

Shepherding Notes

John

By Caleb Bunch

Today we begin our journey through the book of John. This gospel account is by far the most personal and intimate portrait of Christ. This is the book where we find the most and the longest conversations that Jesus had with people — the conversation with His mother at the wedding of Cana in chapter 2, the conversation with Nicodemus at night in chapter 3, the conversation with the woman at the well in chapter 4, the conversation with the healed paralytic in chapter 5, and many more. John is built around seven signs that are designed to summarize the breadth of Jesus' miracle ministry, starting in Cana of Galilee and culminating with the resurrection of Lazarus. John is also the only one of the four gospels that provides for us the "I Am" statements of Christ. As we make our way through this book, I will do my best to highlight all of the seven signs and seven "I Am" sayings.

In the Beginning...

John initiates his proclamation about Jesus by revealing the eternality, immutability, and Trinity. It does not say that "In the beginning God created the Word." No, the Word was always there. He is eternal — not just in the sense that He will exist forever, but also in the sense that He has always existed in eternity past. Rewind the tape as long as you want, but you will never be able to discover a time that Christ did not exist.

Even at the beginning, He was both with God and simultaneously was God. There is nothing in the created universe that can fit the description of being both "with" something else while simultaneously being of the very same essence, nature, and substance as that something else. I am Caleb — that is the name that has been given to describe the essence of my being. I can be with Ashley, but I am not Ashley. The Trinitarian nature of the Godhead is mysterious and beyond full comprehension. This verse is incredibly instructive to reveal to us that Jesus is fully divine. John does not hide the God-ness of Jesus.

Believe

John wants us to believe in Christ, even though we can't see Him. You and I will not ever experience the earthly ministry of Jesus that was observable by the apostles. We don't have to guess John's purpose — he blatantly tells us in chapter 20:30-31: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that

by believing you may have life in his name." Back up one verse before that and you will find these words Jesus said to a no longer doubting Thomas: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John makes it clear in the first chapter that many people saw Jesus and His glorious ministry — "we have seen his glory," "he has made him known," "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." The point is this: the apostles, as well as many others, saw the glory of Christ and His mighty works. But seeing is not believing. Blessed are we who do not see, yet believe. That is why John's main focus moving forward is what Jesus taught about belief. Of the 222 times the New Testament uses the word "believe," 88 of them are found in John — meaning 40% of the times this word is used is isolated to a book that occupies only 8% of the New Testament.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." — John 20:29

Today we arrive at the very first of the seven signs in the book of John. The miracle at the wedding in Cana is the earliest recorded miracle of Jesus in any of the gospels. Jesus turned water into wine. The wine making process is painstakingly difficult. There are dozens of steps along the way that could distort or destroy the flavor of wine. It is one of the longest processes of food creation, requiring long periods of time for fermentation. Most people who try to make wine spend their entire lives working to perfect the art, and never make even a single bottle that anyone would want to drink. Jesus, being the Son of God, turned water into wine without any time or effort.

This is how John describes it in John 2:11: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." This is really helpful when it comes to grasping the main point of not only this miracle, but all of the signs that John records. Notice that the signs of Jesus are designed to bring belief to His disciples. However, don't be confused by the notion of signs — they were not designed to give belief to everyone. The majority of the people who saw or experienced a sign that Jesus performed did not ultimately believe. Miracles were not then, nor are they now, the cause of anyone's salvation. They were performed to substantiate the message and the messenger.

John opts to use the word "sign" rather than "miracle" because the word sign indicates that the act is done specifically to point you to something. A sign that says "Philadelphia 25 miles" tells you that you are going the right direction — if your goal is to make it to Philly. If you are looking for the Messiah, the Son of God, forgiveness of sins, and a relationship with the Father, these signs are telling you that Jesus is the way. All of these signs are done in public, and all of them are highlighted by John by simply telling us that it was a sign. Whenever you see the word "sign," you are supposed to realize that John is making a point about the deity of Christ.

"The signs of Jesus are designed to point you somewhere — specifically to the One in whom we are to believe."

In John 3 we read about Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus. This Pharisee was a man of great prominence in Israel. Jesus referred to him as "the teacher of Israel." (vs. 10) It is likely that his purpose in coming at night was to avoid the negative press that would have followed him for speaking to Christ publicly. However, it is an encouraging thing that Nicodemus was interested. The very first words we hear from him are, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." This is not only a respectful address — it also acknowledges that Jesus must have a unique connection to God. There is never another recorded encounter of Jesus communicating with a religious ruler that is this gracious or accurate.

Nicodemus was not yet a disciple, but he was genuinely interested — confused as he tried to square the teachings of Jesus with all that he thought he knew. This is often what it looks like when the Lord is beginning to do a work in the life of an unbeliever. How does Jesus handle such a person? He makes it clear that in order to be part of the kingdom of God, they must be born again. (vs. 3) When Nicodemus is confused, Jesus doesn't berate him or give up on him. He simply points him to the answer — Himself. "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

Then, in a shocking turn, Jesus informs Nicodemus that He is going to be crucified. This is the earliest recorded announcement that Jesus makes to anyone that He is going to die for the sins of His people. He compares Himself to the serpent that was lifted up onto the pole by Moses — likewise, Jesus would be lifted up in order to save people from the curse of death that came through the serpent in the garden. When Moses put the serpent on the pole, the announcement was "look and live." When Jesus is lifted up, the announcement is still "look and live."

