

Introductory Thoughts on the Gospel of John 2010 August 2nd for 30th

This is where we started in the summer of 2004. Has it been a reasonable thing to go through the Bible like this in six years, kind of like observant Jews go through the Torah in ten? I'll address that when we're done completely in a couple of months, if I can.

We begin and end with the Gospel of John because it is thought to be the most universal of our sacred texts. If only part of the Bible can be translated into a language, the New Testament is done first. If only one book can be done, John is usually done first. Among other things, it contains the most famous verse in the Bible -- John 3:16.

John the author is pretty much universally accepted to be John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. As such, he is the closest insider of Jesus to write anything. Of the twelve disciples, only three, Peter, John, and John's brother James did everything with him, like go to the top of the mountain for the transfiguration. The other nine, including Matthew, were insiders, but not quite to the level of the Inner Three. (Note that King David had a similar hierarchy of access.) Mark was thought to have been a young proselyte, and Luke was a follower, probably in the crowd, but more of a scholar and writer, not one of the twelve at all.

John writes differently from the others. He writes as a personal friend, not merely an eyewitness trying to make an accurate historical record. John writes so that people will believe Jesus, the human being, was also the divine Christ, the Messiah. His approach turns "seeing is believing" on its head. Think about it. "Believing is seeing." Yes, very different isn't it? Even physics thinks so. The observer inexorably affects the observed. Maybe "believing is seeing" is the more fundamental truth than just the scientific tenet "seeing is believing." Everything is choices, so it would seem....

It is thought that the writing dates from late in the first century, after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., though there is some controversy about this. In any case, Jesus is the new temple. His sacrifice replaces the functions of the temple in our theology. This being the case, it would be like an insider to the Kennedy administration writing a book about it about now in 2010. Not immediately fresh in mind, but, being the most important thing in the author's life, still the best account available, within the confines of security concerns, of course.

So, implicitly agreeing with those who make the translation decisions, we began with John, as an introduction to the faith. Now, with the entire Bible as background, we end with the Gospel of John as the description about what faith in Christ is really all about.

John 1:1 - 28

2010 August 2nd for 31st

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

God's Word made order out of chaos. It made existence out of non-existence.

“He was with God in the beginning.

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. To him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

Jesus was with God in the beginning. Creation was made for him and by him. So was life. And light. There is darkness, that is, absence of life. The light is there but it is not universally grasped or understood.

John the Baptist came first, to testify to this. The goal was that everyone should believe in the light that was coming into the world. When Jesus came into the world, it was all his yet he was neither recognized nor accepted by the world he had made. Some believed and received him, however, and to them “he gave the right to become children of God.” This does not mean children born in the normal way, this means “born of God.”

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John testified to this, to the blessing that was coming, to the fulfillment of the law of Moses. No one has seen God but Jesus “who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

The priests and Levites went out to Bethany to ask John who he was and what he was doing. He was there on the other side of the Jordan baptizing with water. They asked him if he was the Christ? No. Elijah? No. The Prophet? No. Who was he? What were they to report back to those who sent them?

“I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Why was he baptizing then, if he wasn’t the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?

“‘I baptize with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’”

John 1:29 - 51

2010 August 3rd for September 1st

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and declared, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” He also said that this was the one he had been talking about who was greater than he was. He knew this because God had told him that he would see the Spirit come down in the form of a dove on the One who would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God. This was John’s testimony.

The next day John was there with two of his disciples when Jesus passed by. The two disciples asked where he was staying and Jesus invited them to come along and see. Peter's brother Andrew, excited that the Messiah had been found went and found Peter and told him to come see too. Jesus said to Peter, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (that is, "Peter").

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. On the way he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Philip went and found his friend Nathanael and said that the Messiah had been found -- Jesus of Nazareth.

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked."

"Come and see," said Philip."

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching him, he greeted him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." Nathanael wondered how Jesus even knew him. "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Nathanael, stunned, declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

Jesus made an interesting reply, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that. I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

This is the "come and see" episode in which Jesus is establishing himself. The description is of something much less formal than praying all night and calling his disciples, as was related in the other Gospels. Maybe this isn't the calling of the disciples yet though, maybe it is the beginning of the formation of the crowd.

John 2

2010 August 4th for September 2nd

Jesus and his mother and disciples were invited to a wedding. In the middle of the feast the wedding party ran out of wine.

Mary came to Jesus and told him about this. Jesus reply was in essence, "why are you telling me?" Mary told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them. He told them to fill some water jars to the brim, then dip some out and take it to the steward. The steward was surprised and went to the groom and commended him for saving the best wine until last. Ordinarily, people would serve the good wine first then when people were drunk would bring out the cheaper stuff. Wine that Jesus had made from water, however, was the "good stuff."

Jesus did not want to get involved in matters like this. He said that his "time [had] not yet come." Possibly he was deferring to his mother.

After a visit to Capernaum, Jesus and his followers went down to Jerusalem for the Passover. When he got there he found a great deal of commerce going on in the temple courts, people selling animals for sacrifices and changing money for foreigners. This infuriated Jesus and he made up a whip of chords and drove them out with it, making a mess of everything, turning over their tables, saying, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

"Zeal for your house will consume me," the disciples remembered. This was from a Psalm.

Those in charge challenged Jesus for his authority. He replied, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." He was talking about his own body, and the disciples remembered this later, but they thought he was talking about the building they were standing in, a building that had taken 46 years to build.

Witnessing this, the disciples believed. Many people witnessed miracles and believed too but Jesus was careful about this and didn't trust just anyone. "He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."

John 3

2010 August 4th for September 3rd

A teacher from the ruling council, Nicodemus, came to Jesus one night. He believed Jesus because of the miracles, and he declared that this meant that God was with Jesus.

"In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'"

Nicodemus was confused. Could a person re-enter his mother's womb and be "born again?"

