

got life?

How John's
Gospel leads to
truth and faith
in an age of
cynicism and
doubt



A Bible Study by Stan Key

—Answer Guide—

Volume IV



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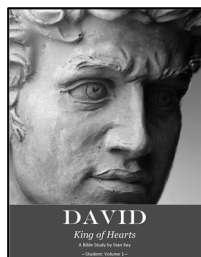
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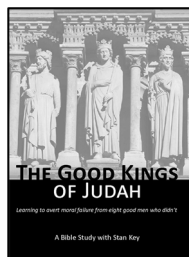
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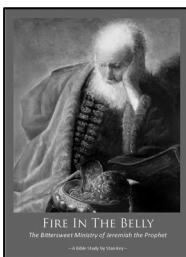
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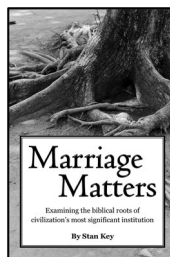
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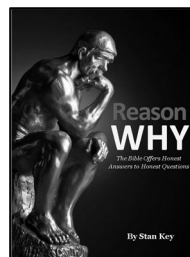
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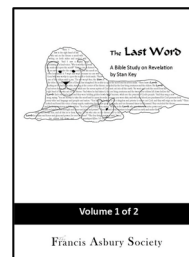
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Why*



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Right Side Up

By Stan Key

*On Calvary's hill, just out of town,
My shattered world was upside down.
It seemed my life had been accursed
For all I knew had been reversed!
I'd turned my back on everything
So I could follow this new king;
I thought that he would be the key
To comfort and prosperity.
And now he's there; exposed; the shame!
Is this the reason that he came?
Is this a joke; some cruel mistake?
The world's Messiah on a stake?*

*But in the darkness of this hour
I catch a glimmer of God's power:
The power of love that took our hate
And did not once retaliate.
Such things are much too vast for me;
I cannot grasp, I cannot see,
Unless my eyes are touched by grace
to see his reassuring face.
I've come, dear Lord, to pause and think
About the cup you chose to drink:
Enable me to understand
The sovereign power of nail-pierced hand.*

*It seems like such a contradiction
That blessing comes from malediction!
But in your brokenness is health
And in your poverty my wealth.
Your death has brought to me my life
The war you fought has calmed my strife.
The cross, the cross! It's only here
That everything in life is clear.
So let this cross now be the norm;
Let all my ways be cruciform!
Thank you, Lord, you drank the cup,
At last my world is right side up!*



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.



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

BIRTH PANGS

John 16:16–33

I. Childbirth Training for Expectant Disciples

A. Lamaze for Christians

Dr. Fernand Lamaze (1891–1957) popularized a method of childbirth preparation and pain management that has been used by many mothers (and fathers) to help with the **trauma** associated with one of life’s most **glorious** events. The method can be summarized in Six Healthy Birth Practices:

1. Let labor begin on its own.
2. Walk, move around, and change positions throughout labor.
3. Bring a loved one or friend for continuous support.
4. Avoid interventions that are not medically necessary.
5. Follow your body’s urges to push.
6. Keep mother and baby together.

B. As their final conversation together came to an end, Jesus knew that all hell was about to break loose! He wanted to prepare his followers for the coming trauma and seized on the metaphor of **childbirth** to explain what was about to happen.¹ The loss, pain, rejection, persecution, and unanswered questions they were about to experience were not random events; they were **birth pangs**.

When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. (John 16:21–22)

Listening to the words of Jesus, remembering your own personal experiences with labor and delivery, reviewing Lamaze’s “Six Healthy Birth Practices,” and using your own sanctified imagination, write down what you think Jesus wants us to understand about the Christian life by using this powerful metaphor.

¹ The metaphor of childbirth is used frequently in Scripture to teach some of the God’s most important truths about life, suffering, hope, and the kingdom of God. Mary’s miraculous conception and birth is only the most famous illustration. For other references, see Isa 26:17–19; Jer 4:31; Hos 13:13–14; Rom 8:22–25; Gal 4:19; 1 Thes 5:3; Rv 12:1–2.).

II. Plain Talk for Confused Disciples

A. Blinded by light

However, the disciples *still* **did not understand** what Jesus was talking about. Jesus' use of the childbirth metaphor (a "figure of speech" —Jn 15:25, 29) left them perplexed and confused. It was not that Jesus' teaching was complicated or intellectually beyond their ability—indeed, even children could understand him! The disciple's inability to understand was not a problem of their IQ or scholastic training but rather the result of **spiritual blindness**. They had not yet received the Spirit of Truth who would lead them into all truth (Jn 16:12–13; see Jn 3:10; 1 Cor 2:6–16).

B. The enigma of the cross

Prior to the cross and Pentecost, no one could understand the ways of God (Isa 55:8–9) or comprehend "**the mind of Christ**" (Phil 2:5ff). Though the Old Testament gave hints of the cross and at times one could discern shadows of its reality, the glory, power, and wisdom of the cross were simply incomprehensible until the Spirit of Truth was poured out at Pentecost.

*For the word of the cross is **folly** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,
"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the **power** of God and the **wisdom** of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
(1 Corinthians 1:18–25)*

C. Knowing what you don't know

Though Jesus knew the disciples wouldn't (couldn't!) fully understand his teaching, he spoke "plainly"² in these final words so that his disciples would at least know what they did not know. This passage is intended to help us **see** where we are blind and to **comprehend** why we can't comprehend.

III. Last words from the Word (John 16:16–33).

A. A word about *suffering*: **expect it!**

The vocabulary of this passage is rich in describing the sufferings of this present life: weep and lament, sorrowful, anguish (Jn 16:20–21). The final thing Jesus gives his disciples is a **promise** that in this world they will indeed experience **tribulation** (Jn 16:33). The Greek word (*thlipsis*) comes from a root that means to crush, squeeze, to be under pressure. It refers to trouble, stress, anguish, affliction, oppression, persecution, etc. The same word was used in verse 21 to describe the "anguish" (*thlipsis*) a woman feels in labor. This promise is repeated in Scripture:

² The Greek word *parrhesia* (Jn 16:25, 29; see Jn 10:24; 11:14) has the idea of "plainly," "frankly," "boldly."

- Paul “strengthen[s] the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
- “...so that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this” (1 Thes 3:3).
- “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tm 3:12).

NOTE: Jesus does not say that your sorrow will be *replaced* by joy; but that “your sorrow will **turn into** joy” (Jn 16:20). Though it is the baby that is causing pain to the woman in labor, it is the baby that will bring her great joy! So don’t get rid of the baby! So it is with Jesus’ cross. Its pain was real—but they were birth pangs! So with all of the afflictions of this world when they are **sanctified** by obedience to Christ: they too can be turned into joy! The very thing that brings pain will “in a short time” bring joy! Think of Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7–10) and Joseph’s rejection and abuse by his brothers (Gn 50:20).

It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts.... That is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: “Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!”³

B. A word about *hope*: let it **define** your present.

Though the word “hope” does not occur in this passage, Jesus is working to give his disciples a **future orientation**. Yes, trials and hardships are real and followers of Christ are not exempt. But live in the joyful expectation of what God has prepared for us. Psychologists tell us that we are defined by our **past**. No! Jesus tells us that we are defined by our future. It’s not where I’ve been that determines who I am but where I am going!

*For we know that the whole creation has been **groaning** together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:22–25)*

C. A word about *prayer*: **just do it**.

Jesus knows that it is impossible to survive spiritually in this world without a vital prayer life. So he encourages his disciples to pray—not just in a contemplative posture of seeking inward serenity. He repeatedly encourages them to **ask** God to do something (what some call the PUSH method: Pray Until Something Happens). Charles Spurgeon famously said: “Asking is the rule of the kingdom.”

- “Whatever you **ask** in my name, this I will do . . . If you **ask** anything me in my name, I will do it” (Jn 14:13–14).
- “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, **ask** whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn 15:7).

³ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 312–13.

- “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. **Ask**, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn 16:24).
- “You do not have, because you do not **ask**” (Jas 4:2)

*Thou art coming to a King
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much. (John Newton)*

To be sure, prayer is *not* a magical Aladdin’s lamp allowing us to get whatever we may happen to want! Here are six questions to evaluate if your “asking” is appropriate:

1. Can I pray this in **Jesus’ name**? (Jn 14:13–14; 16:23–24)
 2. Is there **unconfessed sin** in my life? (Ps 66:18)
 3. Are my motives **pure**? (Jas 4:3)
 4. Can I pray this **in faith** believing? (Mt 21:21–22)
 5. Can I ask other believers to **agree with me** in prayer? (Mt 18:19)
 6. Am I willing to **keep praying** until the answer comes? (Lk 11:5–10)
 7. Am I willing to take **“No”** for an answer? (Mt 26:36–46; 2 Cor 12:7–10)
- D. A word about *peace*: it’s not the **absence** of conflict but the presence of God.
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn 14:27).
 - “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

The world defines peace as the absence of conflict and pain. The word *shalom* has a much deeper meaning. The peace Jesus gives is not the removal of affliction and suffering but the **presence** of God. God’s peace is found **in the midst of** conflict not in its removal!

An artist wanted to paint a picture of peace. What to paint? He chose to paint a stormy sea and a rocky coast. In the foreground he painted a rock with a small crevice where a dove had built her nest and was sitting on it; safe and secure.

- E. A word about *faith*: it is **indispensable**.
- The disciples confess their faith in Jesus by saying they believe that he did indeed “come from God” (Jn 16:27, 30). But perhaps they are a bit **overconfident**. Jesus questions them: “Do you now believe?” (Jn 16:31). Then he tells them they will all abandon him in the hours to come and be scattered (see Jn 16:32). The disciples believe—but it is a shallow, immature belief that will not stand the test of fire. The coming of the Holy Spirit is necessary to give them the gift of true faith. “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 Jn 5:4).

- F. A word about *victory*: Jesus has **already won it!**
- As the disciples saw Jesus arrested, rejected, condemned, crucified, buried, and abandoned by his own followers, they must have found his words about “overcoming the world” to be hollow and incomprehensible (Jn 16:30). And yet Jesus knew what no one else knew except his Father in heaven: the **cross** is the victory; self-giving love (agape) is the key to the redemption of all that is lost and broken.

G. A word about time: it's only a **little while**.

Seven times in four verses (Jn 16:16–19) the phrase “a little while” is repeated. Obviously, Jesus is emphasizing something that he considers to be of utmost importance! Jesus is explaining that he is going away so that he cannot be seen. Then, after “a little while” he will come back so that he can be seen. Some scholars think he is referring to his **resurrection**. Others think he is talking about his **Second Coming** at the end of time (Rv 19:11ff). Perhaps the best answer is—both! His return after his resurrection is a foretaste of his return in power and glory. The ambiguity is intentional and serves to highlight what Jesus most wants us to know: he is coming **soon** (see Rv 22:20). The pains and trials of life are merely birth pangs and will soon be over and forgotten. Teresa of Avila compares the hardships of this life to nothing more than one night in a dirty hotel. “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pt 3:8).