John 3:16 — Word by Word

"For" — The reason for all of the things Jesus has said so far is going to be grounded in whatever comes next.

"God so loved" — The word "so" here is not a statement of extremity or intensity; it is an explanation of type. It could be rightfully stated, "For God loved the world in this way." This is incredibly significant because it means that the death of the Son was specifically purposed as an act of love. It was always the plan for Jesus to die for the sake of love.

"the world" — This describes the system of the world that is in opposition to God. Jesus died for people who hated God and rebelled against Him.

"that He gave" — God's love is expressed in gracious gifting of the most valuable treasure in the universe. He gave Christ to be our substitute, our friend, our elder brother, and our Savior.

"His only Son" — Rarity, scarcity, uniqueness — these are all traits of something valuable. Jesus is the only Son. This is also likely an intentional allusion back to Abraham being told to sacrifice his only son. Jesus is that only Son that would serve as the sacrificial lamb.

"that whoever believes in Him" — Remember, this is the entire point of the book of John — that you may believe.

"should not perish but have eternal life" — This is the other main point of John — "that by believing you might have life in His name."

"For God loved the world in this way — that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

One of the most upside-down claims that the secular world loves to hurl against Christianity goes something like this: "Christianity is responsible for producing a system of disgusting, patriarchal, sexist, misogynistic, anti-woman culture." Such a claim fails to recognize that the system designed by God is the only one that actually properly values, cares for, and liberates women. Consider the kindness of Christ as He interacts with the woman at the well. He is perfectly honorable and upstanding in his interactions with her. He does not ignore her, as most men of those days would have. He entertains a theological conversation with this woman, which was unheard of in those days. Jesus gives us the perfect example of how men should treat women with respect and dignity.

But Jesus does not give her a pass in terms of her sin issues just because she was a woman. During this entire conversation, Jesus was aware that this woman was a sexually immoral, unfaithful person. The reason that she came to the well at this time of day was likely to avoid contact with the other women. Her many marriages would have put her into an undesirable category of the social order. Her main purpose in being there was to get water. But she instead found living water and left her jar behind as she went into the town to tell her entire community about the man who changed her life. The result of her testimony was that many people from her town believed in Christ. (vs. 39)

Sign 2: Healing the Official's Son

There is a second story in this chapter that often gets less press. This is the second sign that Jesus performed that is recorded in John's gospel. (vs. 54) Whereas the first sign was a miracle of physical transformation of material properties — turning water into wine — the second sign is much more significant. Here we find a father asking Jesus to heal his son. Sickness only exists because sin exists. Prior to the fall, illness had not entered into the earth. Our bodies are susceptible to all forms of maladies because we live in a sin-cursed world.

Jesus is not even remotely limited by the curse. He was able to reverse the effects of sin with nothing more than a promise: "Go; your son will live." The very hour that Jesus made that promise, the child was restored to perfect health. With the healing of this child, Jesus simply declared that the child would be healthy, and He healed the boy without ever seeing him. No charlatan could do that. The result of this sign was that the father and all his household believed in Jesus. (vs. 53) Once again, we see the purpose of the signs — to point us to the One in whom we are to believe.

"She found living water and left her jar behind. Whatever you came looking for, Jesus offers something far greater."

In recent decades, secular opponents of the gospel have begun echoing a skeptical refrain: "Jesus never claimed to be God." However, it is clear that most of the people who make that claim have never actually studied the Scriptures. John 5:18 informs us of the motivations of Jesus' opponents: "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." The religious rulers correctly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God.

This entire controversy arose over the third sign in John's gospel. Jesus walked into a crowd of physically disabled people, hand selected one of them, and healed him. It was no accident that Jesus planned to do this on the Sabbath. It was no accident that Jesus selected a person who, when he had the opportunity, sold Jesus out to His enemies. (vs. 15) When pressed on the question of why Jesus thought it was permissible to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus answered, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." God never stops being God and doing Godlike things. And because Jesus is God, He didn't stop operating like God on the Sabbath.

Astounding Claims of Divinity

This sign did not result in immediate belief for those in the presence of the miracle. Instead it produced a hardening of their hearts. The conflict with the religious rulers opened the door for Jesus to declare several aspects of His divinity. Consider the following astounding claims that are made by the Savior in John 5. Jesus said that He is...

- Equal with the Father in regards to the purposes of history. (vs. 20)
- Equal with the Father in regards to giving life. (vs. 21, 40)
- Given all responsibility of judgment by the Father. (vs. 22, 27)
- Equal to the Father in being worthy of honor. (vs. 23)
- Always in perfect alignment with the will of the Father. (vs. 19, 30)
- Attested of by both John the Baptist and, more importantly, God the Father. (vs. 31–38)
- The substance of the Scriptures — they all point to Him. (vs. 39)

- Equal to the Father in being worthy of glory. (vs. 41)
- Able to judge the thoughts and intentions of people's hearts. (vs. 42)
- The One about whom Moses wrote. (vs. 44-46)

"Jesus is God. The third sign was a brilliant setup to provide the perfect stage to proclaim it."