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'"

Nicodemus was still confused.

Now Jesus was frustrated, "You are Israel's teacher and do you not understand these things?" If you don't get this, how can I talk about the heavenly things? Only the Son of Man had been in heaven and he came down to be lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so that everyone might be saved.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The Son came not to condemn but to save, but there is darkness in the world too and some people love that more. Those who hate light and love evil are afraid of light because it will expose them. They will not be in the kingdom of God. Those who hate evil and love light can be in the kingdom of God if they believe Jesus.

Some of John the Baptist’s disciples told John that Jesus was also baptizing and that his movement was pulling ahead. What should they do?

John replied, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.” They all knew already that John wasn’t the Christ. It was proper that the Christ would increase while John would decrease. Jesus, who came from above, owned the whole earth and his testimony was truth. Not all believed this, but those who did certified “that God is truthful.” “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

John 4:1 - 26

2010 August 5th for September 6th

Jesus decided to leave Judea and go back to Galilee because the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was gaining more disciples than John. Jesus’ disciples were doing the actual baptizing of his new followers.

On the way to Galilee they had to go through Samaria and they stopped to rest near a Samaritan town at the town well. The disciples went into town to buy food and a woman from town came out to draw water. Jesus asked her for a drink.

She was surprised at this. Neither did men talk to women at the public well nor did Jews speak to Samaritans anywhere. Jesus replied to this obliquely, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

The woman thought this improbable. The well was deep and Jesus had no equipment. But it wasn’t about the physical water.

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

So, the woman did ask him for this water unto eternal life.

Jesus told her to go get her husband and bring him out too. She replied that she had none.

This was correct, Jesus said. She had had five husbands and was not married to the man she was living with now... he said.

On this, the woman realized that Jesus was a prophet and asked a standard religious question. Was it appropriate to worship in Jerusalem or on this mountain here? This was the standard Jewish - Samaritan religious conflict. Anyone would know about it, even a woman who had been through five husbands and was now going about her daily business of drawing water.

Jesus replied that neither place was the place and that it was not about place. The Jews worship what they know, the Samaritans worship what they do not know, but “a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said that she knew that the Messiah was coming and that he would explain all this. Of course, Jesus had just explained all this. He made the declaration,

“I who speak to you am he.”

John 4:27 - 54

2010 August 11th for September 7th

When the disciples got back from town, they were surprised to find Jesus talking to a woman at the well but said nothing. She left her equipment behind and went in to town to tell everyone about her experience. Meanwhile the disciples tried to get Jesus to eat something but he said, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

What he meant was, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” They had thought he had another source of bread. But Jesus said that he and the disciples were here to reap the crop for eternal life. Others in the past had sowed and done the hard work, they were now here to harvest.

Then the people from the woman’s town arrived and, after listening to Jesus for a while said that they believed him for themselves and not just because of what the woman had told them.

He then went to Galilee and was close to the Cana where he had turned water to wine at the wedding. A royal official had a son who was sick and near death and he came and begged Jesus to come heal the boy.

Jesus said something interesting, “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe.”

This sounds like frustration. It’s not like Jesus was doing miracles for show. It’s not like people were sick just so he would have something to do.... It does say that this was Jesus’ second

miraculous sign. Perhaps miracles are difficult and Jesus was hoping for a following without the need for spectacle.

Whatever the case, the official kept begging, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

Jesus said something else interesting, “You may go. Your son will live.”

The man took Jesus at his word and left for home. The next day he was met by his servants coming out to tell him that the boy was all right. When he inquired about what time the fever had left him, it turned out to be about the same time the previous day that Jesus had said, “Your son will live.”

John 5:1 - 30

2010 August 11th for September 8th

Jesus was in Jerusalem for a feast when he passed a pool surrounded by five covered colonnades where people went for healing. The belief was that when the waters stirred, the first one in would be healed.

One crippled man had been there for thirty-eight years but no one had ever been available to help him into the water first, so he remained there lame and begging. Jesus came by and asked what was the problem. On explanation he said, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

The man did so, but unfortunately it was the Sabbath and some of the Jews challenged him about carrying his mat on the Sabbath. He simply told them that the man who had healed him had told him to do so.

Later Jesus saw the man in the temple and said something interesting to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

The man then told the Jews it was Jesus who had healed him. The Jews persecuted Jesus for working on the Sabbath like that but Jesus said that his father was always working and so he was always working. He only did what he saw his father doing. God had given Jesus authority to heal whoever he wanted and raise the dead to life when he wanted and to judge as he wanted.

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

This was nothing to be amazed at. Even those in their graves would hear his voice and come out -- “those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

But then Jesus said that he was not doing this by himself, that he did not work to please himself but to please his father who sent him.

This is one of the places where get our rapture beliefs.

John 5:31 - 45

2010 August 11th for September 9th

Jesus continued his discourse, addressing the Jews in the temple.

“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.

“You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

“I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

Are these the words of an always loving and kind, gentle shepherd? Maybe they are the words of such a shepherd towards his stubborn sheep.

John 6:1 - 24

2010 August 13th for September 10th

It was getting near the Passover and Jesus and his followers were on a mountainside on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. At this point he had a huge crowd, thousands of people, following him because of the miracles.

Jesus asked Phillip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”

Philip was astounded and estimated that it would take eight month's pay to begin to feed all the people. Andrew had found a boy with five small barley loaves and two fish and offered them. Jesus had the people sit down and blessed the boy's food and handed it out to everyone. When people were through eating, he ordered, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." There were twelve baskets full of scraps left over.

"After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

Jesus did not want to be their king, not on their terms anyway.

Later while Jesus was off by himself, the disciples got in a boat and started back toward Capernaum.

"By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.' Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading."