IV. Where Does It Hurt?

A. Where in your life does it hurt? Where does life just not make sense? Where do you feel confused about the ways and purposes of God? This may well point to “the cross” in your own life, the place where Jesus comes to bear our sorrow and redeem our brokenness. The victory he offers is not **from** your tribulation but **through** it! Jesus does not intend to remove our crosses but to sanctify them!

B. Look again at the seven “words” that Jesus gave to his disciples as he told them goodbye. He wanted them to know what they didn't yet know! Which of these words speaks most powerfully to you? Focusing on that word, **ask** the Father to fulfill his purposes for you and **trust** him to do what he has promised. Let the future define your life today. Jesus gives us a word about:

1. Suffering: expect it.
2. Hope: let it define your present.
3. Prayer: just do it.
4. Peace: it's not the absence of conflict but the presence of God.
5. Faith: it's indispensable.
6. Victory: Jesus has already won it.
7. Time: it's only a little while.

Remember: the pains you feel are birth pangs!

Like a River Glorious

Frances R. Havergal, 1876

*Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious, in its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way.*

*Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.*

*Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.*

*Every joy or trial falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;
We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.*



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The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

MY PRAYER FOR YOU

John 17:1–26

I. The Lord's Prayer

A. A window on the soul.

Perhaps the best way to have an accurate knowledge of someone's truest identity is to listen to him/her pray. In his final hour with his disciples, Jesus prayed¹ in such a way that the disciples saw into the depths of his soul—they saw the very **heart of God!** As Jesus prays to the Father, we have the privilege of overhearing God talking to himself. Here we have:

1. The inner life of the **Trinity**. The Latin term *perichoresis*² refers to the relationship of the three Persons of the triune God, eternally dwelling together in a divine circle, or **dance**. One God, three Persons.
2. How Jesus understood **reality** (true truth).
3. Jesus' deepest **desires**.
4. The things that Jesus most loved, hoped, and **feared**.
5. How **we should pray**. Jesus' prayer is pedagogical: it is part of his response to the disciples' request, "Lord, **teach us** to pray" (Lk 11:1).

B. What is Jesus doing right now?

We know he has ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. But what is he *doing* there?

- "Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is **interceding** for us" (Rom 8:34).
- "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make **intercession** for them" (Heb 7:25).
- "The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments . . . I will confess **his name** before my Father and before his angels" (Rv 3:5).

If you would like to know *what* Jesus is praying for you—keep reading!

C. Intercession

On this final night, Jesus did everything he could to bring the reality of his Father into the lives of his disciples **and** to bring his disciples into the presence of God. He was interceding, standing in the gap. In the first part of the evening, he spoke **to his disciples** about his Father (Jn 13–16). But as the evening ends, he does something far more important: he talks **to his Father** about his disciples (Jn 17).

D. Broader context

Jesus is facing **the cross!** His mission is to give his life as the Lamb of God so that the sins of the world might be taken away (Jn 1:29). No one *took* his life. He was no **victim**. He freely *gave* his life (Jn 10:11, 17–18). The cost was so great that Jesus

¹ Apparently Jesus prayed this prayer in John 17 out loud so that others could hear him! See other occasions when he did something similar (Jn 11:41–41; 12:27–28; Mt 11:25–26; Lk 11:iff. etc.).

² *Peri* means "around." *Chorein* (the origin of our word choreography) means "to make room."

paused. Was there no other way? Though John 17 reveals a **confident** Jesus, other prayers reveal the inner turmoil that preceded this final prayer.

1. The synoptic Gospels tell of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane when he asked the Father to "let this cup pass." "Not **my will**, but yours be done" (Mt 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk 22:40–46).
2. Earlier in John's Gospel Jesus had prayed: "Now is my soul **troubled**, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (Jn 12:27–28).

II. John 17:1–26

| Jesus prays for himself | Jesus prays for his disciples | Jesus prays for future believers |
|---|--|---|
| The hour has come and I've completed the work you sent me to do | I've cared for the disciples you entrusted to me (only Judas is lost). I don't ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from evil. | May all future believers be perfectly one—even as we are one so that the world may believe that you sent me |
| THEREFORE Glorify me so that I can glorify you! Jn 17:1–5 | THEREFORE Sanctify them in the truth! Jn 17:6–19 | THEREFORE I give them the glory that you gave to me! Jn 17:20–26 |

Notes on the text:

1. The prayer "Glorify me" (Jn 17:1, 5) is not **selfish** if the intent is to use that glory to glorify God! Jesus knows that he can glorify the Father *only if* he remains strong and faithful for the mission before him (the cross). See how the psalmist prayed:

*May God be gracious to us and **bless us**
and make his face to shine upon us,
[so] that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples **praise you!** (Psalm 67:1–3)*

Illustration: Before takeoff, flight attendants explain that in an emergency, oxygen masks will descend from the ceiling. If an adult is sitting with a child, please put *your* mask on **first**, *then* place the mask on the child. *Is that selfish?*

2. Twice Jesus speaks of his **pre-existence** (Jn 17:5, 24; see Jn 8:58). Though Jesus, son of Mary, **became** a human person 2,000 years ago, Christ, the son of God, **is** from all eternity. The miracle of Christmas is not that the Son of God came into existence but that the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14)!
3. Notice how Jesus defines "eternal life." "This is eternal life, that they **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). Eternal life is not what happens when we die. It speaks more of a **quality** of life rather than quantity. Knowledge of God is more than knowledge *about* him. It is to know him intimately, personally, relationship, *perichoretically* (see Jer 9:23–24).

III. Jesus' prayer for his disciples

To learn what Jesus prays for the 11 disciples who were with him that evening is to learn what he prays **now** at the right hand of his Father for all disciples everywhere—**for you**.

A. Jesus prays for their **preservation** (Jn 17:6–16).

*Holy Father, **keep** them in your name While I was with them, I kept them in your name I have **guarded** them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you **keep** them from the evil one. (John 17:11–12, 15)*

1. Jesus has a deep and accurate insight into two overwhelming realities. First, he knows how **dangerous** the world is for Christians. Not only is it full of temptations and false doctrines but it has a passionate **hatred** for Christians.

Let's pause and discuss this. Why, oh why, did the world crucify a man who went about doing good? Why does the world detest people who emphasize love, good deeds, and worship? Though the world might look in awe on a Mother Teresa, Jesus says that, in reality, it hates her and her ilk. But why?

2. Secondly, Jesus has a profound awareness of how his disciples are **unstable**, fickle, lukewarm, and full of **doubts** and carnal ambitions. They are lazy, hazy, and crazy! Thomas has doubts. James and John have anger issues. Peter is about to deny that he even knows Jesus. They are all going to desert him and flee. But most troubling of all, Judas (the son of destruction) is in the process of betraying him.
3. So Jesus prays (like a parent sending their child off to **first grade**) for their preservation. "O God, don't let them be eaten alive! Don't let them do something stupid! Don't let them fail! Protect them! Keep them in your tender care! Don't let them be lost!" Jesus prayed that prayer for *you* this morning!
4. Let's talk theology. Jesus **chose** his disciples and yet one of them proved a failure. As the "son of destruction," Judas was lost (cf. Acts 1:25; 2 Thess 2:3). Shouldn't our election guarantee our **security**? Why does Jesus pray that his disciples won't fall if, in fact, he believed they were secure (see Jn 10:28–30)? What kind of doctrinal position did Jesus hold on the security of the believer?
5. Apparently, Jesus considered it a real **possibility** that his chosen followers could fall away. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus prayed: "Father, keep them—although I know it's doctrinally impossible for them to fall from grace." I find Jesus' prayer both comforting and troubling:
 - On the one hand, it is profoundly reassuring to know that Jesus is praying for me!
 - On the other hand, he prays in the awareness that the possibility of my falling from grace is a real one.
6. Though we may want to debate the doctrine of perseverance, we all recognize the potential of apostasy that resides **in our own hearts**. Even as every marriage (though founded on irrevocable vows!) should be alert to the possibility of **divorce**, so backsliding is not just a theoretical abstraction but a real potential in every human heart. The third verse of "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" says it well.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for thy courts above. (Robert Robinson, 1758)*

B. Jesus prays for their **sanctification** (Jn 17:17–19).

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate [sanctify] myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:17–19)

1. The word “sanctify” has two basic meanings:

- To **set apart**, consecrate something or someone for the Lord’s purposes.
- To **make holy**, clean, unstained by the pollutions of this world.

For example, pots and pans were “sanctified” in the Temple. It didn’t mean these pots were better than others but rather that they were devoted uniquely to the Lord for his divine purposes. Jesus is praying that his disciples will be set apart and cleansed so that they can be **wholly devoted** to God and his purposes in the world. This is preeminently the ministry of the **Holy** Spirit (the sanctifying Spirit).

2. Notice that Jesus’ prayer is for those who have already left everything to follow him. These are people who have believed in him and are doing their best to obey his commandments. They have been chosen and called as members of God’s family. And yet something is **missing!** So Jesus prays.
3. The verb tense is important. When Jesus says “I sanctify myself” (Jn 17:19), he uses the present tense (“I keep on sanctifying myself.”) But when he prays, “Sanctify them...” (Jn 17:17), he uses the aorist imperative, signaling a decisive, **once-for-all** kind of event. In other words, Jesus is not praying: “Father, these men already belong to you so I pray you will help them **grow** so that they become more and more holy, like you.” No! He is rather praying, “Father, bring these men to a place where they have a work of your grace done in their hearts that is so definitive and decisive that they know they have been cleansed and set apart for you alone!”

C. Jesus prays for the **unification** (Jn 17:20–26).

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, **just as** you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, **so that** the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20–21)*

1. Jesus expands his prayer to include the entire **history** of the church, reaching to us today. While most world religions have an ethnic/national flavor (Hindu is for Indians, Islam is for Arab peoples, Shinto is for Japanese, Confucianism is for Chinese, etc.) the gospel is for **all peoples**. Beginning with the 11 disciples in front of him, Jesus envisions a body of believers of incredible **diversity**: personality types, worship styles, temperaments, political persuasions, economic distinctions, educational levels, languages, ethnicities, age-groups, etc. Unity? Are you kidding?
2. Jesus is praying for unity, not **uniformity**. An orchestra of bassoons all playing in unison the same note would be mildly interesting. But imagine

80 men and women playing *different* instruments and playing *harmonies* all *in sync* with the conductor—there you have a picture of the people of God.

