has wandered away from the Lord, and no longer reads his bible or prays, but feels miserable in his sin, and wants to come back to the Lord. This person needs to return to fellowship with the Lord and His people and start afresh by reading the word and praying. The Lord will be happy to restore them if only they are willing to come to Him. 3.) Then there is the person who professes to be Christian, but they are only fooling themselves, for they have never been converted. This person needs to abide in Christ in the sense of needing to turn their life over to Christ in faith and trust in Him alone. 4.) There is also the professing Christian who is a Christian, but they are not living for Christ, but living for themselves. This person also seldom reads their bible or prays, except perhaps on Sundays at church meetings. This is a carnal Christian who will have difficulty producing and good fruit, because he is spiritually starving himself and withering on the vine. This person needs to recognize their need for nurturing their spiritual life, and taking some responsibility to make their Christianity more than a superficial commitment, but a real and living relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus was primarily speaking to his disciples to abide in Him, which meant they were to obey his command to love one another. There are many things that Jesus could have said about the details required in the Christian life, but He choose to simply summarize all this instruction in this simple command to love one another. If we learn to love our fellow believers, as Jesus loved us and gave himself for us, then we will abide in His love, bring glory to God, and bear the fruit in our lives that Jesus was referring to in this chapter. Love is the first and greatest commandment for the believer, and that which marks him out as a true and faithful follower of Jesus.

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." 1Cor 13:13

LESSON 84
Sorrow Turns to Joy
JOHN 16

In last weeks lesson we learned about Jesus as the true vine, and this week we find Jesus continuing his talk with his disciples to prepare them for all that was about to take place. He must warn them of persecutions that they will face, and His departure that would bring them sorrow, but afterwards their sorrow would turn to joy when they would see Him again.

Jesus tells his disciples how others who did not know His Father or Himself would persecute them. He tells them about all these things before they happen so that they would later recall his words, find encouragement, and believe. As Jesus spoke about his departure from them, their hearts became sorrowful, but they were not asking Him about where He was going. Jesus said it was necessary for Him to leave them so that He could send the Holy Spirit to them. He calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter, and this helps us to learn one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to comfort God's people. That means He will strengthen them in the face of trials. In addition, the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. When the Holy Spirit would come upon the church, he would work through the believers as they preached the gospel to send forth conviction into the heart of those who heard them. They would be convicted about the sin in their lives, about God's standard of righteousness and about God's judgment against sin. The work of the Holy Spirit bringing conviction has to do with how people view and understand what happened to Jesus as he was rejected, despised and crucified, but then how God raised Him up from the grave and seated Him in glory. As the disciples gave testimony to the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit would convince the world about their sin, about God's pleasure and acceptance of Christ by receiving back to heaven, and about the Devil being defeated through Christ's death on the cross. We can be so thankful that the Holy Spirit does this work, for it is only through His work that a person can be lead to place their trust in Jesus as their Savior and therefore find salvation.

Jesus said that he was going away, but would return in a little while. This confused His disciples and so they began to question each other about his words. Jesus sees that they want to ask him about this and so he tells them that they would weep and have sorrow while the world would rejoice, but later their sorrow was going to be replaced by joy, and no one would be able to take away their joy. Jesus uses the analogy of childbirth to explain how their sorrow would turn to joy. A woman endures much pain and sorrow while in labor, but when her child is born, she forgets all her sorrow, because a new life has been given to her. We understand now that Jesus was talking about his death and resurrection. His crucifixion and death would bring great sorrow to the disciples, but afterwards when they saw Him raised from the dead their sorrow would melt away and be replaced by a great joy, and that joy would never leave them no matter what they might have to face.

Jesus also promises that they can ask anything from His Father in His name, and it will be granted to them. We must be careful not to take the wrong meaning here, or we will expect that God must give to us whatever we pray for. That is not what Jesus is saying. When He says if you ask the Father in my name, what He means is according to His character, authority and purposes. Prayer is not something to just provide us what we think is best for us, for that would be rather selfish and not representative of Christ. Prayer is about fulfilling God's purposes in our lives and the lives of others around us, and when we pray in Jesus name, it does not mean that by saying these words, we have some kind of magic formula to invoke God's favor and blessing. It means to pray in accordance with the character, authority, and purposes of our Lord Jesus Christ. I can pray for souls to be saved and know, according to God's word that I am praying in the will of God, but even that does not guarantee someone will be saved through my prayers, for God will not force anyone to believe the gospel.

Jesus said that he was speaking to them in proverbs, which meant His words and meaning were not always clear to them. He tells them that later when He comes to them again He would speak plainly to them. Often Jesus spoke in parables and taught using metaphors and similes, in order for the truth to be accessible to those who were humble and earnest in seeking after it, while making it more difficult for the proud and insincere to discover God's truth. God rewards those who seek after Him with a sincere heart. The disciples tell Jesus that they believe he came from God and knew all things, but Jesus questions their faith, pointing out that they would all be scattered and leave him alone. He was speaking about when he would be arrested and they would all forsake him and flee. Even in view of the disciples failure the Lord tried to encourage their hearts and prepare them for the sorrow they would face as He was about to be delivered to the Jews, put on trial and crucified. He tells them to be of good cheer for though the world has plenty of trouble, he had overcome the world. If you are feeling the troubles of this world, then remember Jesus has overcome the world. Place your trust in Him knowing that He can change your sorrows into joy.

"Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." John 16:22

Today's Bible Question:

Today's lesson was about Jesus providing words of comfort and encouragement for His disciples as He prepares them for his coming arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. He points out that their sorrows would turn into a joy that would last. This would happen when they witnessed his power to overcome sin, death, and the devil. We learned the Holy Spirit would come to comfort God's children, but bring conviction of sin to the world. Someone might ask the question Why is it important to pray *in Jesus name*?