The next morning, the crowd realized that Jesus and the disciples were all gone but that only one boat was missing and they knew that Jesus had not been on it. After some more boats arrived from Tiberius, they realized that Jesus and the disciples weren't going to be there and so they got in boats to head for Capernaum themselves.

John 6:25 - 71

2010 August 13th for September 13th

The crowds and the Jewish leaders ultimately found Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. An interesting exchange ensued.

First they asked him how he had gotten there, wondering about the thing with the boats from yesterday.

"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

They wondered what it was that God required.

"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

They asked for a miracle, like the manna in the desert (under Moses) to prove that he was the one who had been sent.

“I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

So, they asked for this bread, which seems reasonable, and Jesus said that he himself was the bread.

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Not all would believe, but the Father would give some, and it was the Father’s will that Jesus save all of them, not lose any of them, and that he would “raise them up at the last day.”

At that point it started getting thick. People knew who Jesus was, he was son of Mary and Joseph. What was all this “come down from heaven” business?

Jesus told them to stop grumbling, that only those who the Father brought to him could come to him and that he would raise them up at the last day. “No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.” The ancestors who had eaten the manna in the wilderness had died but when the bread came down from heaven, “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

An argument then broke out about how he could give them his flesh to eat. But it was true.

“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”

It is no wonder that this teaching leads to so much confusion, rejection, and to so many various allegorical interpretations.

Indeed, many of the followers up to that point said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Maybe I'm missing something from context here, but I would have said, "Who can understand it?"

Jesus answered this new grumbling, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

This is both clarifying and troubling. All this "flesh and blood" talk had to do with spiritual, not physical matters. When Jesus says "real" he means "spirit" and when he talks about the physical creation, it is nothing to him. Well enough, but only those who were "enabled" by the Father would be able to do anything with it. Indeed.

So a lot of the crowd turned away and left. Jesus asked the twelve what they were going to do. Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus made a cryptic reply even to this, always pushing the limits of understanding.

"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." He was talking there about Judas Iscariot.

John 7:1 - 24

2010 August 13th for September 14th

Jesus taught around Galilee, staying out of Judea on purpose because the Jews there were waiting to kill him. The disciples lobbied him to go to Judea and show off his miracles so that people would know who he was. You can't be a public leader without going out in public, they said.

Jesus replied, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come."

So Jesus stayed in Galilee while the disciples went up to the feast in Judea.

But later he went to the feast secretly.

Jesus was quite controversial. The Jews were looking for him. Some were saying he was a good man, some were saying he was a deceiver. "But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews."

Then halfway through the feast, he suddenly appeared, teaching in the temple. Just couldn't stay away. One of the crowd commentaries was, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

‘Kill you?’ the crowd said, ‘You must be crazy! You must be demon possessed!’ they said.

Jesus replied, “I did one miracle and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”

Yeah, make a right judgment! What he said!

It seems strange that the objection to miracle working was that it was done on a certain day, the Sabbath, that the Sabbath was somehow more important than the miracle. But there it is.

John 7:25 - 52

2010 August 14th for September 15th

The people listening to Jesus wondered if he was the person the authorities were trying to kill. Here he was speaking in public and no one was doing anything. Further, they knew who he was, he was Jesus from Nazareth, yet, “when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from.” Jesus answered this.

“Yes, you know me and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.”

“At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.” Some put their faith in him. Some asked if the Christ would do more miracles than this man. The authorities sent the temple police to arrest him. Jesus talked to them.

“I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.”

The Jews were confused by this. Was he going to live among the Greeks and teach them? Where did he think he was going that they wouldn’t find him?

Jesus then proclaimed, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

As before, he was talking of spiritual things. Some thought he was a prophet or the Christ, but they were confused because the Christ was supposed to come from Bethlehem, David's home town, not Galilee.

The temple guards did not arrest him and when the authorities challenged them about this they said, "No one ever spoke the way this man does."

"You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. 'Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law -- there is a curse on them.'

"Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 'Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?'

"They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.'"

John 8:1 - 30

2010 August 14th for September 16th

A woman who had been caught committing adultery was brought to Jesus. Those who brought her accused her and quoted the law that "Moses commanded us to stone such women," and demanded that Jesus tell them what he thought. This was a trap to set up a basis for accusing him of some injustice. No matter what he said, he was in trouble.

After some time contemplating and writing on the ground, Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Jesus then went back to writing on the ground. Beginning with the oldest, the people all left. When only Jesus and the woman remained, he spoke to her.

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

Jesus was without sin, so he still could have condemned her, by his own standard, but he did not.

Next Jesus spars with the Pharisees in an exchange that is best followed verbatim.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'

“The Pharisees challenged him, ‘Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.’

“Jesus answered, ‘Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.’

“Then they asked him, ‘Where is your father?’

“‘You do not know me or my Father,’ Jesus replied. ‘If you know me, you would know my Father also. He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

“Once more Jesus said to them, ‘I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.’

“This made the Jews ask, ‘Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, “Where I go, you cannot come”?’

“But he continued, ‘You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.’

“‘Who are you?’ they asked.

“‘Just what I have been claiming all along,’ Jesus replied. ‘I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.’

“They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him,’ Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.”

Many may have put their faith in him, but it is easy to see how this language and these claims would have been inflammatory to the religious leaders, the keepers of the faith, the guardians of God, as they thought.

The exchange between Jesus and the Jewish leaders continues. They can't decide whether to take him seriously or dispense with him. They claim to be children of God, children of Abraham, and they claim he is an outsider, a nobody. Jesus in return calls them children of the devil and tells them why. At the end, he claims to be equal with God, and narrowly escapes being stoned himself.

“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

Notice that most of this quote is omitted from the cornice on the library at the University of Texas. It says only, “... the truth shall make you free.” Interestingly, this makes the books in the library the same sort of authorities that Jesus' opponents here are: self proclaimed.

“They answered him, ‘We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?’

“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.’

“‘Abraham is our father,’ they answered.