3. The unity Jesus prays for is not one of **organizational mergers** (like that promoted by the World Council of Churches). Jesus prays for a unity modeled after the Trinity! This is **organic** and spiritual, not organizational and political. It is grounded in *perichoretic* love (agape) not the lowest common denominator of what we can all agree to.
4. Note especially **the purpose** Jesus prays for unity. Jesus is not interested in unity for unity's sake. Rather he is praying for unity for the sake of the evangelization of the world! When the church is one, like God is one, then the world will believe in Jesus! A divided church simply cannot achieve the mission of God in the world.

IV. Two Conclusions

- A. Allow Jesus' prayer to be answered in your life.

Jesus prays for us precisely because he knows that without his prayers we will crash and burn. Tonight, you are invited to listen as the Second Person of the Trinity himself prays for you:

- *Preservation*. Are you falling? Is your heart lukewarm? Is the world, the flesh, and the devil causing you to wander?
- *Sanctification*. Is there impurity in your life? Is your commitment partial? Where are you not walking in truth?
- *Unification*. Are there members of the body of Christ with whom you have a broken relationship?

- B. Use Jesus' prayer as a model for how to intercede for others.

When the Spirit of God places the name on your heart of someone who is not where they ought to be spiritually, then use Jesus' prayer as an example of how you can intercede for them.

Once in Royal David's City

By Cecil Francis Alexander (1848)

*Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.*

*He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Savior holy.*

*Jesus is our childhood's pattern;
Day by day, like us He grew;
He was little, weak and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us He knew;
And He feeleth for our sadness,
And He shareth in our gladness.*

*And our eyes at last shall see Him,
Through His own redeeming love;
For that Child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above,
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

WHODUNIT?

John 18:1–19:16

I. Introduction

- A. Detective stories in which the readers have access to same clues as the protagonist are called *whodunits*. In homicide cases, readers are expected to sift through the evidence to identify the killer. Tonight, your mission is to examine carefully the clues we have been given and determine who is responsible for **the murder of God**.
- B. Betrayed by a friend, abandoned by his disciples, abused by religious leaders, turned on by a fickle crowd, and unjustly condemned by a Roman court, the crucifixion of Jesus is the most famous **perversion of justice** in history! But who is to blame? Who should be held responsible? Whodunit?
- C. Before beginning our search for the murderer, let's survey the two chapters in John devoted to Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, and death (chapters 18–19). We typically refer to this as Jesus' **passion**.

II. Behold, Your King! (John 18–19). See John 19:14.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| The king is betrayed and arrested. Who do you seek? Jn 18:1–11 | The king is denied and rejected. Jewish trial Jn 18:12–27 | The king is condemned and tortured. Roman trial Jn 18:28–19:16 | The king is crucified and buried. It is finished! Jn 19:17–42 |
|--|---|--|---|

Read John 18:1–19:16 and notice the following:

- A. Though he is betrayed, slandered, abused, and killed, Jesus is no **victim**. It is a gross misreading of the story to say, "Poor Jesus, they trapped him and took his life. It shouldn't have ended this way." No! John highlights the regal splendor of Jesus. He is **in control** through it all. No one *took* his life; he *gave* his life!
 1. The soldiers¹ who came to arrest Jesus anticipated he would try to hide, fight, or run; but they found him calm and prepared to **turn himself in** (Jn 18:1–11). "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions² of angels?" (Mt 26:53).
 2. At the moment of Jesus death (Jn 19:30), he cries out in **triumph**, "It is finished!" Then "he bowed his head and **gave up** his spirit". No one *took* his life... he offered it... in royal command of the situation to the very end.
 3. Jesus was not a helpless victim caught in someone's evil trap. He had emphasized this point earlier when he said:

*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one **takes it** from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have **authority** to lay it down, and I have authority to*

¹ John mentions "a band of soldiers" (Jn 18:3). Technically, this was a "cohort," normally 600 soldiers, one tenth of a legion. Probably, only a portion of this number was sent to arrest Jesus (several hundred?).

² A "legion" was a military term to describe a fighting unit of 6,000 soldiers. Thus, Jesus is talking about 72,000 angelic warriors (armed and dangerous!).

take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:17–18)

B. Note the importance of the two trials.

1. The **Jewish** trial (Jn 18:12–14, 19–24). Mark gives the clearest statement about this. The high priest asks, “Are you the Christ, the Son of Blessed?” Jesus responds, “**I am**, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mk 14:61–62). Jesus is not condemned for anything he *did* but rather for who he claimed to *be*. This was **blasphemy** in the eyes of the Jews.

The problem: Though Jesus deserves death (in Jewish eyes), the Jews have no authority to execute someone, and the Roman courts do not regard blasphemy as a capital offense. What to do? The Jews decide to tell Pilate that Jesus is guilty of **insurrection** (he claims to be a king). This is not true, of course.

Then the whole company of them [the Sanhedrin] arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” (Luke 23:1–2)

2. The **Roman** trial (Jn 18:28–19:16). Though Jesus admits he is a king, Pilate knows he is not an insurrectionist or a danger to Rome. However, he goes along with this pretense and charges Jesus with **treason** (Caesar alone is king). Three times Pilate says, “I find no guilt in him” (Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6) and tries every tactic he can to release him (Barabbas, flogging, washing his hands, etc.). Finally, he agrees to have Jesus killed to protect his reputation in Rome.

Conclusion: The *Jewish trial* saw the issue clearly (Jesus’ identity) and made a conscious choice to reject who Jesus claimed to be. The *Roman trial* never understood the real issue and was a travesty of justice. Which court committed the greater injustice? Speaking to Pilate, Jesus said, “He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin” (Jn 19:11). Pilate is only a wimp and a coward. This is serious and will send a soul to hell (see Rv 21:8). But the Jewish leaders are the real sinners; they have chosen willful **unbelief**!

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is **condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people **loved the darkness** rather than the light because their works were evil. (John 3:18–19)*

C. John delights in **irony** and employs this literary device³ powerfully in this passage. Though each of the following points is rich in spiritual lessons, we will briefly mention only some of the richness that is found in this amazing Scripture.

1. Notice how this passage opens and closes: Jesus is arrested and then buried in a **garden** (Jn 18:1; 19:41). Obviously, this detail is important for John and he underscores its importance for us, the readers. Spiritual lessons:

- _____.
- _____.

³ Irony is the literary use of satire, humor, and paradox to make a point by showing the ridiculous contradiction of two realities. What is expressed and visible is the exact opposite of the reality. This makes for great preaching!

- _____.
- 2. The soldiers who come to arrest Jesus need **torches** to find the Light of the world (see Jn 8:12 and 18:3). Spiritual lessons:
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
- 3. During his arrest, twice Jesus majestically says, “I am” (Jn 18:4–8). Later that evening, twice Peter wimpishly says “**I am not**” (Jn 18:17, 25). Spiritual lessons:
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
- 4. Peter is so **courageous** that he attacks hundreds of professional soldiers alone armed only with a knife. Yet an hour later, he **cowardly** crumbles when a teenage girl asks him if he is a friend of Jesus (Jn 18:10–11, 15–18, 25–27). Spiritual lessons:
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
- 5. Concerned about ritual **purity**, the religious leaders refuse to enter Pilate’s house lest they disobey God’s law (Jn 18:28). While perverting justice and murdering the Lamb of God, they are meticulous about their observance of religious rituals so that they can eat the Passover lamb! Spiritual lessons:
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
- 6. Pilate offers the Jews a choice: Barabbas (thief, murderer, insurrectionist) or Jesus (Jn 18:39–40); which do you prefer? Beyond the obvious absurdity of preferring a terrorist back on the streets than Jesus, the irony is highlighted in Barabbas’ name. Bar-Abbas, in Aramaic literally means “Son of the Father.” The choice is between the son of the father or the Son of the Father!⁴ Spiritual lessons:
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.

III. So, whodunit?

To return to our original question: *who* should be held **ultimately** responsible for the murder of God’s Son? Whose fingerprints are on the weapon? Perhaps the major piece of evidence that serves as a clue for helping us answer this question is the Greek word

⁴ The drama of the choice is highlighted even further when one remembers that some ancient manuscripts of Matthew 27:16–17 have the full name of Barabbas as “Jesus Barabbas.” Thus, Pilate’s question could have been: “Do you want me to release Jesus, the son of the father or Jesus, the Son of the Father?”

paradidomi.⁵ The word can be translated as “deliver up,” “hand over,” or “betray.” Jesus himself used this word to describe his death: “The Son of Man is about to be *delivered* into the hands of men, and they will kill him...” (Mt 17:22–23; etc.). But whodunit?

A. We can, of course, blame **Judas**.

His role in this act of treachery is obvious and well known. When he *handed Jesus over* to the authorities, it was a cold-blooded, calculated, premeditated act of *betrayal*. Limiting our references to John’s Gospel, we see the word *paradidomi* used of his actions in 6:64, 71; 12:4; 13:2, 11, 21; and 18:2, 5.

His motive? Perhaps it was a mixture of **greed** and **frustrated expectations**. But Judas did not act alone. He had helpers.

B. The **Jewish leaders** were certainly complicit.

The Scribes, Pharisees, and members of the Sanhedrin worked together to *deliver* Jesus over to Pilate. Jesus did not conform to their **theological expectations** and he exposed their hypocrisy. So, they *handed him over* to be killed (see Jn 18:30, 35; 19:11).

Their motive? On the surface, they pretended to be zealous to protect biblical orthodoxy, but beneath this profession of piety lurked a more sinister motivation. Pilate recognized that “it was out of **envy** that they had *delivered him up*” (Mt 27:18).

C. **Pilate** and the Romans.

Roman leadership was also complicit in Jesus’ murder. After going through the motions of a trial, Pilate caved to Jewish demands and “*delivered him over to be crucified*” (Jn 19:16).

His motive? Though he knew Jesus was innocent, Pilate *handed Jesus over* because he could not stand up to the crowd, he dared not risk tarnishing his reputation with his superiors in Rome. He preferred to **please men** rather than to do what he knew was right.

Case closed? Have we found all the guilty parties? Like many murder mysteries, this whodunit has a surprise ending. Let’s keep following the evidence.

D. **Citizens of Jerusalem**.

Several weeks after Jesus’ death, Peter stood in the Temple precincts of Jerusalem and addressed a large crowd, making a startling accusation:

The God of Abraham... Isaac... Jacob... glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over [paradidomi] and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. (Acts 3:13–15)

What audacity! Though some of his listeners might have been in the shouting crowds of Passion Week, most were likely minding their own business trying to steer clear of trouble. Us? Guilty of killing the Righteous One? And yet, it’s true. Not only the citizens of Jerusalem, but all of us are complicit! When we willfully sin, we crucify “once again the Son of God and hold him up to contempt” (Heb 6:6). Before understanding that Jesus died on the cross **for us**, we must understand that Jesus

⁵ See John Stott’s excellent book *The Cross of Christ*, especially chapter 2, “Why Did Christ Die?” (51–65).

died **because of us**. There is blood on our hands! German Pietist Johann Heermann (1630) stated this truth in his hymn “Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended”:

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee!
‘Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
I crucified thee.*

Ok, we’ve solved the mystery of Jesus’ death. Right? Not so fast.