Jesus told His disciples that they could ask the Father anything in His name, and the Father would give it to them. As we already mentioned this does not mean that God must give us everything that we demand of Him, as though the phrase, "in Jesus name" grants us some kind of authority to manipulate God, or power over spiritual forces, or some magical formula to invoke God's blessing. We often witness people shouting this phrase out in churches, as though the mere mention of this phrase somehow invokes spiritual power. That is a gross misunderstanding of what the Lord meant by praying in His name, and a sad perversion of the scriptures, which is plaguing many churches today.

When we pray and add to the end of our prayers "in Jesus name", it is not to invoke some kind of magical power to have our prayers answered. What this means is to pray in the name of Jesus. When we pray in His name, we pray with the authority of His name, and according to His purposes and will. We cannot pray that God will provide us a brand new car, and expect God to answer just because we said the words "in Jesus name". Our motives for wanting a new car might be rather selfish and cater to my prideful wants, rather than from a desire to honor and please the Lord. Using the words "*in Jesus name*" means we want our prayers to be in agreement with the character and purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ. If our prayer aligned with the purposes and character of our Lord Jesus, then the Father will be happy to grant what we request. Let us think of some examples of prayers, which would be in accordance with Jesus character and purposes. If we pray that the Father would be pleased to supply food to someone who is hungry, then we know we pray in the will of God, for the scriptures say in Psalm 146, "Who gives food to the hungry". This speaks of how the Lord looks with compassion toward those who are hungry. We can pray with confidence knowing it is the Lord's will to help hungry people, and therefore can say "in Jesus name" knowing that our prayer is in agreement with the Lord's character and purposes. We may also pray for a friend to accept Jesus as their Savior, and can be assured that this also is God's will, for the bible says, 'He would have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth' (1Tim 2:4). When we pray for this and add "in Jesus name", we are praying in the will of God, according to His purposes. We need to remember that when we align our prayers with the will of God, as recorded in the bible, which does not guarantee the outcome as one might expect. God is sovereign, and He sees everything from a heavenly and eternal perspective. His answer might not always seem the best, or the way we think or expect it should be. Take for instance a friend who is sick and in the hospital. We would all be inclined to pray that God should heal them and make them well again. We would ask God to bring about healing, especially if our friend is young or has small children who are dependent on him. From our perspective, we would expect that God should answer our prayers and heal the person so they can look after their children. However, we do not see things as God sees them. God may choose to take their life away because some higher purpose will be served through their death. It is not easy for us to accept such things, but we must never allow ourselves to think that God must answer our prayers the way we think is best, or just because we invoke the phrase "in Jesus name". We must humbly accept whatever God decides to do, for He is much wiser than we are, and He sees the end from the beginning. We can trust Him to always do the right thing. God is not against us, but for us, and sent His Son to die for us. However, because God is for us does not mean we can manipulate God to give to us everything we want. When we behave like that, we are behaving like spoiled children, who only see things from their own small and immediate perspective. Sometimes a parent has to say "No" to their young child even when they know the child will cry and be upset, because parents know better than the child what is best for them. So trust in God to answer your prayers according to what He knows is best, and not what we think is best. Pray using our Lord's name, because we want His will to be done and not our own.

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" Eph5:20

LESSON 85
Glorious Prayer!
JOHN 17

In the past few lessons, we have been considering Jesus conversation with His disciples on the night before He was crucified, or what is commonly known as the *upper room ministry* of our Lord. Today we learn by Jesus example when praying for His disciples. His prayer is glorious and His prayer leads us to His glory!

In this chapter, we have the Lord Jesus praying to His Father in Heaven. From Jesus prayer we learn the desires of His heart. We also learn from Jesus example of how we should pray and what we should pray for. We can also learn that the aim and goal of our lives is to be with Christ and share in His glory.

We won't take time to go through the prayer in detail, but we want to make some observations from Jesus prayer, and find some lessons that we can apply to ourselves. Firstly lets notice what the Lord Jesus mentions in His prayer. He begins His prayer by talking about glorifying His Father, and His desire to be glorified by His Father. He also talks about eternal life which he gives to those who know the Father and the Son. This is an important statement that helps us to understand that our faith in our Lord Jesus is not simply something we once agreed with mentally, and thereafter live as we please. To have eternal life means to enter into a relationship with God the Father and God the Son. This means that our relationship will involve our acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ over our lives, and our obedience to Him, our seeking Him daily in prayer and in the scriptures. To know someone is not simply knowing about them, but it involves spending time and learning about them, and they learning about us. Be sure that your Christian life is not merely an agreement to a set of doctrines, but a living relationship with God and with Jesus Christ through faith.

Jesus also speaks about finishing His work. Jesus work was to come into the world to proclaim good news to the poor, to heal the diseased and afflicted, and set at liberty those who were in bondage to sin and Satan. He completed this work, and spoke of it as completed even though he had not suffered on the cross as yet. The work was as sure as being completed for He knew all that was going to take place.

Jesus prays that the glory he knew before the creation of the world would be granted to Him by His Father. By this He meant being taken back into heaven and exalted to the highest place. The rest of Jesus prayer is taken up with His love and care for His own disciples, as He intercedes for their eternal joy and blessing. He prays for unity among believers, to preserve them from evil, to sanctify them by the word of God. He also prays that the believers will be united to Himself, just as He enjoys unity with His Father. He prays that His disciples may share in His glory by being with Him in heaven, and finally he prays that God's love would be in His disciples also.

This is a prayer about glory, but also a glorious prayer, for it shows to us God's great plan for His own children to have them enjoy His glory, joy and love forever in heaven. There is nothing condemning in this prayer, it is rich with love and seeking the very best of eternal riches for the people whom Jesus loved.