“‘If you were Abraham's children,’ said Jesus, ‘then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does.’

“‘We are not illegitimate children,’ they protested. ‘The only Father we have is God himself.’

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.’

“The Jews answered him, ‘Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?’

“‘I am not possessed by a demon,’ said Jesus, ‘but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.’

“‘At this the Jews exclaimed, ‘Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?’

“‘Jesus replied, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him., I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.’

“‘You are not yet fifty years old,’ the Jews said to him, ‘and you have seen Abraham!’

“‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’

By saying, “I am!” Jesus was claiming to be God, because God’s name is “I am.”

“‘At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.’”

I have complained in the past that I have trouble identifying with no one in the Bible except Jesus. In this incident, very much like the elementary school playground with bullies and strife, I can identify with Jesus. I cannot identify with his position of being the misunderstood and rejected God, the only one who has the truth, but I can identify with his being abused by self-proclaimed authorities on their own strength of strong (and frightened) personality.

John 9:1 - 12

2010 August 24th for September 20th

“‘As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’

“‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ Jesus said, ‘but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’”

I would have said that the universe is imperfect and that sin was a symptom of the imperfection and that both the parents and the man sinned but that the blindness was not necessarily related to their sins but was a reflection of the state of the universe and that God, in the form of Jesus, when he entered the universe, went around fixing every imperfection that he came on, at least

when asked. Here Jesus is saying that the imperfection was so that he could demonstrate his glory. This person was blind from birth so that God could demonstrate his glory.

“Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ‘Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and went home seeing.

This is a decidedly non-Victorian and unsanitary means of healing. Unthinkable to us, I have not heard this preached as something we should literally do, even by the preachers of inerrancy.

“His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, ‘Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?’ Some claimed that he was.

“Others said, ‘No, he only looks like him.’

“But he himself insisted, ‘I am the man.’

“‘How then were your eyes opened?’ they demanded.

“He replied, ‘The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and then I could see.’

“‘Where is this man?’ they asked him.

“‘I don’t know,’ he said.”

John 9:13 - 41

2010 August 24th for September 21st

As it happened, Jesus healed the blind man on a Sabbath. The Pharisees held that Jesus was a sinner because he had worked on the Sabbath and so the healing could not have been from God. They also claimed that the man had never been blind, so they called in the man’s parents for identification. The parents verified that the man was their son and that he had been blind from birth but they wouldn’t say anything more for fear of the leaders because it had already been decided that anyone who claimed Jesus as the Christ would be thrown out of the synagogue.

“A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. ‘Give glory to God,’ they said. ‘We know this man is a sinner.’

“He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’

“Then they asked him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’

“He answered, ‘I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?’”

These were fighting words.

“They then hurled insults at him and said, ‘You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.’

“The man answered, ‘Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God he could do nothing.’

“To this they replied, ‘You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us! And they threw him out.’”

“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’

“‘Who is he, sir?’ the man asked. ‘Tell me so that I may believe in him.’

“Jesus said, ‘You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’

“Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.

“Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.’

“Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, ‘What? Are we blind too?’

“Jesus said, ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.’”

Jesus could put down anyone anytime.

John 10:1 - 21

2010 August 25th for September 22nd

Jesus taught about himself using the analogy of a shepherd. Interestingly, the analogy begins with a man who enters the sheep pen not by the normal gate but by climbing over the wall. Such a man is a robber and thief.

There are two kinds of shepherds: the owner and the hired hand. The owner cares for the sheep and lays his life down for them in case of danger. The hired man runs away to protect himself, caring nothing for the sheep. The sheep knows the owner's voice and they follow him.

Jesus then spoke about himself. He was himself the sheep gate. The thief comes to destroy but Jesus comes to give life.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me -- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father -- and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -- only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

The "others" may refer to non Jews who would become part of Jesus' flock. Jesus has an unusual power to be able to *take up* his life again. Anyone can lay down his life, or have it taken away by another, or by accident or nature.

Listening to this, the religious authorities thought Jesus had a demon or was "raving mad" and advised against listening to him. Others said, "Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

John 10:22 - 42

2010 August 27th for September 23rd

Jesus had a direct confrontation with the Jews about his claim of identity with God. They said, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Anyone who has gotten to John Chapter 10 knows that they have already had this discussion. Maybe it was just entrapment. Jesus replies, talking again about his sheep.

"Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'

"Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?'"

(That was one of dad's favorite verses.)

"'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'

“Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I have said you are gods”?’ [referring to Psalm 82] If he called them “gods,” to whom the word of God came -- and the Scripture cannot be broken -- what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, “I am God’s son”? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.’ Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.”

Jesus returned across the Jordan to where he had baptized at the start. The people there said of him, “Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.” As a result, many believed in Jesus.

John 11:1 - 44

2010 August 27th for September 24th

A man from Bethany, Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha and friend of Jesus, was sick. The family sent for Jesus so Lazarus could be healed but Jesus delayed two extra days. He said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

After the two days, he said, “Let us go back to Judea.”

The disciples protested that they had just been in Judea where the Jews had tried to stone him. Jesus replied to this,

“Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”

I don’t exactly follow how this is relevant to being stoned by the Jews. Is Jesus saying that he walks by light or is light while they are in darkness? Perhaps he knows that it will be safe for him to go back because he has the light or the knowledge of what is happening and will happen.

He continued, saying, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

The disciples didn’t think this was a big deal if he was just sleeping naturally. Jesus had to be plain with them. “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

“Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’”

I don't see how this is relevant either. Maybe Thomas was remembering that the Jews were trying to stone Jesus and he expected that the whole party was marching to their death and they would be loyal in doing so.

Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem and when they got there Lazarus had been dead for four days. This was plenty long for everyone to believe that he was really dead and not just in a coma or a "dead faint." Martha came out to meet Jesus on the road. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

"Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

"Martha answered, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'"

We quote this in our funeral services, particularly at graveside.