E. The one ultimately responsible!

Are you sitting down? To follow the evidence where it leads, the word *paradidomi* leads us to one final suspect—actually two. Long before any of the other murderers dreamed of their foul deed, there was someone else, quietly at work preparing to *deliver* God’s own Son over to death:

1. **Jesus himself.**

No one *took* Jesus’ life; he freely offered it (Jn 10:17–18; 19:30; Mt 26:53–54). Paul underscores this truth when he speaks of Jesus as the one “who loved me and *gave himself* [*paradidomi*] for me” (Gal 2:20). But Jesus was not acting alone. His own Father was intimately involved. In fact, it is the Father who is **ultimately** responsible for Jesus’ death!

2. **God the Father.**

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up [*paradidomi*] for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32)*

Ultimately, it wasn’t the greed of Judas, the unbelief of the Pharisees, the cowardice of Pilate, or the fickleness of the people that delivered Jesus over to death. Rather it was the fathomless love of God. The cross reveals two great mysteries:

- The depth and perversity of **my sin**.
- The immensity of **God’s love**.

It wasn’t the nails that held Jesus to the cross. It was his love!

*Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see,
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart, with tears, two wonders I confess:
The wonders of redeeming love,
And my unworthiness.⁶*

⁶ “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” (1868) by Elizabeth C. Clephane.

He Brought Me Out

Henry J. Zelle (1898)

*My heart was distressed 'neath Jehovah's dread frown,
And low in the pit where my sins dragged me down;
I cried to the Lord from the deep miry clay,
Who tenderly brought me out to golden day.*

Refrain:

*He brought me out of the miry clay,
He set my feet on the Rock to stay;
He puts a song in my soul today,
A song of praise, hallelujah!*

*He placed me upon the strong Rock by His side,
My steps were established and here I'll abide;
No danger of falling while here I remain,
But stand by His grace until the crown I gain.*

*He gave me a song, 'twas a new song of praise;
By day and by night its sweet notes I will raise;
My heart's overflowing, I'm happy and free;
I'll praise my Redeemer, Who has rescued me.*

*I'll tell of the pit, with its gloom and despair,
I'll praise the dear Father, who answered my prayer;
I'll sing my new song, the glad story of love,
Then join in the chorus with the saints above.*



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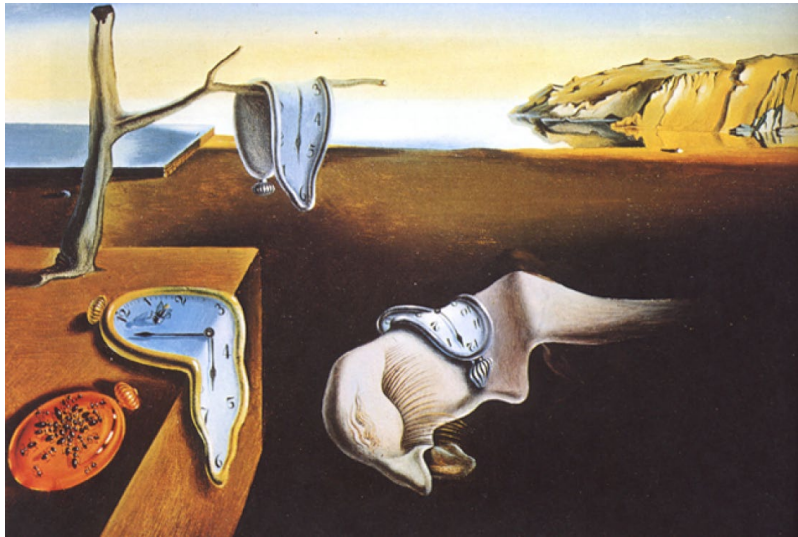
The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER¹

John 19:17–42

I. But What Does It Mean?

A. Salvador Dalí, in 1931, painted one of his most famous works of art: melted watches (or clocks) in a desert. Critics agree that this is a masterpiece. But the question remains: *What does it mean?*



B. Interpretation (hermeneutics) of a great work of art is not always easy and often becomes a matter of

subjectivity (what it means *to me*). What do *you* think the painting means? Possible clues might be:

- The painting belongs to a school of art called *surrealism* (known for illogical scenes and shocking juxtapositions that portray the fluid boundary between dreams and reality, giving freedom of expression to the unconscious).
- Dalí named the painting “The Persistence of Memory.”
- Some think the painting is an attempt to express visually Einstein’s theory of relativity.

C. The only way to have an **authoritative** interpretation of this painting is to ask Salvador himself to explain what it means.²

D. The death of the Son of God on a cross is the greatest single event in the Bible: it is God’s **masterpiece**. It is not limited to a few proof-texts, but is the controlling theme of all the Law and all the Prophets. The cross is God’s finest hour; the defining moment in Biblical revelation (see Lk 24:25–27; Acts 3:18; 17:2–3; 26:22–23). The cross is the whole point of His-story; it is **the crux of the matter!** But what does it *mean*?

E. All great “works of art” can be appreciated as they are. There is beauty and truth conveyed that is independent of interpretation. But the danger of **misunderstanding** is always present and so the need for an authoritative interpretation is obvious. When it comes to the cross of Christ, our **salvation** depends on getting the meaning correct.

¹ *Crux* is the Latin word for cross. “The crux of the matter” refers to what is central, essential, and the critical point of an issue. Regardless of the origin of this interesting phrase, it is a gospel truth to assert that the crux of the matter is the matter of the crux!

² Interestingly, when asked whether his painting was an attempt to portray Einstein’s theory of relativity, Dalí replied that the idea of soft watches was inspired by a surrealist perception of Camembert cheese melting in the sun!

- F. Some flawed and/or partial attempts to interpret the cross include the following:
1. The Messiah (God's anointed), by definition, could *not* end like this. Therefore, either the cross must be **erased** from the narrative (as in the gnostic gospels) or the one crucified was someone other than Jesus (as in the Koran). Even the Old Testament is unequivocal about this: "anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's **curse**" (Dt 21:23 NIV).
 2. Some regard the idea that our sins were placed on a first-century Jew as a nightmarish fantasy and see the cross as a primordial type of cosmic **child abuse**; the Father beating his Son for something he didn't do.³ Such interpretations dismiss the cross from their religious beliefs.
 3. Many evangelicals see the cross as a "bridge" making it possible for sinners to **go to heaven when they die**. And yet the sermons in Acts *never* talk about the purpose of Jesus' death in these terms! Though this teaching is true, it is only a (small?) part of the reason Jesus died.

II. God's masterpiece: John 19:17–42.

Though our focus tonight is on **interpreting** the cross rather than analyzing the details, we need to begin by looking once again at God's masterpiece. Before asking what it means, let's just take a hushed moment to gaze in wonder at the picture before us. Note the following:

- A. Jesus is crucified as a **king**.
- In mockery he is arrayed in purple and crowned with thorns (Jn 19:2–3).
 - Pilate's final presentation of Jesus is with the words, "Behold, your King!" (Jn 19:14).
 - The formal inscription attached to the cross states boldly: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Jn 19:19–22).
- B. Throughout the narrative, we are reminded how these events have been foretold by the prophets (see Jn 19:24, 28, 36, 37 as well as Jn 18:9, 32). The betrayal, crucifixion, casting lots for Jesus' tunic, Jesus' thirst, etc. are not random events but part of God's sovereign plan. The cross is not a sign of the **absence of God** but of his sovereign control!
- C. Though the account of Jesus' death is **realistic**, the emphasis is *not* on Jesus' suffering or on the brutality of the events. The text simply tells us what happened and does not attempt to enflame our emotions or sympathies.⁴
- D. The title "King of the Jews" was written in Latin (language of the rulers), Greek (the *lingua franca* of the empire) and Aramaic (a form of Hebrew locally spoken). What is happening to this Jewish rabbi on the edge of the Roman empire obviously must have implications for the **whole world!**
- E. John underscores the fact that Jesus was killed at **Passover** (Jn 18:28; 19:14, 31).⁵ It is possible that Jesus' crucifixion occurred at the very moment the lambs in the

³ We love to sing, "And on the cross, when Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied," but we must be careful to recognize that God's wrath was directed at the sin Jesus was carrying, not at Jesus himself!

⁴ We should take our cue from the Scriptures in preaching the cross. Those sermon and dramatic presentations of Jesus' death that emphasize the whip, nails, thorns, spear, blood, torment, etc. may succeed in arousing an emotional response but may fail when it comes to encouraging the kind of response that God really wants!

⁵ Note two additional allusions: A hyssop branch was used to lift a sponge of sour wine for Jesus to drink (Jn 19:28–29; see Ex 12:22) and none of Jesus' bones were broken (Jn 19:31–36; see Ex 12:46).

Temple were being slain. The choice of this feast day was **deliberate**. Not Yom Kippur, but Passover, would be “the hour” for Jesus’ ultimate work. What Jesus does on the cross parallels the liberation of Israel from Egypt! Jesus announces a new exodus and thus launches a **revolution!**⁶ “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7).

- F. Jesus’ final cry, “It is finished!” (Jn 19:30) was no whimper of defeat but rather a loud shout of **triumph!** He has accomplished the work the Father had sent him to do! (See Jn 4:34; 5:36; 17:4).
- G. The amount of spices used in Jesus’ burial (75 pounds) is enormous and very expensive (Jn 19:39). Indeed, it was a burial **fit for a king!** It is interesting to note that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, secret disciples of Jesus while he was alive, became bold when Jesus was dead. Still today, many Christians seem to show more reverence and devotion to a **dead Jesus** than to a living one!

III. But what does it mean?

Rather than resorting to subjective opinions (What do *you* think the cross means?), let’s simply look at John’s Gospel itself for how the Bible gives us the only fully authoritative interpretation of God’s masterpiece.

- A. The cross is an **altar** that deals with **sin**.

John’s Gospel began with the proclamation by John the Baptist that Jesus is “the **Lamb** of God that takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). He came as a sacrificial lamb to deal with the sin problem that separates us from God and brings our death. Jesus died as our Passover Lamb (Is 53:7; 1 Pt 1:19; Rv 5:6). If we remain “**under the blood**” the judgment of God will pass-over us.