If John's main goal was to focus on the miracles of Jesus, then he is doing a pretty bad job. The feeding of the 5,000 was the most widely observed miracle of Jesus — every adult in Israel probably knew someone who personally experienced this event. It was an event so powerful that the people who ate those loaves and fish wanted to make Jesus king by force. (vs. 15) Yet, when it comes to writing, John spends almost no time with details of this miracle. John's goal was not to focus on the miracle/sign, but to look past the sign and to the place that the sign was pointing. This is the longest chapter in the book of John, yet the majority of it is focused on Jesus' words, not His works.

"I Am" #1: The Bread of Life

This is when we encounter the first of the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus. By declaring "I Am," Jesus is employing the most holy and revered name of God. In this case, Jesus exclaimed, "I Am the bread of life." He compares Himself with the manna that was consumed by the Israelites. Those men had to collect the bread that came from heaven day after day. Although it was free, they had to work for it. It could produce a satisfaction for their bellies, but not their souls. Jesus is claiming to be the better manna, the true bread from heaven.

"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." — John 6:49–51

This two-day event began with Jesus having the largest crowd of followers that He ever gathered during His ministry. But one day later almost everyone had departed, except the twelve disciples and seemingly a handful of others. Jesus turned and asked His disciples if they were going to be the next to depart. This is where we find the beautiful confession of Peter echoed in the heart of every true believer to this day: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (vs. 68–69)

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." — Simon Peter, John 6:68

The majority of Jesus' ministry occurred in Galilee, far from the center of power held by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. There are only a few occasions when Jesus made His way into the city, and they typically resulted in a renewed violent response by the religious elites. John 7 tells us about one short trip to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. Jesus was encouraged by His "brothers" who wanted Him to go into Jerusalem and show off by doing signs. But notice that the very next verse informs us that this was not a sign of belief, but of their unbelief: "For not even his brothers believed in him." The earthly brothers of Jesus were likely seeking any possible earthly advantage that could come from being related to a famous miracle worker.

The response of the crowds in Jerusalem is mixed. "And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, 'He is a good man,' others said, 'No, he is leading the people astray.'" Neither of these positions accurately acknowledges the deity or messiahship of Jesus. However, the conversation began to move in the direction of considering Christ as the Messiah — not because of any sign Jesus performed, but because of how the Sanhedrin was acting. "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?"

This chapter is filled with an incredible amount of tension. The religious leaders and the crowds are constantly vacillating on whether or not, or how to arrest Jesus. Thankfully, John reveals to us the hidden hand of God that was working out all that took place by simply telling us, "So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." (vs. 30) The violent arrest of Christ was going to happen, but not until the very moment that God had designed.

The religious leaders sent temple guards to arrest Jesus. However, when they did get to Jesus, they listened to Him and were unable to carry out their warrant. When they returned empty-handed, all they could say was, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

Do you remember Nicodemus? He is the only one speaking truth in this meeting of the 70 most powerful religious leaders in the nation — the only thing he brings up is the importance of having a fair trial. For that just and lawful suggestion, Nicodemus was ostracized and painted as an ignorant foreigner. This is not the last time that we will hear about Nicodemus. Time will reveal his true response to Jesus.

"No one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." The hidden hand of God was working out all that took place.

Today we come to the second "I Am" statement of Jesus. In order to understand the timing of this declaration, it is necessary to understand a little bit about the Feast of Booths. The booths or tents that they would live in for the week were to remind them of the tents they inhabited for those 40 years in the desert. There were also four large candelabras that were raised high into the air on poles above the temple courts — the light would illuminate the entire city and were designed to call to remembrance the presence of the Lord in the pillar of fire during the Exodus. With that light as the backdrop, Jesus claimed that He was the Light of the World. He added, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Significantly, He was also claiming that there are no borders to limit His light. His salvation goes forth beyond Israel and to the entire world.

"I Am" #2: The Light of the World

One of the common phrases that has made its way into the everyday vernacular of our society goes something like this: "We are all God's children." Although this is the politically correct thing to say, it is definitely not biblical. Jesus draws a line in the sand and claims that there are only two categories — you are either a child of God, or a child of the devil. These religious leaders were not banking on their works alone. They were relying on their bloodline. This is why they claim so firmly to be children of Abraham.

There are many particulars of this argument worth studying, but I want to point out just two. First, notice that Jesus speaks of His sinless perfection: "Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" (vs. 46) If Jesus had ever done anything wrong, they would have paraded it before the public in order to discredit Him. The fact that they had looked into His parentage reveals that they had certainly been digging into His past looking for any skeletons they could find in His closet. Obviously, there was nothing.

Lastly, notice how Jesus addresses their claims to Abraham as their father: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." (vs. 56) Not only does Jesus claim to be alive during the time of Abraham (roughly 2,000 years earlier) — He also revealed that Abraham considered Jesus to be his superior. When the Pharisees pointed out the obvious math problem of Jesus' age, He responded, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." By claiming "I Am" instead of "I was," Jesus is making claim to be eternal. The Pharisees recognized that this could be understood as nothing

but a claim to Godhood. That is why they picked up stones to kill Him.

"Before Abraham was, I am." — Jesus, John 8:58

Today we arrive at the sixth of the seven signs in John's gospel — the healing of the man who was born blind. This miracle takes place directly following Jesus' proclamation that He is the light of the world. He reiterates that fact for us again in verse 5. However, blind people do not see light. This chapter is all about who does and who does not see Jesus accurately.