"'Yes, Lord,' she told him, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.'"

She then went and got Mary and when Mary got up to go out to Jesus, the people who were at the house mourning with her got up and followed, thinking perhaps she was going to the tomb to continue mourning.

Mary then said the same thing, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus did not discuss with her as he had with Martha. He noted how distraught she was and how distraught were the people with her and was himself troubled to the point of tears. "'Where have you laid him?' he asked."

And so they went to the tomb where Jesus wept and the people watching said, "See how he loved him!" But some also said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus ordered the stone to be removed from the mouth of the tomb. Martha warned that there would be an odor, as it had been already four days. Jesus was too late to view the body!

"Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'"

This was a hard sell, understandably so.

So they moved the stone.

“Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me.’”

“When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and cloth around his face.” He had really been dead.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Take of the grave clothes and let him go.’”

John 11:45 - 57

2010 August 30th for September 27th

The raising of Lazarus created a crisis. Many of the witnesses believed in Jesus and put their faith in him. Others went to the religious leaders and reported. In their response we learn something of the motivations of those leaders.

“‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked, ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’”

“Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.’”

John now branches into interpretation and extension.

“He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.”

Jesus no longer freely moved among the Jews. He moved to a village called Ephraim in the desert with his disciples. When the feast of the Passover came, everyone was wondering if he would show up in Jerusalem. If he did, the religious leaders were going to have him arrested.

John 12:1 - 19

2010 September 1st for 28th

On the way to the Passover, Jesus passed through Bethany. A big dinner was thrown for him with Martha, Lazarus’ sister, serving. During the evening Mary brought out “a pint of pure nard” and poured it on Jesus feet, wiping them with her hair. Judas, the money keeper and later betrayer of Jesus, objected that this was a waste. The perfume was very expensive and could have been sold and the money given to the poor, he complained.

“Leave her alone, ‘ Jesus replied, ‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.’”

The crowd around Jesus was large, including many witnesses to the raising of Lazarus. As a result, the Jews planned to kill Lazarus too.

... the Jews planned to kill Lazarus too. Just resuscitated, he would be murdered in the name of God. This is truly remarkable hard-heartedness.

The following day, five days before the Passover, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The people came out to meet him waving palm branches and shouting,

“Hosanna!

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

“Blessed is the King of Israel.”

At this point the disciples didn’t understand what was going on. Later, “after Jesus was glorified” they realized that all this had been prophesied in the scriptures.

The crowds continued to spread the word about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead to the point where the Pharisees were saying to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

John 12:20 - 50

2010 September 1st for 29th

Some Greeks had come to the Passover. They approached Philip about seeing Jesus. Philip and Andrew went and told Jesus about the request. Jesus’ reply was off topic for the request but it was what he wanted to say.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven saying, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

Some thought it thundered. Others thought an angel had spoken. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

This, it says, is his indication of the type of death he would die, i.e., being “lifted up” on the cross.

The crowd said that they had heard the Christ would live forever, so what was this about being “lifted up?” Who was this “Son of Man” anyway?

I have wondered that.

Jesus answered, again on his own agenda, not the topic of the question, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”

Then he hid from everyone, in broad daylight.

(Note that after the resurrection, Jesus would suddenly appear “among them” in a similar way, a more impressive feat.)

The Jews continued to disbelieve in Jesus, as had been prophesied variously in Isaiah. The writer says that “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.”

Some of the religious leadership put their faith in Jesus but others “would not confess” because “they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”

It is hard for us to imagine a public figure before the era of microphones, speakers, and amplification. At this point Jesus “cried out.” It is unclear whether he cried out to be heard by as many as possible or if from anguish, or both. Either way his statement is radical.

“When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

John 13:1 - 17

2010 September 2nd for 30th

“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”

Knowing that God had put everything into his power and that having come from God he was about to return to God, he got up, took off his outer clothes, and put a towel around his waist as a slave would do. He then started washing the disciples feet, as a slave would.

When he came to Peter, there was a discussion. Peter insisted that Jesus could not serve him in this way. Jesus replied that he did not understand now what was happening but that someday he would. Peter still declined. “Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’” So Peter asked that he have a complete bath. Jesus said that a complete bath was not necessary but only the feet because only part of the body was not clean. In saying that part of the body was not clean he was referring to Judas who the devil had prompted to betray him. (At least this is the way the story is told at the time of writing.)

When this was finished, Jesus put his clothes back on, returned to his place, and told them this:

“Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

More radically upside-down kingdom.

John 13:18 - 38

2010 September 3rd for October 1st

Jesus said that one of those at the Passover table with them would betray him. The disciples looked around at each other puzzled. Peter motioned for John (the author) to ask Jesus who it was. John was in the position of the most favored, He was reclining right by Jesus. John asked and Jesus told him that the person he served next was the one. He served Judas.

“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

“‘What you are about to do, do quickly,’ Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him.” Maybe he was supposed to go buy bread or help the poor or something.

“When he was gone, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Peter asked Jesus where he was going. Jesus said Peter could not follow now, but would follow later.

“Peter asked, ‘Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’

“Then Jesus answered, ‘Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!’”

John 14

2010 September 6th for October 4th

Jesus continues his teaching and conversation at the Passover table. It is a lengthy discourse. Much of what he says here is used verbatim in our liturgy, in Communion, Funerals, Weddings, and Baptisms among others.

We use these texts as tidbits of faith, comfort foods really, but the discourse between Jesus and the disciples, loving and patient though he is, is still one of incredulity. Most of it is peppered with ‘how many times do I have to tell you.... How can you not know by now!’ Here Jesus was about to leave the earth and the disciples were still not showing signs of being very trained.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

These are words from Jewish betrothal, Jesus acting as the husband.

“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’

“Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’

“Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.’

“Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, ‘But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?’

“Jesus replied, ‘If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.”