- B. The cross offers a **substitute** to die in my place

Abraham explained to his son Isaac, “**God will provide** for himself the lamb for the offering” (Gn 22:8). When Caiaphas, the high priest, said “one man should die for the people” so that the whole nation will not perish (Jn 11:50–52), he preached a better sermon than he knew how to preach! He was proclaiming the truth of the doctrine of substitution. God will accept a substitute to pay the penalty for my sins. Barabbas is perhaps the most famous illustration of how this works (Jn 18:39–40; see Mt 27:15–23).

- C. The cross is a **throne** where Jesus reigns in **glory**.

Again and again, Jesus speaks of being “lifted up,” or exalted in majesty (see Jn 3:14–15; 8:28; 12:32–33). Though his disciples thought he was talking about his coronation, Jesus was actually talking about the cross—what was and is his throne! Jesus reigns in majesty and glory from his cross.

- D. The cross offers **life** and the only remedy for the poison of sin.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (Jn 3:14–15; see Nm 21:4–9). In the preceding context, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that this life comes when we are **born again** (Jn 3:1ff.).

- E. The cross redefines **power**.

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18ff.). The cross creates a revolution in how

⁶ See N. T. Wright’s excellent book *The Day the Revolution Began*.

power is understood and proves that strength is made perfect in **weakness** (2 Cor 12:8–10). The cross shows us that the power of **self-giving love** is stronger than all the distorted forms of self-serving power found in politics, economics, militarism, entertainment, etc. The power of love triumphs over the love of power.

How remarkable it is that the Western church so easily embraces self-discovery, self-fulfillment, and self-realization as though they were the heart of the “gospel”—as though Mark 8 didn’t exist! Yes, following Jesus will mean disappointment, failure, frustration, muddle, misunderstanding, pain, and sorrow—and those are just the “first-world problems.” Some Christians, even while I have been working on this book, have been beheaded for their faith; others have seen their homes bombed, their livelihoods taken away, their health ruined.... This is how the kingdom comes....⁷

F. The cross transforms the meaning of **suffering**.

The cross teaches us that God’s intention is not so much to save us **from** suffering but to save us **through** it! Salvation does not spare us from pain but teaches us how to transform our pain to resemble his! “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29). Our suffering, when rightly understood, can become, to some degree, **redemptive** for others. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions...” (Col 1:24).

G. The cross becomes the **model** for our lives and ministries.

Beware the danger of concluding that because Jesus suffered on the cross therefore we are delivered from suffering. Actually, just the opposite is true. John 12:24 announces a principle that is not just true for Jesus; it is true for all believers.⁸ “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertullian). All Christian living and especially all ministry is to be **cruciform**. The risen Jesus showed his disciples his nail-pierced hands and said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (Jn 20:20–21). Jesus gives his **Holy Spirit** to enable us to live such a life-giving life.

The gospel Jesus announced was not about getting in touch with your deepest feelings or accepting yourself as you really are. It was about taking up your cross and following him. That is tough, and it doesn’t stop being tough when you’ve done it for a year, or a decade, or a lifetime.⁹

IV. Closing Illustration

Father Damien (1840–1889), a Roman Catholic missionary¹⁰ from Belgium, went to Hawaii to minister on the island of Molokai, which had been set apart as a leper colony. After 11 years, he discovered he too had contracted leprosy when he was scalded by hot water yet felt no pain. He began his worship service with the words, “My fellow lepers.” Some have called him a “martyr of love.”

⁷ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 410.

⁸ “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24).

⁹ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 398.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict recognized him as a saint in 2009.

At the Cross

By Isaac Watts (1707)

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?*

*Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!*

*Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker died,
For man the creature's sin.*

*Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.*

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do.*

Refrain:

*At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

SIGNS OF LIFE

John 20:1–10

I. Introduction

A. Where were you on September 11, 2001?

How much can you remember of who you were with and what you were doing? Can you recall the conversations, your emotions, the weather, what you had for lunch? Epic moments in life **galvanize** our memory so that minute details remain with us forever. Just so with that Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead! The Gospel accounts are obviously the work of **eye-witnesses** to what happened that epic morning.

B. John 20:1–29.

| The Historical Fact The tomb is empty, and the body is missing | The Personal Experience The Living Lord appears | | |
|--|--|------------------|-------------|
| | To Mary | To the Disciples | To Thomas |
| Jn 20:1–10 | Jn 20:11–18 | Jn 20:19–23 | Jn 20:24–29 |

C. Read John 20:1–10 (brief commentary).

1. *The time.* “The first day of the week” (Jn 20:1).
 - a. John seems to be explaining the reason Christians worship on **Sunday**, “the Lord’s day” (see Jn 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rv 1:10). The **only** explanation for such a radical departure from Jewish practice (the fourth commandment) is that something of truly momentous significance must have happened!
 - b. John also seems to say that the resurrection of Jesus is the dawning a new era. This day marks the inauguration of a **New Creation!** The New Adam is leading into a new beginning and the curse is in the process of being **reversed**.
2. *The people.* Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John.¹
 - a. It is profoundly **shocking** that the first witness to the resurrection is Mary Magdalene.² Though in this account she seems to be alone, we know that other women were with her.³ That God would orchestrate the situation so that the most significant event in human history first would be revealed to a **woman** who had previously been **demon possessed** (Lk 8:2) is surely one of the most mind-boggling realities in the New Testament!

¹ With most evangelical scholarship, I assume that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) is John himself, the author of this Gospel.

² Indeed, by first-century standards, the prominence given to Mary Magdalene in the Gospels is scandalous! It is hard to imagine that anyone would have ever “invented” this. It must be rooted in historical fact. Perhaps John wants us to see Mary Magdalene’s role on Easter morning as a reversal of Eve’s role at the fall.

³ See the Easter accounts in the other Gospels and note Mary Magdalene’s use of “we” in this account (Jn 20:2).

- b. Peter and John race to the tomb. All they know is that **the body is missing**. John (probably younger) gets there first but stops at the entrance. Peter arrives soon after and dashes inside. Their attention is fixed on the grave clothes! John “saw and believed” (Jn 20:8) but we are not told exactly *what* he believed. All we know is that no one yet understood the Scriptures that said, “Jesus must rise from the dead”⁴ (Jn 20:9). The race to the tomb is a powerful **psychological** study of two personalities and how they respond to tragedy and hope. See the painting by Eugene Burnand (1898).



3. Other important details.
- a. *The stone* had been “taken away” from the tomb (Jn 20:1). John uses a verb we would not expect. It means something like “lifted up,” perhaps lifted out of its groove. This was odd! Perhaps it was caused by an earthquake (see Mt 28:2). Regardless, the stone had been moved in an **extraordinary** manner.
- b. *The grave clothes* (Jn 20:5–8).
John emphasizes the “linen cloths” and “face cloth” used to wrap Jesus for burial, probably somewhat like a mummy, wound with a long cloth (see Lazarus’ burial clothing in John 11:44). The **inexplicable** state of these garments brought John immediately to a new level of belief! If someone had taken the body, why would they have removed the clothing? The wrapped cloth appeared to be something like a **collapsed cocoon**. The head cloth was neatly folded and placed nearby. How oh how could the body have passed through the clothing? And how to account for the neatness and orderliness of the scene?

II. The linchpin.⁵

- A. The resurrection of Jesus is the linchpin of the Christian faith. If it is omitted or proven untrue, “the wheels come off.” Writing to Greek believers who believed in the doctrine of the **immortality of the soul** but were not quite sure what to do with the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, Paul emphasized the indispensable importance of Jesus’ **bodily** resurrection.

*And if Christ has not been raised, then our **preaching** is in vain and your **faith** is in vain.... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are*

⁴ It is worth noting that John does not say that the Scripture teaches that Jesus *would* rise from the dead but that he *must* rise. God cannot and will not tolerate the notion that Satan, sin, or death would have the last word. There is a divine necessity in raising things from the dead!

⁵ A linchpin is a locking pin or fastener, inserted crosswise in the end of an axle that prevents the wheel from slipping off. Metaphorically, a linchpin is something (or someone) who is so vital and essential that, if it went missing, the whole structure would fall apart.

*still **in your sins**.... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:14–19)*

Rudolph Bultmann, who worked hard to “demythologize” the New Testament, famously said that “if the bones of the dead Jesus were discovered tomorrow in a Palestinian tomb, all the essentials of Christianity would remain unchanged.” Really? Paul certainly would have strongly disagreed with such a claim. If an archeologist could prove that he had discovered the bones of Jesus of Nazareth in a tomb, the Christian faith would crumble like a house of cards! The gospel would be exposed as a **pious delusion** at best or a **malicious hoax** at worst.

B. The Biblical data refutes human explanations of what happened:

1. Jesus “went to heaven.” Though many today seem content with a vague promise of “going to heaven,” the Bible harbors no such **sentimental ambiguities**. When he ascended 40 days later (see Acts 1:9–11), Jesus did indeed “go to heaven” but that is called the **ascension**. Our topic is the resurrection, another matter entirely!
2. Someone **stole the body**. But who?
 - *The disciples?* From a psychological point of view, they were too shocked and depressed to pull off such a bold stunt. The Gospels emphasize that some disciples **doubted** the resurrection even *after* the event (Mt 28:17; Mk 16:11–14; Jn 20:24–29). And would they have been martyred for what they knew was a **fraud**?
 - *The authorities?* Why then did they seal the tomb and place a guard? And when the disciples began to preach the resurrection, why didn’t they just **produce the corpse**?
 - *Thieves?* But what would have been their **motive**? How did they get past the guard? And why take the body but leave the clothing? The orderliness of the tomb shows that this was not the work of grave robbers.
3. Jesus never really died, he only **swooned**. In the coolness of the tomb he revived. Really? Can anyone survive a crucifixion and that final spear thrust? How did he get out of the grave clothes (Lazarus couldn’t)? How did he move the stone?⁶ And how did a grotesque, mangled, and disfigured man inspire the disciples to believe that he was the Lord of life?
4. Jesus was raised **like Lazarus**. It is instructive to *compare* the two. Though we think of them both as “resurrections” the **contrast** could not be stronger:

| Lazarus | Jesus |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Needed help to roll away the stone | God did it |
| Needed help with grave clothes | God did it |
| He re-inhabited his old body | He received a glorified body |
| The reanimation of a corpse | The resurrection of the body |
| He died again | He lives forever |

⁶ It is worth noting that the stone was rolled away *not* so that Jesus could get out but so that the disciples could get in!