As we consider this great prayer of Jesus for His disciples lets also take some general lessons about prayer for ourselves. Firstly note that the quality of the prayer is more important than the quantity or length of prayer. Sometimes we think the duration of prayer brings some kind of merit points with God. Jesus prayer here is the most sublime in all of the scriptures, and yet is it a short prayer that probably took just a couple of minutes to pray. All the prayers in the bible are rather short. I believe the longest prayer is found in the book of Nehemiah, and it can be read in less than 10 minutes. Now I am not saying that we should not take time to be in God's presence, but we must not think that our repetition of words, or the duration of the hours spent in prayer somehow outweighs the actual concerns of our heart as we present them to God. Some of the shortest prayers are the most effective.

We should also take notice that Jesus was speaking with His Father, and prayers should be directed to heaven and not for impressing men by our spiritual language or passionate expressions. Prayer is no place to show off, for that would show insincerity and hypocrisy. Prayer must be with a concern for God's glory and the fulfillment of His purposes. We also should understand that man's greatest need is eternal life, not acquiring riches and comfort in this world. Also our prayers should aim towards salvation of souls, and the unification, sanctification and glorification of God's children. If these are the concerns of Jesus when He prayed, they should also be our concerns. It is encouraging to know that Jesus prayer was not only concerned with the disciples who knew Him in the days of His flesh, but for all who would believe based upon their testimony, and that includes all Christians throughout the church age. My prayer is that all who are listening to this message will come to know Jesus Christ, and find eternal life through faith in Him.

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." John 17:3

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we considered the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ for His disciples. He prayed for their unity, for their preservation, sanctification and ultimate glorification with Him in heaven. Someone might ask the question, "What is the proper manner for making our prayers to God?"

Many people have been convinced by their experience that prayer is something ritualistic, or made effective by the length or intensity of the prayer. I fear that many might be deceived about the practice of prayer. Some recite prayers repeatedly over and over again, as though the mere saying of the same words will make it more effective in God's hearing. However Jesus told us not to use vain repetition when we pray, and provided us a pattern in the Lord's prayer. This was not simply meant for us to repeat habitually, but it was a model to teach us about the proper content and direction of prayer. Just like the prayer of John 17, the Lord's prayer addresses God as Father and looks to His glory and purposes as the priority in prayer. The prayer includes our sense of dependency for daily needs, our protection from evil, our need to show forgiveness so that we may be forgiven, and ends with an acknowledgment of God's eternal glory, dominion and power. So we learn that God's glory should be the theme of our prayers. We should not come to God demanding and making bold claims, but rather in humble dependence upon His grace. Many people are trying to speak to Satan or fight against Satan in their prayers, but we don't find this taught in the scriptures. Jude tells us that even Michael the archangel when contending with Satan, did not accuse Satan, but said the Lord rebuke you. Now if the archangel did not think it proper for him to accuse Satan, how much more should we consider it wrong for us to do so.

What about our posture in prayer. Some might like to stand, while others sit. Some open their eyes and some close their eyes. Our posture really is not so important outwardly, but inwardly our posture should be one of humble submission and godly reverence. Most of us close our eyes to pray, since that helps us concentrate, but there is no biblical rule that says we should have to close our eyes when we pray. We read today that Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and prayed, showing us an example which we may follow. However a little bit later we will find Jesus falling on His face in prayer while in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus said we should pray in our rooms alone, praying in secret, and then our Father will reward us openly. Having a healthy private prayer life is an important key to a healthy spiritual life. When we pray alone with God, there is no one around us to impress, and therefore it becomes a true expression of our faith and dependence upon God. Praying in public is okay and has its purpose, but most of our praying should be done in private. People who make long public prayers rob others of opportunity to participate in prayer, and obviously think it necessary to pray about everything that comes to their mind. God knows everything before we pray, and so it is not as though we are informing God of things He does not already know. Perhaps it is better to pray more sincerely about one or two things, than half-heartedly about a whole list of things and people.

We can find many prayers in the bible, and by reading and studying these prayers, we will learn about how we also ought to pray. James points out that some people do not have their prayers answered because they ask amiss. They just want God to cater to their lusts, and God will not provide for our sinful and selfish nature. Our prayers should be preoccupied with eternal issues above all else. We should be seeking God's glory in all situations, and not just what men want, or what men think to be best. We should always pray, "Thy will be done", for God's will is above our own will, and His will is always designed for the very best possible outcome. Some times God might grant us our prayer requests, in order to teach us lessons and reprove us. He did this to the children of Israel when they were wandering in the wilderness and begging Moses to supply them meat. God granted their request, but sent leanness into their souls. So they got their meat, but lost out on the spiritual blessing of close fellowship with God. So we should remember to seek first God's glory, and not be so concerned with our gain or comfort in this world. For our daily bread we are encouraged to pray, and when our Lord supplies us we need to be thankful and content.

"And He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul." Psalm 106:15

LESSON 86
Man against God!
JOHN 18

In today's lesson we learn of the arrest and trial of Jesus. We see how Peter denied knowing the Lord, how Pilate wanted to release Him, and how the Jewish authorities insisted on the crucifixion of Jesus. Here we seen men aligning themselves against God, and wonder why men were permitted to do such evil against God's beloved Son.

John provides us with the locations, people, and details of Jesus arrest, trial, and crucifixion, teaching us about the sinfulness of men, and the kindness, grace, and patience of God. When Jesus leaves Jerusalem he enters a garden on the east side of the Kidron Valley, where he prays. He prays earnestly late into the night as He anticipates the great spiritual battle ahead of Him. The disciples however were overcome by weariness and had fallen asleep. When the soldiers, lead by Judas Iscariot, came to arrest Him, Jesus presented Himself to them, and asked them whom they were seeking. They said Jesus of Nazareth, and he said "I am", and they fell backwards to the ground. In a previous lesson we mentioned Jesus title "I AM", which identifies Him as Almighty God, and even here the mere mention of His Identity caused them to fall down.