Blindness

The most common miracle that we read about Jesus performing is that of restoring sight to the blind. There is often a clear link to the healing of blindness and the need for God to do a work of revelation for our minds in order to receive salvation.

Suffering

There is a distinctly noticeable and faulty understanding held by the disciples in regards to suffering. When they see a man who has been blind since birth, they assume that the cause of his suffering was necessarily connected to sin. On the one hand, they were correct — all suffering is a direct result of the fact that sin exists in our world. (Romans 5:12) However, they were viewing things incorrectly by assuming that if we do good things we will avoid suffering, and only when we do something egregious towards the Lord are we sent hardships and pain. As the saying goes, if you have not suffered, you simply haven't lived long enough.

Sovereignty

What may surprise you is that God has orchestrated even the most painful parts of your experiences for the purpose of His glory. Jesus completely sidesteps their question and informs them that the man was born blind so that the glory of God might be displayed. God is not only powerful enough to control every single event that you will ever experience, but He is also so loving that He promises to work all of those things together for your good and His glory — even the most painful things. (Romans 8:28)

Salvation

In this chapter, you are going to see the intentional contrast of this man who was born blind yet could see Jesus clearly, juxtaposed against the Pharisees who ask, "Are we also blind?" in verse 40. Unbelief is often paralleled with blindness in the Bible — that is why

we sing those famous words in Amazing Grace: "was blind, but now I see." Christian, this chapter should cause your heart to soar because you should see yourself in the blind man's position. You were blinded by your sin and incapable of understanding who Jesus is. Yet, when He sought you out, He opened your eyes to see Him clearly. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6)

"If you are a Christian, God has illumined you so that you might experience His glory through His Son. You were blind — and now you see."

As we enter chapter 10, it is really important that you don't forget what happened in chapter 9. Remember that the leaders of Israel were furious that Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. Instead of rejoicing that one of their national brothers had experienced freedom from his blindness, they confronted, interrogated, insulted, and rejected him. There is no indication that any time has passed between chapter 9 and chapter 10. It is likely that Jesus spoke these words about being the Good Shepherd on the very same day as the shepherds of Israel displayed their true colors.

"I Am" #3: The Door

In chapter 10, Jesus is answering two main questions. Who is the real shepherd of God's people? And, who are the sheep that belong to God? Jesus opens this discourse by noting that "he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." (vs. 1) Then Jesus answers clearly: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." Notice that Jesus pushes this metaphor beyond just who is eligible to lead the sheep — you can't even be a sheep unless you come through Christ.

This flew in the face of the idea that the Jews held that everyone from the line of Abraham was automatically a sheep. Bloodline has nothing to do with it. "You do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (vs. 26–27) True sheep will hear the gospel and believe it resulting in salvation. And those sheep come from both Jews and Gentiles, joined into one single flock of God. (vs. 16)

"I Am" #4: The Good Shepherd

The imagery of shepherding is one of the most common metaphors employed throughout the Bible. It is a beautiful picture of someone loving and caring for creatures that are far below their station, and far too ignorant to care for themselves. It is no coincidence that Moses and David were both shepherds before leading the people of Israel. David wrote all the way back in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Jesus is drawing upon that very imagery in John 10.

However, Jesus takes the metaphor beyond just the nurturing aspects that were written about by David. Jesus did not only feed and lead — He explains that the ultimate role of the Good Shepherd is to lay down His life for the sheep. He refers to these evil religious

rulers as thieves that come to steal, kill, and destroy, and calls them hired hands that are only interested in self-advancement and self-preservation. There is only one Good Shepherd who is always perfectly dedicated to the good of His flock.

"Nobody in their right mind would argue that a literal sheep is of more value than the shepherd sent to guard it. Yet the Shepherd chose to lay down His life for us."

There are many days in life that pass by when we don't think about the inevitability of death. Unless the Lord returns soon, we will one day pass away. Death is a reality that we spend our entire lives attempting to reject or ignore. It should make us uncomfortable, but not just because it is unnatural. Physical death is a picture of the reality that God must judge sin. In John 11, Jesus is going to perform the final of the seven signs in this gospel narrative, accompanied by "I Am" statement number five.

"I Am" #5: The Resurrection and the Life

Jews living under the Old Covenant did believe that there was an afterlife where those who followed the Lord would be at peace and those who rejected Him would experience torment. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this can be found in Job 19:25-27: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God."

Martha understood this. She knew that Lazarus would rise again on the last day. However, she still did not understand the nature of the person in front of her. This is when Jesus explained to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Don't miss those seemingly contradictory lines. How can Jesus say that someone will die, yet never die? The answer is simply that there is more than one kind of death. Jesus was explaining that even though we will still die physically, those who trust in Him will never die spiritually or eternally.

Sign 7: The Raising of Lazarus

Jesus was not the first person in history to raise someone from the dead — Elijah raised the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-22), and Elisha raised the Shunamite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37). However, there is something discernably distinct about what Jesus performs in this chapter. First, Jesus intentionally delayed until the body had been cold for four days and was well into the process of decomposition. Secondly, Jesus did not plead with the Father to bring Lazarus back to life. Instead, Jesus prays a prayer of thanks to the Father, then commanded Lazarus to come forth. Just like light could not refuse to be created on the first day, Lazarus could not remain in death.

This is, not coincidentally, exactly what happens when someone comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ. When we were dead in our trespasses and sins, He makes us alive. (Eph.