He said, “let us leave” but there are at least two more chapters of this teaching before or while they are leaving.

John 15

2010 September 8th for October 5th

Jesus' final lesson continues unbroken through this entire chapter.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: “They hated me without reason.”

“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

John 16

2010 September 7th for October 6th

Jesus’ lengthy final earthly teaching continues.

“All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue, in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment; in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

The disciples were confused by this. What did he mean by, “In a little while....”? What did he mean by, “going to the Father”?

“Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, ‘Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me”? I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

“Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

The disciples thought they understood now, that Jesus was speaking plainly.

“Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”

“You believe at last!” Jesus answered. “But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

John 17

2010 September 9th for October 7th

The conclusion of Jesus’ final teaching consumes this chapter uninterrupted. It is entirely a prayer, prayed while Jesus “looked toward heaven.” The prayer is in three parts: The glorification of Jesus and his Father, intercession for the disciples, and intercession for all believers. Throughout, we see directly that Jesus pre-existed his life on this earth and was in glory in heaven before he gave it all up to come here.

“Father, the time has come, Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those who you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name -- the name you gave me -- so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.”

This raises a question. Was it necessary that one be “doomed to destruction” in the outworking of the ultimate miracle of Jesus’ sacrifice? Was the dooming done to Judas or did Judas bring it on himself? Was it necessary at all that one be “doomed to destruction so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.”?

Continuing...

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Here Jesus has prayed for us, those who believe through the message of the disciples. Are we now in “complete unity” so that the world knows that God sent Jesus and loved the disciples?

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

John 18:1 - 18

2010 September 11th for October 8th

At the end of his prayer, Jesus and the disciples left, crossed the Kidron Valley, and went to an olive grove that was a customary meeting place for them. Judas knew about the place and came there too, leading a “detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.”

Jesus asked, “Who is it you want.”

They said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I am he,” he replied. At this they withdrew and fell to the ground, Judas among them.

So Jesus asked again who they were looking for and they replied again, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.”

This was to fulfill the prophecy “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”

Peter had a sword and at that point he drew it and struck at someone who turned out to be a servant of the high priest named Malchus, cutting off his ear. Peter apparently wasn't very skillful with the sword.

“Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”

So Jesus was arrested and bound and brought to Annas who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year, the one who had said that it would be best if one man died for the Jewish nation.

Peter and another disciple followed. The other disciple (some think it was John the author) was known to the high priest and was permitted in the courtyard but Peter had to wait outside, warming himself at the fire with the others because it was cold. The other disciple came out to speak to the girl on guard about bringing Peter in. She asked if he wasn't one of the disciples.

“He replied, ‘I am not.’”

John 18:19 - 40

2010 September 16th for October 11th

Jesus' trial proceeded in three stages. First he appeared somewhat informally before Annas, the high priest's father-in-law. Annas questioned Jesus about his teaching and his disciples. Jesus replied.

“I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”

This was taken as insolence and one of the guards hit Jesus in the face. Jesus replied to this.

“If I have said something wrong testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”

So Annas advanced Jesus to the high priest, Caiaphas.

Meanwhile Peter was warming himself in the courtyard and someone asked him if he wasn't one of the disciples. Peter denied it. One of Malchus' relatives (the servant whose ear Peter had cut off) challenged him further. “Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?” Peter denied it again and at that time a rooster started crowing, as Jesus had prophesied.

Early in the morning Caiaphas had Jesus brought to Pilate, the local Roman governor. The Jews did not go into the palace because entering the home of a Gentile would defile them, prohibiting them from eating the Passover that day. Pilate asked for the charges. Their reply was classic schoolyard bullying.

“If he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you.”

Pilate then correctly told them to go off and deal with it themselves. They protested, however, that they had no authority to execute anyone. Pilate had Jesus brought in for an interview.

P: “Are you the king of the Jews?”

J: “Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?”

P: “Am I a Jew? It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

J: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

P: “You are a king, then?”

It would of course be illegal to claim to be a king in Caesar's dominion.

J: “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

P: “‘What is truth?’ Pilate asked.” This is the classic ‘Pilate’s Question.’

So Pilate went out to the crowd and correctly said there was no basis for a charge. Because it was the festival and because there was a custom of releasing a prisoner at the festival, Pilate offered to release Jesus.

“They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.”

John 19:1 - 16

2010 September 16th for October 12th

Pilate, continuing in ambivalence, had Jesus flogged. The soldiers doing the flogging twisted together thorns into a crown and jammed it onto his head. They mocked him by putting him in a purple robe and hailing him as “King of the Jews.”

Pilate then had Jesus brought out, beaten and bleeding, claiming still that there was no basis for a

charge against him. This seems strangely cruel doesn't it, punishing a man without charges only due to the leader's weakness? Immediately the chief priests and officials started yelling, "Crucify! Crucify!"

Pilate told them to go crucify him, but they only replied that they had a law that anyone claiming to be the Son of God should be executed. This frightened Pilate and he brought Jesus in for more questioning.

P: "Where do you come from?"

J: <silence>

P: "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

J: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

Pilate kept trying to free Jesus but the Jews kept shouting.

"If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

They knew how to get his attention. Pilate worked for Caesar.

"When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour." [noon]

"Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews.

"But they shouted 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!'

"Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered.

"Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified."

...

"We have no king but Caesar." Strange thing for the Jewish religious leaders to be saying.

On the order from Pilate the soldiers took charge of Jesus and, making him carry his own cross, led him out to be crucified at a place called "The Skull." Two criminals were crucified with him, one on each side. Pilate had a notice put on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It was written in three languages, Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, so that everyone who passed by could read it. The inscription, of course, started a religious controversy. The religious leaders protested to Pilate that he should change it to "...this man *claimed* to be King of the Jews." Pilate, to his credit, said, "What I have written, I have written."