When Peter attacked with his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest, Jesus is quick to rebuke Peter for His hasty actions, saying that He must drink the cup of suffering given to Him. Jesus heals the mans ear, and then is bound by the soldiers and led away. Jesus corrects the violent actions of Peter, heals the injuries of his enemies, and quietly submits himself to their arrest. We must marvel at the grace and goodness of God, to allow such wicked men to forcefully take, under the cloak of darkness, He who only came to do them good.

While the disciples all fled for fear, Peter follows secretly to see the outcome, but when he is identified as one of the disciples he denies even knowing Jesus. His denial was made with oaths, for he was determined that no one should know that He was one of Jesus disciples. When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him earlier that evening how he would deny him three times. Peter was convicted by his own lack of courage, and went out and wept bitterly. We might look condemningly at Peter, for his failure, but we too would likely do the same out of fear for our lives.

When Jesus is brought before the high priest, Jesus tells him and the others that His teachings were spoken openly to the people, and He had nothing to hide. One the officers thought Jesus was speaking too boldly before the high priest, and struck Jesus with his hand. When they led Jesus to meet with the Roman governor the Jews did not want to enter the gentile Praetorium lest they should be defiled and not able to eat the Passover feast. The irony here is quite remarkable, for while these men had a conscience about remaining ceremonially clean to eat the Passover, they were preparing to kill an innocent man. They could not perceive their own hypocrisy in wanting kill God's innocent Lamb.

Pilate wanted to get rid of this case from the start, for he knew that the Jews had handed Jesus to him because of envy. However after repeated attempts, and questioning Jesus, he finally had to give into their cries, for he feared the Jews would cause an uproar which might threaten his political position. When Pilate talked with Jesus, he asked him if He was a king, to which Jesus replied that if was the reason for which He was born, and that He came to bear witness of the truth. Then Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" This is an important question for all of us to consider. Many people assume they have the answers to the bigger questions in life, such as where the world came from, what the purpose of our existence is, and where will we go when we die. However men really do not have the answers to these profound questions, only the eternal God who created us has all knowledge and therefore can answer our questions. Jesus is not simply someone with some wisdom to help us on our way through life. Jesus is the truth itself, for He is the creator, He is the purpose for our living, and He is the Judge or Savior of sinners. While Pilate wondered about truth, he was not able to recognize that that one he was speaking with was truth itself. Had he only taken time to truly understand the man that was before him that day, perhaps he would have refused to be the one responsible to order his execution.

We gaze with wonder at His willing submission to suffer at the hands of such wicked men. He did not resist their evil design, but yielded Himself to the higher purposes of God to redeem many souls. His sight was not set on the agony and shame of the cross, but the glory that would follow. I trust the Holy Spirit will cause you to reflect upon the grace of our Lord, who was willing to be arrested and sentenced to crucifixion so you could have a home in heaven. If you have never surrendered to Jesus as your Savior, then perhaps today, you have seen the heart of God who loves you and sent His Son to bear away your sin on the cross. If you know that you need to make a decision about Christ, then I encourage you to receive Christ today as your Lord and Savior.

"Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." John 18:37

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we saw how wicked men were permitted by God to arrest Jesus, put him on trial before a human court, and sentence him to crucifixion. We also saw how Peter lost courage and denied knowing Jesus, how all his disciples fled for fear, and men turned against God, and yet Jesus still went to the cross in love for our souls. Someone might ask the question, "Are some sinners beyond the hope of salvation?"

In today's lesson we witnessed men at their very worst, as they set themselves against God, and condemned the one man that could save them from eternal condemnation. Even Jesus' closest friends ran away in fear, and one denied even knowing Jesus. With such lack of faith, lying, and utter wickedness, how could God possibly forgive their sins? We wonder if some people's sins have led them past the point of no return, and there is no hope for their salvation. What is marvelous to hear though, is the words of Jesus from the cross, when He prayed and said "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

We see how God is so compassionate towards the ignorance of man, and even man's foolish rebellion to his own hurt. God looks at the wickedness in the heart of man and still finds room to forgive him, because of what Jesus did on the cross.

It is an amazing demonstration of the love and grace of God, that such rebellion against God, should turn out to be the very means by which God in grace can forgive the wicked people who have crucified the Son of God. In view of such grace, it would be so utterly foolish for any person to turn away from God's free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, and yet many people do reject God's salvation. When people refuse to bow to Jesus as Lord, and place their trust in Him as their Savior, God has no choice but to condemn them to eternal judgment. With God there is always hope of salvation for His heart is ever so gracious and kind towards mankind. God never created us to destroy us, but He desires that we might know Him, have fellowship with Him, and enjoy His goodness and presence forever. God has done all that is possible to reveal to men their sinful condition, and that His judgment will fall on all those who reject Jesus as their Savior. Yet men in their folly and blindness still turn away from Him, and trust in their own religious efforts. Imagine these Pharisees and Jewish leaders standing in the presence of God and praying for God to forgive their sins, when they had just sent Jesus to the cross. Here was the very answer for their sins, and yet they cast Him away and crucified Him, and then presume to come to God in prayer, seeking forgiveness. It is a remarkable irony, but God understood that these men were blinded by their pride, and foolishly rejected whom they thought to be a false Messiah, and so Jesus is compelled to pray for their forgiveness. We are not certain that any of those men repented and gave their lives over to Jesus in faith, but we do read that some of the priests were obedient to the faith, and it also appears that at least two Pharisees came to place their faith in Jesus, namely Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus.

Is it possible for sinners to go beyond any hope of salvation? Well it depends on which direction you look at it. From man's perspective it would seem impossible, for if man continues to refuse God's Son then they have no possible way to be saved, for Jesus is the only way a person can be saved. From God's perspective there is always hope, for with men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. God will look for any and every way to turn the sinner from His sin, and point Him to Jesus for salvation. God does not give up on sinners, but always works towards their ultimate salvation. However God will never force a person to choose Christ or heaven, though He will plead, and say "come let us reason together". God is not willing that anyone should perish, and calls on all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.