2:1-9) There is no amount of evidence that will ever cause the heart of a person to transition from loving the world to loving Christ. Those who rejected Christ did not see this miracle and turn in faith. Instead they were solidified in their opposition and determination to kill Him. If Christ had not sought you and bought you with His redeeming blood, you would still be just as committed to opposing Christ as the Pharisees in this passage.

"When we were dead in our trespasses and sins, He makes us alive. Thanks be to God that you have been given the gift of eternal life."

Today I just want to focus in on one tiny phrase that we find in this chapter. In verse 38, we find Jesus being connected to a term that is often seen in the Old Testament: "the arm of the Lord."

In the Old Testament, the everlasting arm of the Lord comes to bring salvation and judgment, to establish freedom from bondage, to permit us to dwell with God, and to be motivated to accomplish these things because of His divine love. One of the beautiful ways that God begins to use this term is found in the servant songs of Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 51:9, we see a commissioning call. "Awake, awake, arm of the Lord, clothe yourself with strength!" God is speaking to His own arm — God the Father is commissioning God the Son. Here in Isaiah we see that the arm of the Lord is not just a metaphorical way to speak of manifestations of power. It is a way to describe the pre-incarnate Son of God acting in the world.

This is continued in the next chapter. Isaiah 52:10: "The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." God declares that He is going to flex — but what is so shocking is that His display of power is unlike anything we might expect. It doesn't come through plagues or famines or wars. The arm of the Lord would come forward as a servant.

We see this even more clearly in Isaiah 53:1–2: "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." Notice that the arm of the Lord is now personified — inexorably linked to the suffering servant that was coming to be stricken, smitten, and afflicted, bruised for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

John the apostle understood this connection and says in John 12:36–38: "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" John identifies Jesus as the arm of the Lord that has been revealed to some, but not to all. Jesus is the manifest power of God to us — the one who came to bring judgment and mercy, who sets the captives free from slavery to sin and from Satan.

"Jesus is the arm of the Lord revealed. He is the manifest power of God – motivated by love for the Father and for us."

Today we arrive at the evening that has come to be known as "The Last Supper." Jesus never sleeps again after this point in history. This is the most zoomed in that the lens will ever be in the book of John. The last 24 hours of Jesus' earthly life are by far the most thoroughly represented aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry portrayed in this book — it is designed that way because everything in all of history hangs on what happened during this period. John 13:1–18:11 covers what happened from roughly 5:00pm to midnight the night that Jesus was betrayed. Today we will mainly focus on the act of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples.

Jesus Humbled Himself

When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, He took upon Himself the position that was typically reserved for the very lowest of household servants. He placed Himself in the humblest of positions in order to serve His disciples. All of us are always looking for ways to advance beyond lowly positions. We naturally prefer to be on the higher end of the economic and sociological food chain. Our default position is to desire to be served, not to be a servant.

Jesus had already condescended from His eternal throne to serve mankind in human form. There has never been a more servant-hearted move in all of history. But it should be shocking to us that He took on poverty, rejection, simplicity, and lowliness and engaged in what no earthly king would be caught dead doing. Kings and Queens would likely be more embarrassed by a picture of them doing janitorial work than they would be when their sin scandals come to light. Rulers love their own reputations. Jesus humbled Himself by taking on the form of a servant. (Phil. 2:5–11)

Jesus Makes Us Clean

This humble act by Jesus clearly made them uncomfortable. Peter went so far as to reject the offer until Jesus told him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Then Peter shifted as far as possible in the opposite direction declaring, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Of course, Jesus was not talking about physical washing. There is spiritual cleansing that occurs when we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus made it clear to them that, "And you are clean, but not every one of you" — even though Jesus had cleaned the feet of all of the disciples, there was one amongst them whose soul was not made clean by Christ.

"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." – 1 Corinthians 6:11

Jesus Calls Us to Imitate His Service

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (vs. 14–16) Do you go out of your way to serve one another? Are you quick to offer help when you see a need? We who have been washed by the blood should do whatever we can to lay down our comfort in order to care for one another.

"Take a moment to thank the Lord that you have been made clean by the servant-hearted, sacrificial work of Christ on the cross."

Today we come to the sixth "I Am" statement of Jesus — "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I want you to see that for every I AM, there is also an I WILL. Sometimes these connections are clearly stated, sometimes they are implied. The first time God revealed this divine name was to Moses at the burning bush. And after saying His name was "I Am," He told Moses:

- I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt.
 - I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with wonders.
 - I will harden Pharaoh's heart.
-

He cannot say "I Will" unless it is firmly rooted in "I Am." God always acts in accordance with His character. We see this clearly in the "I Am" statements of Christ.

Jesus is not speaking to the Pharisees in chapter 14, nor to a group of college students, or religious pluralists. He is speaking to the disciples. And the message that Jesus is getting at here is one of peace and internal, spiritual comfort. The disciples are deeply troubled, and Jesus knows that it is only going to get harder for them when He is taken from them and brutally killed. He loves them and tells them in verse 1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

I think many of us have troubled hearts. Do you not look around at the world and get a troubled heart? The instability of the world powers. Political tensions. The daily issues of your personal life. Disobedient children in your house, discord in your relationships, depression in your heart. Taxes, traffic, trials. Bills, bad bosses, broken down cars. And deeper than that, the spiritual trials of temptation and doubt and anxiety and areas where we sin and can't seem to find victory. Jesus gives these promises to help you no longer have a troubled heart.