The soldiers on guard divided up Jesus' clothing and when they came to the one-piece undergarment, gambled for it rather than tear it into pieces. This fulfilled a prophesy from Psalm 22 that they would gamble for his clothing.

Several followers were nearby - Mary wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Jesus and her sister. From the cross, Jesus saw his mother and his favorite disciple, the author John, standing there. He charged John to take care of his mother and charged his mother to be cared for by John. John took Mary into his household at that moment.

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

It being the day of preparation for the Passover (a rare, special Passover Sabbath that year), the Jews did not want bodies on the crosses after sundown. They asked Pilate to have the victim's legs broken so they would die and could be taken down. The soldiers did this to the two criminals but when they came to Jesus, found he was already dead. Instead, one soldier stabbed him in the side with a sword. Blood and water gushed out. This fulfilled prophecies from Exodus, Numbers, and Psalms that he would be pierced and that he would have no bones broken.

John, in effect, signs the story with this declaration:

"The man who saw it has given testimony and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled."

Joseph of Arimathea, a secret follower of Jesus, asked for the body and with Pilate's permission, took it down and took it to a new, unused tomb. Nicodemus, who we met before ("...can I enter into my mother's womb and be born again?") brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, per the Jewish burial customs. The body was put in the tomb at the end of the day.

A side remark: The notion of a “secret follower of Jesus” goes against a lot of preaching that I have heard....

John 20

2010 September 18th for October 14th

The morning after the Sabbath, that is, 36 hours after the body was left in the tomb, Mary Magdalene was there before first light to finish the burial work with the spices. She found that the stone covering the tomb was rolled aside and that there was no body inside. She ran back to the disciples, crying. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

Peter and “the other disciple” (presumably the author John) ran for the tomb. John got there first. “He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separated from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus was going rise from death.)”

The disciples returned to their homes, but Mary stayed there crying.

“As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

“They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’

“‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

“‘Woman,’ he said, ‘why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’

“Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’

“She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).

“Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’

“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.”

It would seem that Mary Magdalene was the first mortal to see the resurrected Jesus.

The next evening, the disciples were together in a locked room (in fear of the Jews) when Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you!" he said. He then showed them the forensic evidence of his pierced hands and side and they were convinced that it was him and were full of joy. He then said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Disciple Thomas was not with them at this encounter and did not believe that they had really seen Jesus. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

So a week later, they were all together in a locked room again, for fear of the Jews again, and Thomas was there this time and Jesus was there with them. Again he said, "Peace be with you!" He then said directly to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed." It wasn't going to be possible for everyone who was ever going to live to see.

The author concludes: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name."

This statement was the unifying theme of John's book by which he made choices on what to include and what to leave out.

John 21

2010 September 18th for October 15th

Jesus appeared to the disciples for a third time. Peter had said that he was going fishing. Perhaps he was going back to his old business, perhaps he was just going back to something familiar. Anyway, the others said they would go with him. They fished all night and caught nothing.

Early the next morning there was a man standing on the shore. He hailed them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" They had no fish. The man on the shore knew they didn't.

"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." They did this and "were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish."

Peter realized it was Jesus, put on his outer garment, and jumped in the water to swim ashore. The rest of the disciples followed in the boat struggling to tow the overloaded net.

“When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’” Peter went aboard the boat and drug the net up. Even though there were 153 fish in it, it had not torn. All of this was remarkable.

After breakfast Jesus said to Peter, “‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’

“‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’

“Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’

Lost in the translation here is the set of words used for “love.” The Greek “agape” or divine love that Jesus is using, is translated “truly love.” The Greek “phileo” or friendship or brotherly love that Peter is using is translated “love.” (The Greek “eros” for sexual love is not used here.)

“Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’

“He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’

“Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’

“The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’”

This time Jesus said “phileo.”

“Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’”

I think Peter was also hurt because Jesus said “phileo.” This thought is controversial in Christian scholarship as I will discuss in one of my summaries later.

“Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘follow me!’”

Peter had denied Jesus three times. Now Peter affirmed Jesus three times, in his own way. His commission now was to tend the flock of the church.

Peter then turned and asked about John, the author.

“Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I remain, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?’”

Hyperbole and put downs were not beyond even the resurrected Jesus when appropriate, as they always seemed to be.

John then concludes with his signature.

“This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

Concluding Thoughts on John

2010 September 20th for October 18th

John is different from the other Gospels. What John quotes Jesus as saying is a lot more in-your-face than the morality or uplifting-of-the-downtrodden teachings in the other accounts. John has many more direct quotes of the speeches and debates of Jesus. The claims of divinity and difficulties with the believers and non-believers, indeed, the difficulties with anyone, anyone at all, merely understanding just what Jesus was saying about himself are much more detailed and protracted in John than elsewhere.

By his own admission, John the author writes this account so that the reader will know the sorts of things Jesus said, not everything he said, but a representative portion. Also so the reader will know the sorts of things Jesus did, particularly the details of the last supper, betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection, from a firsthand point of view. John swears to the veracity of it all several times, especially at the most important junctures. Comparing parallel Gospel accounts works after a fashion in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but John covers different material and comes from a different angle, a very close and personal one.

On this reading, my impression of the Gospel of John is Jesus saying, “Believe in me; do what I say -- if the Father permits it.” It doesn’t say as much about specifically what it is Jesus said to do. That is in the other Gospels. Maybe John knew this and wrote accordingly. Maybe he wrote as he was told, or inspired. In any case, it reminds me of Paul. “Don’t stray from the faith once delivered.” But, what faith was that again?

To be honest, I find myself in the large crowd of those who just don’t get it. The religious leader asking, “Can I enter my mother’s womb and be born again?” or “You aren’t even fifty yet, how

can you say you've seen Abraham?" or "You must be crazy to think someone is trying to kill you." Jesus was not inaccurate or dishonest when answering these points, but his approach and tone severely stretch our modern concept of "patience," a trait in which we are significantly taught to imagine or visualize Jesus. In fact, he spends most of his time seeming exasperated with everyone around him, friend and foe. I didn't pick up much of the "Shepherd Jesus" in this book.