If you have friends or relatives who are not Christians, and you wonder if they will ever be saved, take encouragement that God does want to save them. Pray for your unsaved friends and God will open wonderful ways for them to hear and respond to the gospel. While God does His part, man must also do His part and respond in faith, for God will not force anyone to believe. If you are listening today and still not saved, then take this opportunity to surrender your life to Jesus in faith. Ask Him to forgive you, because God is ever ready to forgive, and accept you, if you will accept Jesus as your Savior.

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2Peter 3:9

LESSON 87
Man tries to Kill God!
JOHN 19

In today's lesson we have reached the climax of John's gospel when Jesus is condemned and crucified at the hands of wicked men. They thought they could kill this man and get rid of Him, not realizing they were seeking to put God upon a cross. Man can be killed, but God is eternal and cannot be harmed by man.

As we consider this most important chapter in our bibles, and see Jesus dying for our sins the writer provides us with many details to help us to appreciate the great sacrifice Jesus made for us, the depth of man's depravity and sin, as well as the assurances that this man by one sacrifice was able to put away sin forever. When Pilate gave the sentence to crucify Jesus, he was led outside the city, stripped of his clothes, nailed to a cross with an accusation fixed on the cross, "This is the king of the Jews". Many of the Jews gathered to watch him suffer, and taunted him to come down from the cross if he was the Christ. While upon the cross Jesus gives his mother's care into the hands of John, and then bows his head and dies. The soldiers refrain from breaking his legs when they see he had died, and put spear in his side just to be sure he was dead. Joseph of Arimathea is kind to request Jesus body, wrap it for burial, and place the body in his own tomb which was in a garden near the place where he was crucified.

There are several things we can learn from this chapter, but today I want to draw your attention to some aspects of Jesus death that are important for us all to understand.

Firstly Jesus death was according to prophecy. There are around 300 OT prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, and 34 prophecies specifically about his death. Some examples of these prophecies are:

- A. The cast lot for his clothing – Ps 22:18
- B. He said "I thirst" and was given gall to drink – Ps 69:3,21
- C. No bone of his was broken – Ps 34:20
- D. He was pierced with a spear – Zech 12:10
- E. Buried with the rich – Isa 53:9
- F. Died with transgressors – Isa 53:12
- G. His feet and hands were pierced – Ps 22:16
- H. He was mocked – Ps 22:6-8

These prophecies along with others verify to us that Jesus is the one foretold in the Old Testament who would be the Messiah, and the one to redeem us back to God. His identity is vital to our salvation, and so God has carefully recorded down many prophecies over the centuries to confirm that He is the Savior, when we count all the many scriptures that were fulfilled exactly by Jesus.

Another important thing we should consider about Jesus death is that it was a very cruel death. He was given an unjust trial. He was beaten beyond recognition, and mocked by the soldiers who beat him and the Jews who hated Him. He was crucified which is perhaps the most shameful, and cruel death imaginable. Normally those crucified were left to suffer on their cross for even a few days, while the slowly suffocated from lack of oxygen, but endured a horrific pain. The Romans invented crucifixion as a way to warn all would be rebels not to challenge their authority or they would receive a very painful death. Crucifixes lined the roads to send a message to the people that Rome's power is not to be challenged. Jesus pain and suffering are to help us remember the terrible judgment that our sin deserves. What man did to Jesus was bad enough, but the scriptures also teach us that God's wrath was poured out upon Jesus while He was on the cross, and his soul was made an offering for sin. He did this to take away our sins, and every time we think of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, it should make us turn away from sin, and express our gratitude and worship to Him, who endured the cross for us.

While the cross was cruel it was also the will of God. Jesus died according to the scriptures. He came into the world with the very purpose of dying to pay our debt of sin. Several OT and NT passages confirm that Jesus death was God's plan, for it was the only way that our sins could be washed away.

Lastly the death of Jesus is the means of our salvation. He paid our debt of sin. He was the lamb of God, the innocent sacrifice that God accepted as adequate payment to take away our sins forever. We cannot be saved apart from Jesus and the payment he made on our behalf. We deserve God's judgment, but Jesus took that judgment for us, and now we can go free. However it is very important that we understand that we must apply Jesus payment for sin to our account. We can only be saved by receiving Jesus by faith. It is when we look to Jesus in faith, and trust in Him as our Savior, that we can be forgiven for our sins, and God will give us eternal life. We can never earn this salvation for God has paid the price through the blood of Jesus, and all our efforts are only an insult to the perfect and complete work of Jesus on the cross. The cross is your only hope for salvation. Make no delays turn to Jesus, admit your sin and guilt and cry out to Him to save your soul, to forgive your sins, and grant you everlasting life. Man did not kill God on the cross, but men fulfilled God's purposes by killing the only one who can take away our sin.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1Corinthians 1:18

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned how Jesus death was a fulfillment of prophecy, that it was cruel, it was the will of God, and the only way that men can be saved from the penalty of their sins. The cross is a shameful display of the wicked depravity of man, but also the greatest display of God's grace and love towards us. Someone might ask the question, "If Jesus suffered for my sins, will I ever have to suffer for my sins?"

When Jesus went to the cross and died there, the scriptures tell us that he was suffering for our sins. Peter says He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. And John wrote that He made propitiation not for our sins only, but for sins of the whole world. To make propitiation means to make satisfaction. In other words God is fully satisfied with the payment made for our sins, when Jesus took our judgment on the cross.