"I Am" #6: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

We don't hear much from Thomas in the Bible. But I think Thomas has a panic attack here when he realizes that he doesn't know how to get there. You can almost hear the pleading tone to his voice: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" And this is when Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So, what is the "I Will" of this "I Am" statement? Simply put, it is that we might find our peace and comfort in Christ. Jesus is teaching us these promises because they are the only truths that could calm a sinner's troubled heart. That is why Jesus resolves this conversation by saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

"For every Christian, the promise of Jesus in this 'I Am' statement should produce in us the most glorious and settled comfort imaginable."

Today we are going to examine the last of the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus. This conversation took place as Jesus was walking with His disciples on the two-mile journey from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. On that journey they would have been surrounded by numerous vineyards. You will notice that this is the only one of the seven "I Am" statements that has a qualifier next to it. He does not merely say "I am the Vine." He is the true vine.

"I Am" #7: The True Vine

The Jewish people were regularly referred to as the people of the vine during this time in history. In fact, the Old Testament regularly compares Israel to a vine — however, those comparisons are always negative. The best example is found in Isaiah 5:1–7, in which the Lord accuses His vineyard of only producing "wild grapes" and therefore says He would destroy it. Jesus is informing the disciples that there is no true spiritual life that comes from simply being born into the nation of Israel. That vine does not give life. Where does your spiritual life come from? Jesus begins his teaching by emphatically declaring that He is the true source of spirituality.

This passage also speaks about two kinds of branches. The first are the kind that do not bear fruit. Judas is exactly the kind of person Jesus has in view here when he speaks of branches that do not bear fruit. They appear for a time to be part of the vine, but eventually it becomes clear that they should not be part of the vine. According to verses 2 and 6, these people are broken off and destroyed. This is an action of finality.

Branches that do bear fruit will have power flowing through them from the vine. Genuine Christians will produce godly fruit — including the fruit of repentance, the fruit of the Spirit, and above all, being conformed into the image of Christ. We also see in this text that those who are genuine believers will be pruned. Pruning is the process by which a vine keeper will cut off the unhelpful parts of the plant in order to maximize the fruit. This kind of pruning usually takes place through suffering. The Christian life is not always comfortable. Pruning hurts. But for those who are in Christ, these experiences are designed by God to work together for your good and His glory.

Benefits of Abiding in Christ

- Fruit — He that abides in Christ will bear much fruit. (vs. 5) Who among us could really say, "I really just don't need any more love, or joy, or peace?"
- Prayer — According to verse 7, those who abide in Christ should expect their prayers to be answered. As you abide in Christ, you will begin to pray in accordance with the will of God.
- Love — Verse 10 says, "abide in my love." The same kind of love that the Trinity has shared for eternity is now accessible to us. God has loved you like this.
- Joy — Jesus was the most joyful person who has ever lived. He tells us that we can have His joy by abiding in Him. (vs. 11)

"Without Christ you can do nothing — specifically, you cannot become more like Christ unless He is working in and through you. Are you abiding in Him for your spiritual growth each day?"

I would like to draw out three simple lines of this chapter that are well worth meditating upon today.

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."

VS. 1

It is like Jesus telling His bride what to expect. And what specific expectation is He pointing to? Persecution. From John 15:18 through John 16:4, Jesus has been describing the harm and hatred that will be hurled against them by those who hate the Lord. What should a Christian expect? We should anticipate that the world will hate us. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." (John 15:18) We should expect persecution. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12)

Don't get me wrong — we should not try to be offensive. Quite the opposite. We should be the most kind, polite, generous, upstanding people in our community. People are not primarily offended by what we do, but by what we prize. They are offended by our claims that Jesus is Lord over all, including them. They are offended by the exclusivity claims of Jesus. Anyone under the unbiblical illusion that we should expect the world to love us as its own is in for a grand disillusionment. We are not called to comfort, but to pick up our cross and follow Him.

"He will guide you into all the truth... He will glorify me."

VS. 13–14

There is a great deal of confusion in our modern evangelical world regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit and His role in our lives. First, notice that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "He." This is not some kind of impersonal force. He is a person, just like the Father and the Son. He has come with one primary mission: to give glory to the Son. He is like a spotlight designed to illuminate the stage. If you are focused on the light itself, you are missing the primary purpose. The Holy Spirit has come in order to help you to see Christ more clearly and love Him more dearly.

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

VS. 33

Our first focus today was on persecution. Jesus reiterates that idea with the even harsher word "tribulation." The good news is that we have no need to fear. Take heart, brothers and sisters — Jesus has overcome the world. Even though the slow progression of history is playing out before our eyes, the end is already locked in place. Jesus wins. He has procured the victory. Even though the world will thrash about in its throes of death, Jesus has proclaimed victory. Do not fear.