To be honest, I've had this experience before with brilliant leaders. They know their material cold. "I am from the Father, no one has seen the Father but me." And they assume that everyone else can just see what they see, believe what they believe, espouse the obviously suggested values, and sanely act accordingly. Reminds me of Samuel. "Make a correct judgment!" Jesus says. Indeed, do that!

Indeed, I have been the person who knows all about something and couldn't get through to someone who didn't. Often it's not important and we can carry on but when it is important it can in fact be exasperating. OK, so I *can* identify with Jesus in his apparent impatience. But my training says he is bigger than that. He knows everything, he knows just how to deal with anyone or anything. If he *seems* exasperated that is just what he calmly and understandingly does to get through most effectively. I must be missing something, though. Jesus doesn't always get through. To anyone. I can't buy the infinite intelligence argument. Maybe now, but not when he was human.

My training was that if you just stood there doe-eyed and let Jesus' truth kind of just wash over you, you could do no wrong; you couldn't hurt a fly. I have proven that this doesn't work, and people I know who live out this approach also prove that it doesn't have the expected outcomes.

But Jesus also said it right there in the negative: "*You haven't* seen the Father," he said about me, about you, about every other human being on earth, ever. In fact, based on what I've seen it is sometimes hard to see that there even *is* a Father. Except that we exist. Except that we live. But even so, the evidence out there and the evidence about Jesus in the Gospel of John is that the Father's true character is not much as we imagine him. Indeed, much of it is hidden from us. The Bible says as much. Jesus doesn't talk much about what the Father is like except to say that, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." This isn't a terrible lot of help in that when we see Jesus we see a human being with whom it is difficult to identify. Who among us has performed a miracle, healed someone in an instant with a word and a touch, Sabbath or otherwise? Who has fed a crowd of thousands on a blessing and the offerings of a child? Who has stood in the house of faith and claimed to be God, to have been the only person to have ever seen the Father? No, I don't identify with any of this either.

As a team leader Jesus was far beyond his followers, having them walk away at a loss often, except for the chosen dozen, all but one of the dozen anyway. He was always stretching them, scaring the daylights out of them, challenging them, correcting them, being short and exasperated

with them. But he did stick with them and in his last prayers we see that this had been very important to him.

In his post-resurrected body Jesus seems much more relaxed. He calls the disciples “friends” and although he still corrects and chastises them, it is milder, gentler, and more peer-like. This cannot help to have also been confusing to them. Three apparitions of the Lord to the disciples who thought he was dead and who believed, as most people do and always have, that death was the truly hard deadline. They coped, they were empowered, their lives were changed, but did they know in the aftermath what had happened, what was really going on? It doesn’t seem like it. We actually heard a little from one or two of them following Jesus’ life on earth but the main focus, at least in the Bible, shifts elsewhere. Confusion in the aftermath aids believability.

But then, as we were saying, “believing is seeing.” That concept still has me adrift. True, every experience I have or have witnessed tells me that believing is seeing and that without believing there is no seeing to believe, were it actually true that seeing was believing. Even in physics, the alleged most objective of the disciplines, objectivity only exists at the macroscopic level where we live and thus is an illusion to us. Even in physics “believing is seeing” it would seem. You may think that you see objectively and believe only what you see, but without believing first there is no seeing in the first place. And, what is objectivity anyway if you only ever find what you are looking for? It is a big question at JPL. How do we know how to look when we look for the unexpected?

What is truth? Yes, I identify with Pilate too. I understand weak leadership. I understand indecision, authority in the absence of sufficient information, lack of firm principle. And I identify with Caiaphas, though identifying with him distresses me most of all. Who wouldn’t sacrifice one person to keep the peace? Caiaphas and Pilate both did. (But they didn’t have to be so cruel about it, did they? Or did they?) And I identify with Peter. Peter was ready to go into battle beside his Lord, to die beside him in an attempt to set up the new kingdom, or, maybe with supernatural help, to actually win and enjoy the privileges of ruling in the new order. That’s what he swore to do throughout the story. He was not, however, ready to march into the Sanhedrin and voluntarily give up his life for ... what? To be a Lamb of God? To be ground up by the imperfect and cruel world in order to do what? Die without accomplishment? Save the world? Set an example of faith, of belief, to be emulated? Who wants to emulate being destroyed by the cruel world on a point of belief? Is he really the cad we make him out to be for warming himself by the fire in the courtyard while trying to distance himself from this utterly confusing nonsense? Who would have done better?

As we come to the end of an overall survey of the Bible, here I am whining. I have nothing about which to complain, actually. I have the resources and the leisure to even undertake a pursuit like this, Tevye’s dream: to spend a most of one’s time in God’s word, to find out what would really happen if a believer read the Bible for himself, using his God-given skills and experiences as the inevitable interpretive filter.

I am alarmed at the degree to which Jesus is different from the portrait painted of him in religious teaching. But, I do not fool myself into thinking that I could never make the errors that those in the religious establishment of Jesus' day did because, by their bad example, I know so much better. To the contrary, I would most likely make them. I do make them, but I would (and do) feel troubled as a result, not arrogant and self-assured, having marginalized a lunatic. So maybe I'm not that bad. (As if lesser degrees of bad were "good.")

This evening as I have written this I have been tired. It was a long Monday and I'm behind and things are in trouble everywhere I go. I have been in that condition when I came to this task more often than not. It was either write through that condition or do nothing at all. That's my take on the human situation: wait forever until you are ready to do a good job, or do something as you are right now. What's your take? Jesus tells me to follow him and keep his commandments. "Why don't you get it?" he asks. "Why don't you just do right?"

Why indeed....

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