This might lead us to conclude that because Jesus has already paid the price for our sins, then we need no longer worry about judgment against our sin, and therefore we can live as we please. This is not what the grace of God would teach us to do. God's grace should lead us to forsake all of our sins, and live righteously and godly. When men can look at the death of Christ, and still have no conscience about their sin, it means the Holy Spirit is not living in them, for no true child of God can think lightly about sin. It is true that the price has been paid in full for our sins, and Christians shall never come into condemnation because of our sins, but that does not mean that we are free from the consequences of our sins. If we are truly God's children, then God will discipline us when we sin, and train us to love righteousness and hate iniquity. This is not a judgment against sin, but a discipline to teach us to live godly and send a proper message through our conduct to the world. If we sin, God can even shorten our life here on earth, and take us to heaven early. This is what was happening to some in the Corinthian church because of their irreverent behavior at the Lord's Supper. We shall never have to pay the eternal judgment for sin, because Christ has paid that on our behalf, but we will face the consequences of our disobedience as God disciplines us and trains us to walk in holiness.

For those who are not believers, they will most certainly have to pay for their own sins someday in the fires of Hell, because they failed to apply the sacrifice of Christ to their own account. Even though Jesus has paid their debt in full, and invites them to come to Him for forgiveness, they still cannot have pardon from their sins until they come to Jesus in faith and accept Him as their Savior. God will not accept any religious efforts, good works, or feeling sorry and confessing, if Jesus is not our only hope and remedy to remove our stain of sin.

What about people who are Christians but continue to live a life of sin, won't they have to pay for their sins? It is a sad fact that many professing Christians live a life of sin. Some are stealing or lying or fornicating, but still calling themselves Christians. It is possible for true Christians to be ensnared by sin, but their conscience should be pricked by the Holy Spirit, and they will know what they are doing is wrong, and seek to forsake their sin. However if a professing Christian can continue happily in their sinful behavior without any sense of remorse, then we have to wonder if that person is really a Christian. There are likely many people who are fooling themselves into thinking they are Christians and ready to go to heaven when they die, but in fact are only Christians in name and not in reality. If the Holy Spirit lives inside a person, He will deliver them from sin, and cause them to show the world that they are changed, and being changed daily to be like the Lord Jesus. If Christians behave more like the devil than like Christ, then we will discern that they are not children of God but children of the devil. Christians, if they are born of God, should do the works of their Father in heaven. Don't let yourself be fooled, for if sin is ruling in your life, and it does not bother you, then your Christian testimony is meaningless. It is our good works and turning away from sin that identifies the reality of our new nature in Christ. Christ paid the price for our sins, but the payment will only be good for those who are God's true children, who have by faith been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by their turning away from sin.

"And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

1John 2:2

LESSON 88
A new Dawn!
JOHN 20

In today's lesson we have the greatest news ever told, and the dawn of a new era for all of mankind through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though hated and rejected by men, hung on a cross to die a shameful death, the story does not end with man's treachery and rebellion against God's Son, but the story continues through the victorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When some of the women who knew and loved Jesus went early on Sunday morning to visit the grave, hoping to anoint his body with spices, they were shocked to see the stone was rolled away. In their confusion and excitement they went back and reported to the other disciples. Mary came to the disciples first, and when Peter and John heard the news that the grave had been disturbed they quickly ran to see what had happened. Peter went inside the tomb and found the grave clothes, and the cloth that had been wrapped around His head folded in a place by itself. While Peter was marveling and wondering about what he was seeing, we are told that John also went in and saw and believed. Afterwards they leave the tomb, but Mary continues standing by the tomb weeping. Mary then sees two angels inside the tomb, who asked her why she is weeping. She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When she turned around she saw a man standing there, and the man also asked her why she was weeping. She thought it was the gardener, and said that if he had taken away the body, he should tell her where he is and she will take him away. It is clear that Mary loved Jesus very much, and could not bear the thought of his body not being given a proper burial. At that moment one of the greatest of all things in history took place, for the man who had been talking to her was none other than Jesus himself, raised back to life. When he said "Mary", she recognized him and said to Him, "Rabboni". We can only imagine the joy and excitement in Mary as she beheld her Lord and Master standing there before her. It seems that she must have clung onto him, for Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, but go and tell my brethren I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.

Later that evening Jesus appears again to His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, and greets them by saying "peace be with you". He showed them His hands and feet and the disciples were glad when they saw the risen Lord. Thomas was not present with them though, and when they told him they had seen the Lord, he refused to believe unless he saw the wounds in His hands and in His side. Then some days later they were again gathered together and Jesus appears and this time Thomas sees Him. Jesus told Thomas to place his hand in His side, and his finger into his hand, and to stop doubting and believe. Thomas was astonished for sure, and confessed before Jesus and the others, "My Lord, and My God". This is a very important statement that Thomas made for He affirmed what this whole gospel has been trying to show to us, and that is that Jesus is God. When Thomas said these words, Jesus did not correct Him, but said he was blessed for knowing this, but even more blessed were those who had not seen Him and yet believed. Some want to believe that Jesus is less than the Almighty and eternal God, and yet when Thomas referred to Jesus as His God, it would have been incredibly deceitful and wicked to allow a man to believe and address Him as God, if in fact He were not God. This confirms for us very clearly that Jesus accepted Thomas' words as His true identity.

John has told us these things and everything in John's gospel, for the distinct purpose that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that believing we might have life in His name. This gospel was written to help you and I find eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, and believing that He is God's Son, God manifested in the flesh.