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." — Jesus, John 16:33

This chapter contains the "High Priestly Prayer" of Jesus. It should be a powerful encouragement to know that on the very night that Jesus was betrayed, He was praying for all believers who would ever follow Him — including you! In this chapter Jesus prays for/about the following aspects of the Christian life, intentionally listed here in the order in which they take place in our spiritual journey:

- The election of His people (vs. 9–10)
- The self-revelation of Christ to His people (vs. 6)
- The regeneration of His people (vs. 2)
- The enlightenment of His people (vs. 26)
- The gratification of His people (vs. 13)
- The sanctification of His people (vs. 16–17)
- The commissioning of His people (vs. 18)
- The unity of His people (vs. 21)
- The preservation of His people (vs. 11–12)
- The glorification of His people (vs. 24)

In this single prayer, Jesus prayed about every aspect of your spiritual journey. The scope of His prayer reaches from eternity past into eternity future. But there is one very important part of this that I did not mention above — it is the one upon which all of these other things depend: namely, union with Christ.

Let's look at the prayer of Jesus in verses 21–23: "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us... I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one." There is a puzzling and seemingly paradoxical way that Jesus speaks spatially about His relationship with the Father and with us. He uses the word "in." Imagine the statement as a set of Russian nesting dolls — inside the believer is Jesus, and inside Jesus is the Father.

This is really difficult for our minds to grasp because there is nothing in nature that is fully contained by another thing while also fully containing that other thing. But I think that is the point. Jesus is declaring that we are so unified with Him that those who are in Christ are inseparable from Him. We are in Him, and He in us. This means that we are able to be joined through Christ to the Father. As the Father loves the Son, so He also loves us. This is what theologians refer to as "mutual abiding."

"On the very night He was betrayed, Jesus was praying for all believers who would ever follow Him – including you."

It can be a little bit tricky piecing together all of the details of Jesus' trials. Each of the gospel authors gives us a piece of the puzzle, but none of them give all of the details. By putting together the four accounts, we find that there were a total of six trials of Jesus. The first three were ecumenical trials before Jewish religious leaders. In all three of those trials, Jesus was found guilty. In all three civic trials, Jesus was found innocent, but condemned anyway.

Ecumenical Trials

- Annas — John 18:12–23; Matthew 26:57–58; Mark 14:53–54; Luke 22:54–55
- Caiaphas — John 18:24; Matthew 26:59–75; Mark 14:55–65; Luke 22:56–65
- Sanhedrin — Matthew 26:59–75; Mark 14:55–65; Luke 22:56–65

Civic Trials

- Pilate — John 18:28–38; Matthew 27:2–14; Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:1–6
- Herod — Luke 23:7–12
- Pilate (second) — John 18:39–19:16; Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25

Zone in on one phrase of Pilate: "I find no guilt in him." In a court of law, this statement should be the last thing anyone ever hears. At the conclusion of a trial a judge will utter the words "NOT GUILTY" and then lower the gavel. This should have been the end of the trial — if Pilate was a just judge. Instead, he unjustly hands over all authority to the violent mob.

Pilate thought he had a brilliant move — he specifically asked the crowd if they would prefer to have Jesus or Barabbas. Ironically, the name Barabbas means "son of the father." So, standing before the people was the holy, righteous eternal Son of the Eternal Father, and the notorious murderer named the son of the father. Pilate thought to himself, "I will make them choose to set Jesus free." His plan backfired in dramatic fashion.

Jesus, the just judge, stood condemned by an unjust judge and an unjust mob. We the readers can look at this and view the absolute absurdity that the innocent judge of the universe stood falsely condemned.

"The innocent Judge of the universe stood falsely condemned. The just for the unjust. He experienced injustice in order to save unjust people like us."

Yesterday we saw the irony of the Just Judge who stood condemned by an unjust judge and an unjust mob. As we continue reading through Jesus' experience with Pilate, we will see more and more clearly this troubling irony. As we move forward, I would like to point out another irony: the King of Kings.

Back in John 18:36, Jesus admits to being the King of a kingdom. But He says to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Jesus has spent His years of ministry preaching about the Kingdom of heaven. Earthly kingdoms are all defined by their limitations — empires rise and empires fall; they have a beginning and an end. The Kingdom of Heaven has no such limitations. Jesus is a reigning King with no limitations. He will rule forever over a kingdom that has no boundaries.

The Crown of Thorns

The crown of thorns was twisted together and placed on His head as a way to mock and ridicule Him. A crown represents authority. They place this crown on His head and instead of bowing down to declare their allegiance, they beat him with their fists. Many people throughout history have worn crowns. Many people have had positions of authority. We have all sought to accumulate glory for ourselves in one way or another. But Revelation 4:10–11 tells us what will eventually happen to our crowns: "They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.'" We will gladly lay down our crowns at the feet of the only One who has the right to rule and reign forever.

The Robe

You should also take note of the robe. Robes like this one were worn as a sign of power — very expensive and could only be worn by someone with great resources. These men who were mocking Jesus were seeking to dishonor and disgrace Him by placing this robe around Him. But this would not be the first or the last time Jesus was to wear a robe. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah the prophet has a vision of heaven and sees Jesus sitting on the throne, with "the train of His robe filled the temple" — a way to express the unparalleled majesty of King Jesus. We also see Jesus wearing a robe in Revelation 19:13, 16 when He returns to judge the earth, clothed in a robe dipped in blood. "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

"Crown Him with many crowns! The one they mocked with thorns and robes returns clothed in glory as King of kings and Lord of lords."

Welcome to the crescendo of John's gospel — the crescendo of history itself: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything in this book, and the rest of the Bible, has been bending toward this moment.

The Empty Tomb

vs. 1–10

In the darkness of the morning, Mary Magdalene approached the tomb, fully expecting to mourn the death of her friend. But when she arrived, she was confused to see that the stone had been rolled away. She had to tell someone, so she rushed to tell the disciples.