5. The disciples had a **vision** of Jesus. Maybe Jesus' followers imagined (hallucinated?) they saw Jesus. Wanting so badly to see him again, they had a "wish projection." But no one expected Jesus to rise from the dead. How could **500** people have the same hallucination at the same time (1 Cor 15:6)? And how to explain that on three occasions even Jesus' closest friends **did not recognize** him (Jn 20:14–15; 21:4; Lk 24:15–16).
 6. Jesus rose "**spiritually**". Some say that Jesus did not rise bodily; rather he rose into the preaching of the apostles! The real question, they say, is not has Jesus risen physically but has he risen **for you**? Such talk leads to irrationality and is psychobabble at its worst, confusing history with pious **sentimentality**.
 7. The disciples **made up** the story (conspiracy theory). But they did not **expect** Jesus to rise. And why would they have let Jesus' first appearance be to **women**? Why would they have insisted that many disciples continued to doubt even after the resurrection? Pascal said: "The apostles were either deceived or deceivers. Either supposition is difficult, for it is not possible to imagine that a man has risen from the dead."
- C. The facts, man, just the facts. Jesus' resurrection is not presented as a *philosophical proposition* to explain what happens after death or as a *mythical story* to inspire us. It is presented as a historical fact, something that happened in **time and space**. If it isn't true, our faith is **worthless**.
1. *Historical*. This is not a legend or myth. The people, the places, the dates, the events are all verifiable. If someone had had **a camera**, it could have been recorded.
 - "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were **eyewitnesses** of his majesty" (2 Pt 1:16).
 - "That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we looked upon and have **touched** with our hands, concerning the word of life... [this is what] we proclaim to you..." (1 Jn 1:1–3).
 2. *Bodily*. While Greeks promote the immortality of the soul, the gospel creates a revolution when it proclaims the resurrection of the body! But we must be careful in describing this new body, because it is of an order that has never been seen before!
 - On the one hand, it is very much like our current bodies. In fact, Jesus was so **normal** that Mary Magdalene mistook the Second Person of the Trinity for the gardener (Jn 10:15). There was no halo or luminous glow that made him stand out.

*As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw **a spirit**. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have **flesh and bones** as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here **to eat**?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. (Luke 24:36–42)*

- On the other hand, in his glorified body, Jesus could **travel** from one place to another (Jerusalem to Galilee, etc.) and could appear suddenly (vaporize?) in a room where the doors were locked (Jn 20:19; etc.). This body could ascend to heaven and will **live forever**.
3. This resurrection body of the glorified Jesus is the **first fruits** of the New Age. His body illustrates what **our bodies** will be like when the Kingdom of God is fully established on earth. Paul spoke of this new reality in 1 Corinthians 15:

*But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With **what kind of body** do they come?” You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen...*

*So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a **spiritual body**. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust (the first Adam), we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven (the last Adam)...*

*Behold! I tell you a **mystery**. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.... Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not **in vain**. (1 Corinthians 15:35–58)*

III. Not Home Yet

A. What about you? Do you believe?

John wrote his Gospel to lead us to **faith** (Jn 20:30–31). The resurrection of Jesus is the **linchpin**. John gives us enough evidence that faith becomes *possible*—but it does not make it *inevitable*. The **choice** is up to you!

*If you confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:9–10)*

B. And yet, there's more.

When John looked at the grave clothes, he believed! And yet his faith was still **incomplete**. He “saw and believed” and yet “did not understand” what it all meant. So, he “went back home” (Jn 20:8–10). The remainder of this chapter will show us what was missing in John’s “Easter faith.”

1. The risen Lord hasn't yet made an **appearance**. Next week, we will see how the risen Jesus appeared to Mary, to the disciples, and to Thomas (Jn 20: 11–29). Without a personal, face-to-face encounter, faith is little more than a theological conviction.

2. The disciples don't yet understand their mission, their purpose in life. Jesus will come and **commission** them to be agents of redemption in the world (Jn 20:20-21).
3. When Jesus comes, he shares the gift he's been preparing us for: the gift of the **Holy Spirit** (Jn 20:22-23).

Thomas was **absent** from church when Jesus appeared to the disciples, commissioned them, and gave them the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:24). His is an example *not* to follow! See you next week!

Thine Is the Glory

Edmond Budry (1904)

*Thine is the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry Thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where Thy body lay.*

Refrain:

*Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry Thou o'er death hast won.*

*Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb.
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let His church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
for the Lord now liveth; death hath lost its sting. [Refrain]*

*No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life!!
Life is nought without Thee; aid us in our strife;
make us more than conqu'rors, through Thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above. [Refrain]*



got life?

The Gospel of John

A Bible Study with Stan Key

AND HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS

John 20:11–29

I. Introduction

A. *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia, Ph.D.¹

Tonia, a woman (about 50 years of age) from our church in hospice care for terminal cancer, told of a Catholic nun reading this book to help her patients face death. It illustrates how **fuzzy** and **pagan** are our notions about what happens when we die; even in the church.

B. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by John.

While Buscaglia's sentimental **fantasy** is not more than a hopeful guess about the hereafter, John tells a story rooted in time and space that is **true**. Jesus died and then came back to tell us about it!

*We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a **forerunner** on our behalf, having become a high priest forever.... (Hebrews 6:19–20)*

II. Preaching the sermon I'm not going to preach.

John 20:11–29 tells of three appearances: to Mary (vv. 11–18), to the ten disciples (vv. 19–23), and to Thomas (vv. 24–29).² Tonight, our focus is on verses 19–23. But let's imagine what the study would have been if I had chosen to focus on either Mary or Thomas.

A. If our focus had been on *Mary* (Jn 20:11–18), I would preach on **the unrecognized Jesus**. How can God be present and we not know it (see Gn 28:16). How could Mary mistake God for the gardener? Mary wasn't the only one who failed to recognize the Lord; notably the disciples who went fishing (Jn 21:4) and the two on the Emmaus Road (Lk 24:16). It is one thing when unbelievers don't recognize God, but how to explain it when Jesus' **closest friends** don't recognize him? These Scriptures help us understand why we too may fail to recognize the living Lord in our midst.

1. We aren't looking for him. We have **zero expectation** of him showing up.
2. We have a **flawed theology** that defines what God would look and act like if, in fact, he did show up. Mother Theresa spoke of God's "distressing disguises."³
3. We are blinded by our **grief** (depression); tears make our vision blurry.

B. If our focus had been on *Thomas* (Jn 20:4–29), I would preach on **the psychology of unbelief**. Taking an apologetic approach, I would present rational explanations for Jesus' resurrection so that it becomes plausible. The problem wasn't that Thomas "could not" believe but that he "would not" (Jn 20:25). But he was an **honest doubter** and once his questions were answered he was on his knees, "My Lord, and

¹ Ithaca: Cornell University, 1982: see pages 13–19.

² It is remarkable that Jesus first appeared to a woman who had been demon possessed (Mary), to the group of people who had abandoned him, and to a doubter (Thomas). Really? Imagine if *you* had been Jesus' Public Relations Consultant. How would you have advised him in choosing your first resurrection appearances?

³ "Seeking the face of God in everything, everyone, all the time, and his hand in everything; this is what it means to be contemplative... Seeing and adoring the presence of Jesus, especially in the lowly appearance of bread and in the distressing disguise of the poor" (Mother Teresa).

my God!” (Jn 20:28). Using John’s Gospel, I’d outline the reasons people won’t believe:

1. *Philosophical* reasons. Like Pilate who doesn’t believe in **truth** (Jn 18:33–38).
2. *Intellectual* reasons. Like Thomas who needs **evidence** (Jn 20:24–28).
3. *Emotional* reasons. Like Mary and Martha who could not believe in a Savior who had **let their brother die** (Jn 11:20–27).
4. *Social* reasons. Those who let the **opinions of others** control their thinking will not be able to come to authentic faith (Jn 5:44; 12:42–43).
5. *Moral* reasons. Those who **love darkness** and refuse to give up their sins will never put their faith in Jesus (Jn 3:19–21).

III. The Great Commission according to John (Jn 20:19–23).

When Jesus appeared to his disciples, it wasn’t just to soothe their hurts and reassure their faith; it was to commission them and **send them out!** Though Jesus’ work on the cross was finished his mission was not! All four Gospels and the book of Acts record a moment when Jesus gave a “Great Commission,”⁴ but John’s account is truly unique.

A. The context of the commission.

1. Who are the **people** the Lord chooses to carry on his mission? What are their **circumstances**? It had been quite a week!
 - It began with a triumphal procession; Jesus entering Jerusalem as king.
 - Public opinion, at first favorable, went south.
 - In the Upper Room, Jesus had washed feet and spoken of love, abiding in the vine, the Comforter, and the dangers of worldliness.
 - Jesus had prayed for his disciples not to fall away and to remain united.
 - Judas betrayed Jesus.
 - Peter denied Jesus.
 - The Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus.
 - The Roman trial before Pilate was rigged.
 - Jesus was beaten and crucified; he died and was buried.
 - Now his tomb is empty and body missing. Mary claims she has seen him.
2. Imagine the emotions in the room that Sunday evening:
 - **Fear** (the doors were locked)
 - **Grief** (Mary)
 - **Confusion** (where’s the body?)
 - **Doubt** (Thomas, who happens to be absent!)
 - **Disillusionment** (“we had hoped that he was the one…” —Lk 24:21)
 - _____
 - _____
3. Imagine what the **conversations** must have been about around the table:
 - The meaning of Scripture in the light of all that happened
 - Confessing their sins to one another

⁴ Matthew 28:18–20 sends the disciples to “make disciples.” Mark 16:15–16 emphasizes “preach the gospel.” Luke 24:46–49 focuses on the proclamation of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Finally, Acts 1:8 sends the disciples into the world to “be witnesses.”

- Comfort and encouragement
 - _____
 - _____.
4. Perhaps the most important thing to notice is that they are **together!** Broken, messed up, and confused though they are, this is the group Jesus has chosen to change the world! (But Thomas was missing.)
 5. A few illustrations:
 - The Holy Club at Oxford (c. 1730): John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, etc.
 - The Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut (1700s). They defined a Christian as one who has “an inseparable friendship with the Lamb, the slaughtered Lamb.” They sent missionaries all over the world.
 - *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Harper & Row, 1954).

Conclusion A: No one finds God’s mission for their life without a **genuine community** of humble men and women who love Jesus and love one another.

B. The one who commissions.

1. But what does Jesus want? Why has he come? What are his intentions? Has he come to rebuke us? To condemn us? His opening greeting, repeated twice, is full of comfort and reassurance: “**Peace** be with you” (Jn 20:19, 21).
2. Our mission cannot be understood without a deep and **accurate** knowledge of the one who chose us, called us, and now is sending us (see Jn 15:16). Mission without knowledge of God is spreading **poison**.