As we consider this amazing historical record of the resurrection of Jesus, it provides for us the greatest message ever told. This is not simply a fanciful story of some zealous but ignorant fools. This was the record confirmed not only by those who saw Him, but by the power and hope that His resurrection has given to all who place their faith in Him. He did not only appear once but several times, to different people, and groups of people. The resurrection begins for us a whole new era for human history, like the dawning of bright new day full of hope and joy. The resurrection sends us the message that God has accepted the sacrifice of Christ as satisfactory payment for our sins. It also tells us that Jesus has overcome death, and entered into heavens glory. The bible calls him the first fruits of resurrection, which means the full harvest is yet to come. All those who belong to Jesus will also experience a resurrection from the dead. When the Lord returns to take His church home to heaven then all Christians of all ages will be raised up from their graves and their bodies and souls will reunite. The resurrection body will be a glorified body like the glorious body of Jesus in heaven. It will be a body that shall never see decay or corruption, and that cannot die. Even those Christians who are still alive on earth when the Lord returns, shall be changed and given this new resurrection body. The resurrection body is still not fully known to us, but what we do know, is that we shall be like the Lord Jesus, and share in His glory with a body that will never corrupt or die. Paul writing to the Corinthians explains that our bodies are buried like seeds in the ground but in the resurrection they will have a glory that compares to the plant that is formed from the seed planted. This tells us that the resurrection body will be much different from the original body, but still the details of that body will be found in germ form in the original body that was planted. What a wonderful hope for every believer in Christ!

"And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain, perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body." 1Corinthians 15:37-38

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard the greatest news ever told, and about the beginning of a new dawn for humanity, filled with hope and the promise of eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was seen by His disciples, who at first find it difficult to believe, but seeing his wounds they are convinced that He is more than just a man, but He is their God, and they worship Him. Someone might ask the question, "Can a person who does not believe in the resurrection be a true Christian?"

The simple answer to this question is "no", but let's find out why a person who denies the resurrection cannot be a true Christian. Our hope of salvation rests on the fact that Jesus not only died on the cross, but was buried according to the scriptures, and most importantly He was raised from the dead according to the scriptures. In order to fulfill all that was prophesied about the Messiah in the Old Testament it was necessary that He must rise from the dead. Also if Christ did not rise from the dead what hope could any of us have for eternal life. Jesus was God's demonstration of His mighty power to raise the dead. His resurrection ensures us that God's promise to raise up all who believe in Him, will come to pass. The bible says *if Christ be not raised, then we are of all men most miserable*. This is because all that will live for, and all of our hope is based upon an empty promise. But praise be to God, Christ is risen indeed. We have the historical evidence, the prophetic evidence, and the outworking of Christ's life in all believers that gives us power and a sure hope.

If we believed in a dead Savior, then our religion means nothing, and when we die we will just turn to dust with no hope of eternal life. To be a Christian you must believe that Jesus is alive, otherwise you are following a man that is dead and can do nothing for you. If Jesus conquered death, and has power over life and death then He has power to rescue us from death and raise us up to be with Him in glory.

Notice what the scripture says about salvation, *"that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9). This verse from Romans shows us clearly that it is essential to believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead in order to be saved. Therefore no one can be a true Christian unless they believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Often at a baptism the question is asked of the one being baptized 'do you believe that Jesus is risen from the dead'. It is based upon a confession of Jesus as Lord, and belief in the heart that God raised Him from the dead that brings about our salvation, and therefore baptism can be conducted in obedience.

If we believe that Jesus is alive, then we know we are actually talking with Him when we come to Him in prayer. We also know that when we gather to worship, we are worshipping someone who can hear us, and enjoy our praise. By faith we also know that we can preach Jesus to others, knowing that they too can be saved, and pray to a living Savior. We must be careful that we do not have a formal ritualistic religion devoid of true faith, and living relationship with the risen Christ. If we do not believe He is alive we can have no relationship to Him and our prayers would not be heard or answered.

When we truly believe that Jesus is alive it changes everything, for now our hope is in heaven and not on earth. This means we should expect Christians to be more concerned with storing up treasures in heaven than riches in this world. When we see Christians who live for the comfort and riches of this world, then we begin to wonder if they really believe Jesus is risen. It is not consistent to believe in a living Lord ready to judge this wicked world, and yet to live as though He cannot see or cannot hear. If we ignore His words to deny ourselves, and take up our cross, then His resurrection might be a nice idea, but we act as though we really don't believe it. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is not only important to believe for our salvation, but also the evidence of our belief is seen by the manner in which we live as Christians. Can people tell that you serve a risen Savior, not just by your words, but by the way in which you live?

"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty... But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1Cor 15:14,20

LESSON 89
A New Career!
JOHN 21

In today's lesson we have reached the final chapter of John's gospel, and we complete our study of the gospels. This final chapter is about another visit from the resurrected Lord Jesus with His disciples. We have a personal account of Jesus' dealings with Peter. Peter was a fisherman by trade, but now the Lord gives him a new career as a shepherd.

Jesus had told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit, but Peter decided that he might as well occupy himself while he was waiting, and decided to go fishing. Some of the other disciples decided to join Peter, but they fished all night and caught nothing. Even though they were well trained in fishing, this still could not guarantee a catch of fish. In this world there is little security in our wages and jobs. Our good fortune and blessing and security can only be found in the gracious hand of our God. When Jesus calls from the shore and asks them if they have any food, they told Him "no". Jesus tells them to throw the net on the right side of the boat and they would find some. When the disciples did as Jesus instructed suddenly they had so many fish in the net they could not pull it into the boat. John, who is called here 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' said to Peter "It is the Lord". In the early darkness of morning they did not recognize who the man was that was talking to them from the shore, but John must have remembered another occasion where Jesus also told them to throw the net on the other side of the boat and they suddenly had so many fish that the boat was ready to sink. Sometimes the spiritually discerning will recognize the presence of the Lord through His work in the lives of people, and John was able to discern his Master's actions. Peter was so anxious to see his Lord that he jumped into the water and quickly swam to shore. When they all came to shore they drew in the net with fish, and even though there were so many large fish the net was not broken. I believe there are some spiritual lessons for us to learn here. One lesson is that when Jesus is the captain of our ship, and master over our lives, and we obey His voice then we shall prosper. Trained fishermen could not catch a single fish, but with Jesus they had a great abundance. Now we must not think Jesus simply wants to make us rich, but we should understand that our trust and security are in Him, for He is able to abundantly supply our needs. Perhaps Peter was thinking he would have to support himself and the disciples now that Jesus was going away. The Lord showed him that He was quite able to supply them whatever they would need for His work. Another lesson we can learn is that obedience to His voice will produce results. Often men try to use their own wisdom to accomplish things for God, but simple and sincere obedience to the Lord produces the greatest results.