Peter and John ran to investigate. John got there first but hesitated at the entrance, likely fearful of what he might find — or not find — there. Peter, true to his character, bolted right in. There was no sign of grave robbers. The very linen that had wrapped the body of the Messiah had been neatly folded and set aside. The disciples must have assumed that whatever happened was not malicious. It wasn't haphazard. The "crime scene" had been set in an orderly and deliberate fashion. The body of Jesus had not been stolen. He had risen. The text tells us that John "saw and believed." (vs. 8)

The First Eyewitness

vs. 11–18

Mary stayed behind, weeping. Not only had she lost her friend to a torturous death, now she thought that insult had been added to injury and that His body had been desecrated. She looked into the tomb and saw two angels, but her grief blinded her to the miracle. Maybe it was due to her confusion and grief, maybe it was due to her tears, but when she first saw Jesus, she mistook Him for the gardener.

All it took was one word to cut through all the fear and chaos. Jesus simply said, "Mary." The Good Shepherd calls His sheep by name (John 10:3). Mary instantly recognized Him and cried out, "Rabboni!" She clung to Him, but Jesus gently told her it was not yet time. Instead, He gave her a great commission: "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary became the first evangelist of the resurrection. She had come to mourn the dead, but instead left proclaiming the message of life.

"She had come to mourn the dead, but instead left proclaiming the message of life. All it took was one word from the Good Shepherd: 'Mary.'"

Behind Closed Doors

vs. 19–23

That evening, the disciples had gathered in the upper room. The doors were locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Of course, He said that because they had been experiencing inner turmoil. Jesus calmed them and showed them His hands and His side. The sight of the scars turned their fear into joy as they came to terms with the fact that Jesus had truly been raised.

Again He said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This promise would later be fully realized at Pentecost.

Doubting Thomas

vs. 24–29

Thomas was not with them the first time Jesus showed up in the upper room. When the others told him they had seen the Lord, he replied, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

A week later Jesus returned — specifically for Thomas. He offered the exact proof Thomas had demanded and said gently, "Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas' response is one of the greatest confessions in the Bible: "My Lord and my God!" (vs. 28) There are many scholars who argue that Jesus never claimed to be God. If that were true, then Jesus would have vehemently rejected Thomas' confession. Instead, Jesus accepted Thomas' recognition that He truly is Lord and God. Jesus simply replied, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

"These Are Written..."

vs. 30–31

Every book of the Bible is making a specific argument. John is not ambiguous about his purpose: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,

the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

What is the unifying theme of this entire book? Every line of this book is reverberating with the reality that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save sinners. This gospel message is the driving force of every part of the Christian life.

"My Lord and my God!" – Thomas, John 20:28. There is no greater confession. Jesus accepted it without correction. He truly is Lord and God.

John is the third-most prolific author in the New Testament, behind Luke and Paul. Even though we are finishing his gospel, he has four other books in the New Testament for us to enjoy. As we complete our time in this gospel account, I want to draw your attention to one simple truth.

Jesus Gently Restores Those Who Fail

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter had denied Him three times. Imagine how that must have haunted him. Peter, one of the three disciples who were permitted into the inner circle of Jesus, the one who was the voice-box of the twelve, failed. In fear, he chose personal protection over allegiance to his friend, his Messiah, his King.

When the news of the resurrection arrived, Peter and John were the two who raced to see the tomb. John arrived first, but did not enter. Peter, on the other hand, rushed inside to examine the scene. Jesus then appeared twice to the disciples on consecutive Sundays, but as far as we can tell, He never spoke directly to Peter. At least seven of the disciples returned to Galilee, likely because they had to employ their marketable skill of fishing in order to eat. As you read, Jesus miraculously revealed to the disciples where to catch a great number of fish. Peter, realizing that it was Jesus who had spoken to them, jumped in and swam back to land.

I highlight this as a significant factor in being restored by Christ. When we sin, our natural inclination is to run and hide. The guilt is so heavy that we can't imagine running to Jesus. Peter shows us how we should respond. The inclination of his heart was to get as close to Christ as he could.

After eating with the disciples, Jesus singles out Peter and begins to question him. He begins by asking if Peter loves him more than the other disciples do — a callback to the way Peter had spoken with such audacity about being the one and only trustworthy disciple among them during the Last Supper. Peter had viewed himself with a level of spiritual superiority that was clearly undermined by the events that followed. Jesus was pointing out that Peter's pride was unfounded and his attempt to stand in his own strength had failed.

Peter denied Jesus three times. It is likely for this reason that Jesus asks three times, "Do you love me?" When Peter would acknowledge and confess his love for Christ, Jesus would remind him of his calling to shepherd God's people. At the close of that

conversation, Jesus informed Peter of how he was going to be martyred for the sake of Christ. But what I want you to see is this: Jesus' final command to Peter is exactly the same as His first command to Peter. He simply tells him, "Follow me."

If you are caught in sin, turn to Jesus. Don't hide. Don't run from Him. Run to Him. He is gentle to all who repent, like Paul. All who run from Him and fail to repent experience the judgment, like Judas. He is a forgiving Savior. Follow Him.

"Jesus' final command to Peter is exactly the same as His first command to Peter: 'Follow me.' No matter how far you have fallen, this is still His word to you."