When we speak of a call, we nearly always leave out the essential feature: the nature of the one who calls.... The call of God is not the echo of my nature, but expressive of God’s nature.⁵

3. Jesus “showed them his hands and side” (Jn 20:20). Note that his **scars** are not erased! The stigmata remain; even in his ascended glory. But why? And why does Jesus show them to his disciples? Three answers can be offered:
 - a. To **verify** for the disciples that this living Lord before them is the very same Jesus who was crucified three days ago.
 - b. The scars remind us of the **price paid** for our redemption. Throughout eternity we will worship the Lamb that was slain (cf. Rv 5:6, 12).
 - c. These wounds are, from now on, the primary evidence for recognizing the **Body of Christ!** The true church is known by its wounds.
4. An illustration. When attacked by “super apostles” (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11), Paul defended himself not by setting forth his theological diplomas, his conversion testimony, his spiritual experiences, his miracles, or the churches he had planted. He validated his apostolic commission by showing his “**scars**.”

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with

⁵ Chambers, *So Send I You*, 1288.

rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.... If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (2 Corinthians 11:23–30)

These are my credentials. Wanna show me yours? Any questions?

Conclusion B: To know our mission, we must know the one who sends us. His scars **define** his ministry—and ours!

C. The commission.

1. The outstretched, nail-pierced hands are the backdrop for the commission: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Don’t overlook the word “**as**.” Jesus is sending us into the world in the same manner the Father sent him into the world.
2. So, how did the Father send the Son?
 - a. A *secondary level* answer, might say that the Father sent the Son to **preach, teach** and **heal**—to minister to the whole person (see Mt 4:23; 9:35; etc.). So, we now are sent to do similar kinds of ministries. But why did Jesus show them his hands?
 - b. A *deeper* response is this: The Father sent the Son to **lay down his life** for others (Jn 3:16; etc.), so now the Son is sending us to do the same thing. Our mission is to lay down our lives (like **martyrs**) for others; to practice self-giving love (*agape*) every day to everyone.

It will not be enough for the church to place a cross on the top of its buildings or in the center of its altars or on the robes of its clergy. The marks of the cross will have to be recognizable also in the lives of its members if the church is to be the authentic presence of the kingdom. I find it remarkable that this aspect of the biblical teaching has been so much neglected in the missiology of the past two hundred years, and that missions have been seen by contrast—in triumphalistic terms.⁶

3. This ministry will be especially focused on dealing with the **sin problem** that resides in the heart and life of every human being. “If you forgive the sins of any...” (Jn 20:23). While some see these words as the basis for sacramentalism and liturgical formulas, the best way to understand them is to see that Jesus is giving to all his disciples the power to help others experience the forgiveness that has **already** been accomplished; if they only believe.

Conclusion C: Our witness and ministry to the world is **invalidated** when we preach the cross without living the cross (self-giving love). We participate in his mission to the same extent that we participate in his **passion** (see Col 1:24).

⁶ Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 23.

- D. The empowerment for the commission.
1. Now that we understand our mission, what do you say? Perhaps the best response is this: that's **impossible!** Precisely!
 2. This is why Jesus gives the **Holy Spirit**. Often compared to wind and breath, the Spirit is indispensable to this kind of mission. In breathing on them, Jesus is reminding his disciples of two historical precedents: the creation of Adam from dirt (Gn 2:7), and the revival of dry bones (Ez 37:1–10).
 3. It seems that this initial gift of the Holy Spirit was mainly anticipatory of what was soon to happen at **Pentecost** (Acts 2). Note that in John 20 the disciples hardly went out to change the world. In fact, most them went **fishing** (Jn 21).

Conclusion D: Anyone who ministers without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit is **not** doing the ministry God sent us to do. If we can do our ministry in our own strength, then we are doing *our* ministry, not his.

Arise, My Soul, Arise!

Charles Wesley (1742)

*Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears:
Before the throne my surety stands,
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.*

*He ever lives above, for me to intercede;
His all redeeming love, His precious blood, to plead:
His blood atoned for all our race,
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

*Five bleeding wounds He bears; received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me:
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"*

*The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away, the presence of His Son;
His Spirit answers to the blood,
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.*

*My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear:
With confidence I now draw nigh,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

P.S. FOLLOW ME!

John 21:1–25

- I. Why this chapter?
 - A. Everyone agrees that chapter 20 is a **natural ending** for John's Gospel. Jesus has completed the work the Father sent him to do (giving his life as an offering for sin and rising from the dead) and he has commissioned his disciples to carry on the mission he began (Jn 20:19–23). John 20:30–31 provides a strong conclusion and application.
 - B. So why chapter 21? Liberal textual **critics** often claim it was written by another author years after John's death to clear up some problems caused by the apostle's demise. They claim it is anticlimactic and perhaps reflects another version of the miracle recorded in Luke 5:1–11. Some see a political agenda in the early church where the "Peter party" and the "John party" were struggling against each other for supremacy.
 - C. Yet every known manuscript of John's Gospel includes chapter 21 and there is no reason to believe it is not the work of the same author who penned the first 20 chapters. But why? Why did John add this postscript (appendix, epilogue, final comment)? This is a very **good question** and answering it will help us **interpret** its meaning.
 - D. I believe John added this chapter for several reasons. Primarily, he wants to help disciples everywhere (like us) to discover realistic and practical ways to **apply the gospel** we say we believe. Chapter 21 helps us to understand that:
 1. Believing the gospel and even receiving the Holy Spirit (Chapter 20) does not **automatically** make us missionaries and world changers. Chapter 21 tells us that after the first disciples received their commission, rather than going out to change the world, they went **fishing!**
 2. There are at least three areas where the disciples (like us!) tend to struggle in applying the gospel to our personal lives:
 - a. **Discouragement** in believing that our lives really can make a difference. The problems "out there" are just too big and my life is just too small and insignificant. Me? Make a difference? I think I'll just go fishing.
 - b. Misplaced **priorities**. Even when I do give my all to be a mission-minded disciple and work to change my world, I often major on minors and emphasize that which is secondary. How can I be sure I'm doing the right thing?
 - c. **Comparison** with others. When I look at other disciples around me, they often seem to have it all together and to be leading dynamic ministries. Why does God seem to bless them more than me?
 3. Though John 21 applies to all disciples, it is especially appropriate for men and women **in ministry**. John concludes his Gospel by giving a word of encouragement to those who are called to fish for men and care for sheep.

II. Brief Commentary on John 21. There are three sections.

A. Jesus appears to seven disciples who have gone fishing (Jn 21:1–14).

1. The miracle catch of fish is the final **sign** in John’s Gospel (see Jn 20:30–31). A sign points beyond itself. Don’t just look *at* it, look **through** it. This sign points to what ministry is going to look like for the disciples.
2. What did Peter mean when he said, “I’m going fishing” (Jn 21:3). Was he returning to his old profession? Was he bored and restless? Was he frustrated and depressed and so went back to his “sweet spot”? Whatever his motivation, he was *not* fulfilling the commission he had been given by Jesus! While this may not have been sinful, it did reflect **confusion** about what to do next.
3. “That night they caught nothing” (Jn 21:3). Few things are more frustrating than failing at doing what you do best! In the Upper Room, Jesus had told the disciples, “Apart from me you **can do nothing**” (Jn 15:5). Peter was discovering that going back to what he was before was impossible! Without even realizing it, he had “crossed the Rubicon”; **no turning back!** (See Paul’s similar discovery in Phil 3:13–15).
4. A stranger on the shore offers advice to professional fisherman. “Cast the net on the right side of the boat” (Jn 21:6). When the men obey, they experience a **miraculous catch** of 153 large fish (Jn 21:11).¹ The fishermen were astounded that though the catch was so great the net “was not torn” (*schizo*, the root of our English word schism).
5. John is the first **to recognize** Jesus (“It is the Lord,” verse 7), but Peter is the first **to act** (“he threw himself into the sea,” verse 7). This is consistent with both of their personalities (see Jn 20:3–9).
6. Why did Peter “put on his outer garment” before swimming to shore (Jn 21:7)? The text probably describes some sort of **tucking** his robe into his waist band before jumping in the water. This would have made swimming possible and given him something to wear in the presence of Jesus.²
7. Jesus had prepared “a charcoal fire” (Jn 21:9). The choice of words can’t be accidental. This was the word used in John 18:18 of the fire where people were warming themselves when Peter denied Jesus three times. The sight of the fire must have been a **humbling reminder** to Peter of his greatest failure.

B. Peter is reinstated as the chief shepherd (Jn 21:15–19).

1. “Do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). There are three possible meanings:
 - a. Do you love me *more than these other disciples love me?* (Is your level of spirituality really greater than theirs?)
 - b. Do you love me *more than you love your friends?* (Is your goal to please me above all else or are you still a people pleaser?)

¹ Though many have wanted to find a spiritual or symbolic value in the number 153, the probable meaning is simply this: fisherman have always loved to count their fish!

² An intriguing, though improbable, interpretation is that Peter believed he should be able to walk on water if indeed it was the risen Jesus on the beach. Now, perhaps he could succeed where he had failed in his earlier effort (see Mt 14:28–30). In putting on his outer garment, he was just getting dressed to take a walk!

- c. Do you love me *more than this fishing equipment* (boat, tackle, fish, etc.)? (Does your love for me take priority over your professional career and security?)

My preference is for the first option because of Peter's longstanding struggle with a **competitive spirit**, always comparing his spirituality to others' in an ongoing game of spiritual one-up-manship. He had boasted that he was stronger and better at following Jesus than anyone else (see Mt 26:33 and Lk 22:24). So now, Jesus exposes the ugly reality of what a pompous, self-serving coward he really is. Yet in the same moment Jesus reinstates him a Chief Under-Shepherd.

2. Notice that Jesus calls Peter "**Simon**" rather than the name he had given him ("Peter" or "Rock"—see Jn 1:42). In reminding him of his past, Jesus was at the same time liberating him from it!
3. The fact that Jesus asked Peter **three times** about his love is surely a veiled allusion to the fact that Peter had denied Jesus three times. The three-fold failure is matched by a three-fold **recommissioning!** "If Peter has a primacy among the apostles, it is because he has primacy as a forgiven sinner."³
4. Much has been made of the fact that John uses two different terms for love in this dialogue with Peter. In the first two questions, Jesus asks if Peter loves (*agapao*) him and Peter responds that he loves (*phileo*) him. In the third question, Jesus uses Peter's word (*phileo*) and Peter responds as he had the first two times. Those who insist that the words have different meanings believe that Jesus has somehow **lowered** his requirement for love to match what Peter was able to offer.

I once took a similar approach, but now I believe the two words, at least as they are used here, are basically **synonyms** and John uses them out of his love for stylistic variation (he also uses "sheep/lambs," "feed/tend," "Simon/Peter" and has different words for "fish."). Elsewhere, he uses *agapao* and *phileo* interchangeably. Jesus' three questions, therefore, are examining the **reality** of Peter's love, not its **quality!** As Jesus anticipates leaving the church in the hands of Peter and other human leaders, he does not raise questions concerning their training or gifting. The one thing he wants to determine is the reality of their love and their willingness to do anything for the well-being of the sheep.