Jesus asked the men to bring some of their fish to a fire that was already burning on the shore, and they ate together some bread and fish along with their own fish for breakfast. As they sat and ate together none of the disciples dared ask, "who are you" – knowing it was the Lord. In the dull light of morning perhaps they could not see His features, but they knew Him by His words and actions.

Jesus talks to Peter and asks him if he loved Him more than the others. This was clearly related to Peter's words in the upper room before Jesus went to the cross, where Peter had said even if all others should forsake him, he was ready to die with Him. Of course we know Peter failed in his love for the Lord and denied Him three times. Here Jesus asks Peter 3 times if he loved Him, and in each case Peter admits he loves Him. It is important here to know something about the original Greek words that are used in the text, for Jesus uses a word which means to love very dearly, but Peter answers with a word which is not as strong as Jesus' word for love, and has the idea of being fond of, like a brotherly love. Peter could not bring himself to say he loved Jesus with that great love that caused Jesus to give His life for His disciples. The third time that Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him he uses that lesser word for love that Peter had been using which means brotherly love, as if to say "Peter I know your love is not as strong as you once thought it was, but I accept your love anyway, and now I am asking you to look after my sheep." Peter was a fisherman by trade, but now Jesus is calling him to a new career, and that is to care for His people, which is like being a shepherd to sheep.

As we consider Jesus' words to Peter, "Do you love me?", we might put ourselves in Peter's shoes as though Jesus were asking us this question. Jesus equates love for Him with a love and care for His people. If you really love Jesus, it will not be seen in how loud you sing songs on Sunday morning in a church meeting, but how you tend to the various needs of God's people, which is not a Sunday morning activity, but a fulltime daily practice.

As we complete our study of the gospels about the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus, I hope you have learned how much Jesus loves you, and how He desires to bring you to heaven to be with Him forever. If you would like to know for sure you are going to be in heaven, then turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive your sins, and to take over your life as Lord and Savior. If you call upon Him in faith He will save your soul.

"...And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You..." John 21:17

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we saw how the Lord Jesus supplied his hungry disciples with a large catch of fish, feeding them breakfast after a long night of work. We learned how Jesus confronts Peter about the weakness of his love, and yet still calls on Peter to look after His followers. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know if God is calling me to serve Him?"

Many Christians have some desire to serve the Lord, and wonder if God is calling them to serve. There is a sense in which every Christian is called to serve the Lord. What I mean by this is that every Christian should be a faithful witness of the gospel, by telling others about how they can be saved and go to heaven. Also every Christian needs to learn what their spiritual gift is and use it in the church to carry out God's work. The idea that only one man is called to lead and pastor a church is a terrible misconception of what the bible teaches, but yet so commonly seen in the practice of churches. It seems many are convinced that only the preacher at the front is a man called of God, or anointed of God, as some like to say. This is a very foolish deception and creates all kinds of unfortunate problems in the work of the Lord. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ in the church, and everyone should find their place of service. God uses some mature brothers who meet the biblical qualifications to lead and teach the word in the gatherings of the church, but that does not elevate them to some greater level of Christianity. We should respect them and obey the elders for they are like fathers and shepherds expending their time, energy and experience to help Christians in their spiritual development. When we elevate men, whom we call "The Pastor", "Man of God", or "Reverend", we are giving them titles and honor that inflate their pride. They use their position to make themselves rich, and bask in the glory of men's praise. This is an abomination in the sight of God, for God never intended the church to exalt men to such a place of praise and honor, for only our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised and honored. Those who serve under Him, must be men of humility, drawing attention to Jesus and not to themselves.

While ever Christian is called to serve in the church, that is not to say that every Christian is called to leave their job or career in order to serve the Lord in dependence upon God. The Lord does call some men and women to serve Him, and live by faith, trusting in God for their support. A Christian will want to be very sure that God has called them to serve Him fulltime, before presuming to quit His job and cast Himself entirely on the Lord for his support. If God is not calling Him then he will be out of job, and also a starving preacher. God is not obligated to supply every would-be preacher just because they think they should stand on a street corner and shout out "Repent" to those passing by. The call of God can be confirmed in several ways, all adding together to provide assurances of God's call. Here are some to consider.

1. Do others look to you for spiritual guidance and teaching?
2. Do mature Christian leaders recognize and acknowledge your call to serve?
3. Have others been spiritually blessed through your ministry; are you bearing spiritual fruit?
4. Do you have a compelling desire to preach, or serve, such that you would not be happy otherwise?
5. Do you live by trusting in the Lord alone, and not in the sponsorship of others?
6. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ sincerely, and this is what compels you to serve?
7. Are you looking for fame and fortune for yourself and your ministry, or are you content to be humble, poor, unknown in this world, so long as God's kingdom is advancing through your efforts?

By asking these questions it will help you determine if God is calling you to serve Him as His fulltime committed servant. Serving the Lord in dependence entirely upon the Lord's provision is the greatest of all privileges, but should never be presumed without much prayer and counsel from other godly mature believers. Many people have taken upon themselves a career in preaching or serving in the church, when God never called them to do so. By this they bring shame to the gospel and the name of Christ, as others view how they must beg for their support, or their ministry does not show the blessing and approval of God. A man might gain a great following, but that does not necessarily authenticate His ministry, for there are many charismatic characters, reaping a harvest of material wealth, while deceiving the masses. The test of God's true servant is His willingness to serve in humility, sacrificially, and without recognition.

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ephesian 3:8

Bibliography:

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