5. In telling Peter that when he is old he will stretch out his hands and be carried to a place "you do not want to go" (Jn 21:18–19), Jesus is prophesying Peter's future **martyrdom**. According to tradition, he was crucified upside down.
- C. A question about John (Jn 21:20–23).
1. In learning of his coming martyrdom, Peter looks around for someone to **compare** himself with. Seeing John, he says to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" (Jn 21:21). Rather than focusing on his own call to "follow Jesus" (Jn 21:19, 22), Peter is once again in some sort of **competition** with those around him. Jesus' response is a stinging rebuke. In saying "What is that to you?" (Jn 21:22), Jesus is telling Peter to **mind his own business!**

³ Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, 279.

2. Apparently, this conversation had caused some in the early church to draw the conclusion that Jesus would return in glory **before** John's death. Thus, John's death could cause a crisis of faith. However, this is *not* what Jesus had said!

III. Three parting essentials.

A. The big *promise* (Jn 21:1–14)—your life will **make a difference!**

The world is big and the opposition is fierce and we who follow Christ are just a humble few with minimal resources, yet our lives can have a huge impact on the world and on human history—if we **follow Jesus** and **do what he says** (“Cast the net on the right side of the boat”). When we do, the results are beyond our wildest dreams!

Application #1—As I follow Jesus and do what he says, **my life matters!**

B. The essential *priority* (Jn 21:15–19)—**love Jesus** and **care for his sheep!**

1. Especially for those in full-time ministry, it is easy to get so caught up in the multitude of tasks and demands that we lose sight of the **main thing**. Jesus called Peter back to a two-fold essential priority:
 - a. *Love Jesus*. This is the great commandment! When we love Jesus, we will automatically do what he wants (see Jn 14:15). Illustration: Tevia in *Fiddler on the Roof*.
 - b. *Care for and feed his sheep*. Those in ministry need frequent reminders that the flock they pastor does not belong to them (or the bishop!) but to Jesus. One day, they will **give an account** to the Chief Shepherd for how they have cared for his flock. Peter's later life attests that he responded well to Jesus' thrice-repeated command (see 1 Pet 5:1–4).

Application #2—Are Jesus' priorities my priorities?

2. It is interesting how Jesus mixes his metaphors: first he calls his apostles to be **fishers of men** and then he calls them to be **shepherds**. The message seems to be that churches and ministers must have two roles. We must not **separate** what God has joined together!
 - Seeking the lost, **evangelism**—Fishers of men.
 - Caring for the found, **pastoral care**—Shepherds.

Application #3—In ministry, do I gravitate more toward “fishing” (evangelism) or “shepherding” (pastoral care)? What needs to happen so that I can be involved in *both* kinds of ministry?

C. The great *clarification* (Jn 21:20–23)—**follow Jesus!**

Is asking about John's role in God's plan, Peter was asking an **inappropriate** question! Peter had one job description: follow Jesus! God's plan for John was irrelevant to Peter. “You follow me!”⁴ (Jn 21:19, 22).

In C. S. Lewis' book *The Horse and His Boy* (*Chronicles of Narnia* series, Book 3), Shasta asks Aslan questions relating to a friend of his named Aravis. “Child, I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own” (New York: Harper, 1954: 165).

⁴ The command “follow me” is in the Greek present tense which means “keep on following me.” Being a disciple of Jesus is something that concerns all of life, every day. It is not a decision one makes and then moves on to other things.

Application #4—Am I fixated on someone else's story to the degree that I am hindered from following my own?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Share with your group one thing that really spoke to you tonight and explain why.
 2. This study talked about three areas where disciples like us tend to struggle. Which of these three areas applies most to you?
 - discouragement (my life isn't making a difference)
 - misplaced priorities (loving Jesus and feeding sheep gets lost in the other demands of life and ministry)
 - comparison with others (why are others more blessed than I am?)
- Has tonight's study helped you to know how to deal better with this? How?
3. Pray for one another.

Jesus, Thy Wandering Sheep Behold!

By Charles Wesley

(sung to the tune of Sweet Hour of Prayer)

*Jesus, thy wandering sheep behold!
See, Lord, with tenderest pity see
The sheep that cannot find the fold,
Till sought and gathered in by thee.
Lost are they now, and scattered wide,
In pain, and weariness, and want;
With no kind shepherd near to guide
The sick, and spiritless, and faint.*

*Thou, only thou, the kind and good
And sheep-redeeming Shepherd art:
Collect thy flock, and give them food,
And pastors after thine own heart.
Give the pure word of general grace,
And great shall be the preachers' crowd;
Preachers, who all the sinful race
Point to the all-atoning blood.*

*Open their mouth, and utterance give;
Give them a trumpet voice, to call
On all the world to turn and live,
Through faith in him who died for all.
Thy only glory let them seek;
O let their hearts with love o'erflow!
Let them believe, and therefore speak,
And spread thy mercy's praise below.*



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ANSWERS

Birth Pangs

- I. (A) trauma; glorious; (B) childbirth; birth pangs
- II. (A) did not understand; spiritual blindness; (B) the mind of Christ; folly; power; wisdom; (C) see; comprehend
- III. (A) expect it; promise; tribulation; turn into; sanctified; (B) define; future orientation; past; (C) just do it; ask; ask; ask; ask; Ask; ask; (C1) Jesus' name; (C2) unconfessed sin; (C3) pure; (C4) in faith; (C5) agree with me; (C6) keep praying; (C7) "No"; (D) absence; presence; in the midst of; (E) indispensable; overconfident; (F) already won it; cross; (G) little while; resurrection; Second Coming; soon
- IV. (A) from; through; (B) ask; trust

My Prayer for You

- I. (A) heart of God; (A1) Trinity; dance; (A2) reality; (A3) desires; (A4) feared; (A5) we should pray; teach us; (B) interceding; intercession; his name; (C) and; to his disciples; to his Father; (D) the cross; victim; confident; (D1) my will; (D2) troubled
- II. [Column 1] himself; [Column 2] disciples; [Column 3] future believers; (1) selfish; bless us; so that; praise you; first; (2) pre-existence; became; is; (3) know; quality
- III. now; for you; (A) preservation; keep; guarded; keep; (A1) dangerous; hatred; (A2) unstable; doubts; (A3) first grade; (A4) chose; security; (A5) possibility; (A6) in our own hearts; divorce; (B1) set apart; make holy; wholly devoted; Holy; (B2) missing; (B3) once-for-all; grow; (C) unification; just as; so that; (C1) history; all peoples; diversity; (C2) uniformity; (C3) organizational mergers; organic; (C4) the purpose

Whodunit?

- I. (A) the murder of God; (B) perversion of justice; (C) passion
- II. (A) victim; in control; (A1) turn himself in; (A2) triumph; gave up; (A3) takes it; authority; (B1) Jewish; I am; blasphemy; insurrection; (B2) Roman; treason; unbelief; condemned already; loved the darkness; (C) irony; (C1) garden; (C2) torches; (C3) I am not; (C4) courageous; cowardly; (C5) purity
- III. ultimately; (A) Judas; greed; frustrated expectations; (B) Jewish leaders; theological expectations; (C) Pilate; please men; (D) Citizens of Jerusalem; for us; because of us; (E1) Jesus himself; ultimately; (E) God the Father; my sin; God's love

The Crux of the Matter

- I. (B) subjectivity; (C) authoritative; (D) masterpiece; the crux of the matter; (E) misunderstanding; salvation; (F1) erased; curse; (F2) child abuse; (F3) go to heaven when they die
- II. interpreting; (A) king; (B) absence of God; (C) realistic; (D) whole world; (E) Passover; deliberate; revolution; (F) triumph; fit for a king; dead Jesus

- III. (A) altar; sin; Lamb; under the blood; (B) substitute; God will provide; (C) throne; glory; (D) life; born again; (E) power; weakness; self-giving love; (F) suffering; from; through; redemptive; (G) model; cruciform; Holy Spirit

Signs of Life

- I. (A) galvanize; eye-witnesses; (C1a) Sunday; only; (C1b) New Creation; reversed; (C2a) shocking; woman; demon-possessed; (C2b) the body is missing; psychological; (C3a) extraordinary; (C3b) inexplicable; collapsed cocoon
- II. (A) immortality of the soul; bodily; preaching; faith; in your sins; pious delusion; malicious hoax; (B1) sentimental ambiguities; ascension; (B2) stole the body; doubted; fraud; produce the corpse; motive; (B3) swooned; (B4) like Lazarus; contrast; [Lazarus column] reanimation; [Jesus column] lives forever; (B5) vision; 500; did not recognize; (B6) spiritually; for you; sentimentality; (B7) made up; expect; women; (C) time and space; worthless; (C1) a camera; eyewitnesses; heard; seen; touched; (C2) normal; a spirit; flesh and bones; to eat; travel; live forever; (C3) first fruits; our bodies; what kind of body; spiritual body; mystery; in vain
- III. (A) faith; linchpin; choice; Jesus is Lord; (B) incomplete; (B1) appearance; (B2) commission; (B3) Holy Spirit; absent

And He Showed Them His Hands

- I. (A) fuzzy; pagan; (B) fantasy; true; forerunner
- II. (A) the unrecognized Jesus; closest friends; (A1) zero expectation; (A2) flawed theology; (A3) grief; (B) the psychology of unbelief; honest doubter; (B1) truth; (B2) evidence; (B3) let their brother die; (B4) opinions of others; (B5) love darkness
- III. send them out; (A1) people; circumstances; (A2) Fear; Grief; Confusion; Doubt; Disillusionment; (A3) conversations; genuine community; (B1) Peace; (B2) poison; (B3) scars; (B3a) verify; (B3b) price paid; (B3c) Body of Christ; (B4) scars; define; (C1) as; (C2a) preach; teach; heal; (C2b) lay down his life; martyrs; (C3) sin problem; already; invalidated; passion; (D1) impossible; (D2) Holy Spirit; (D3) Pentecost; fishing; not



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NOTES



Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin

By Charles Wesley¹

*Where shall my wondering soul begin?
How shall I all to heaven aspire?
A slave redeemed from death and sin,
A brand plucked from eternal fire,
How shall I equal triumphs raise,
And sing my great deliverer's praise?*

*O how shall I the goodness tell,
Father, which thou to me hast showed?
That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God!
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,
Blest with this antepast of heaven!*

*Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots and publicans and thieves;
He spreads his arms to embrace you all,
Sinners alone his grace receive.
No need of him the righteous have;
He came the lost to seek and save.*

*Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin;
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in.
He calls you now, invites you home:
Come, O my guilty brethren, come.*

*For you the purple current flowed
In pardon from his wounded side,
Languished for you the eternal God,
For you the Prince of Glory died.
Believe, and all your guilt's forgiven,
Only believe—and yours is heaven.*



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