

# **Creative Living Bible Study**

## **QUEST FOR FULFILLMENT** *Studies from the Book of John*

### ***PART 1***

### ***PUBLIC MINISTRY***

## **LESSON 1**

### **LIGHT IN A DARK WORLD**

#### **Prologue (John 1:1-18)**

The author of the Gospel<sup>1</sup> of John is the apostle John<sup>2</sup> who was among the original Twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Historians date his writing around A.D. 85. This would have made John about 85 years old when he penned his gospel, having experienced some 60 years of faith in Jesus Christ. In his 20's as a close disciple of Jesus, John had personally witnessed Christ perform countless miracles (John 20:30, 21:25) such as feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, walking on water, calming storms, and healing the leprous, crippled and demon possessed. He saw Jesus restore sight to the blind and bring Lazarus and a widow's son back from the dead. John saw heaven opened, Elijah and Moses bearing witness to the glorified Christ and heard the voice of God declaring "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" (Mark 9:2-8.)

John was there when Jesus agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane, was crucified on a cross, and most incredible of all, as Jesus walked and talked with him and many others during a forty-day period after His resurrection from the dead.

But this was only the beginning. After this, John witnessed the miraculous coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) to indwell and empower believers to witness for Christ in the face of hostility. He saw God enable the early believers to perform miracles as the church grew and spread the Good News about Christ. John witnessed the incredible conversion of a formerly ruthless persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus (Paul), whom the Lord used to spread the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Last but not least, John lived through the persecution and martyrdom of countless believers and all the apostles except himself. He was now full of years and, more than ever, full of faith.

Tradition states that John wrote his gospel at the request of Christian friends, and agreed to do so only after the church had fasted and prayed for three days.<sup>2</sup> After all he had seen and heard, what did the aged apostle have to say? John began his book with a prologue which summarized the contents of the book and his absolute and to-be-expected conviction: God became man and revealed Himself through Jesus of Nazareth. From the banks of the Jordan to the resurrection appearances, Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, became flesh, John declared, so that men and women could believe in Him and live.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Need for Light**

John begins his Gospel by addressing the need for light. Small children, and even adults, instinctively fear the darkness. It is a place of possible danger which gives a profound sense of being out of control.

Life can hold spiritual and emotional darkness for us all. We are a people who universally benefit from *light* in our lives. We not only need physical light to give us direction, understanding, and security, but we also need spiritual light to have these needs met.

Biblically, the word "light" is often synonymous with good and truth while "darkness" represents evil and falsehood. As in the physical realm, light is opposite darkness, but darkness is not equal to light in strength. A wonderful biblical truth is that spiritual light, or good and truth, ultimately cannot be overcome by darkness (John 1:5). Thus, the light of God John speaks of promises not only to meet our needs for direction, understanding, and security, but also to enable us to overcome evil and fill our lives with truth.

## LESSON 2

### THE FIRST DISCIPLES

#### John 1:19-51

While biblical accounts do not reflect the fact, John the Baptist was a very powerful personality in Israel and stirred up enormous interest in Palestine through his preaching. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote more about John the Baptist than Jesus Christ.

The reason John was so powerful was that he was widely believed to be a prophet. Israel's history involved *prophets* through whom the people heard the very words of God. The Jewish people took great pride in their prophets, but in the four hundred years since Malachi, there had been no prophet in Israel. God had been silent. Then came John the Baptist who was rugged, living in the desert on locusts and wild honey. He uncompromisingly preached repentance from sin in order to prepare for the soon-to-come promised Messiah.

The Jews had looked forward to a Messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression and make them *the* world power.<sup>1</sup> But John the Baptist announced that the Messiah would soon come to judge the hearts of individuals and that being a descendant of Abraham alone was not enough to make one righteous before God. John preached that Jew and Gentile alike should repent of sin and be baptized in preparation to meet the Christ. Multitudes flocked to the Jordan River to hear John and be baptized by him.

Because of his teachings on repentance and baptism, however, many Jewish leaders rejected the prophet. They were offended that John was baptizing

God's chosen people alongside Gentiles (the Jews had previously baptized only Gentile proselytes of the Jewish faith). The Jews also believed that simply being a physical descendant of Abraham made one righteous before God. The religious leaders were insulted that John was instructing them to repent of sin and be baptized to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. But John's popularity and the public's opinion that he was a prophet forced his critics to remain silent. Instead, they began to devise subtle plans to undermine his ministry.

So it was that as John was busy baptizing people in the Jordan, the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem sent a deputation to openly question his ministry credentials (John 1:19-28). They asked him if he was the Old Testament prophet Elijah who never saw death (Malachi 4:5) or The Prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. If not these, would he claim to be the Messiah? What they were really asking was, "Where do you get the right to preach repentance and baptize Jews?"

John handled his adversaries wisely, denying that he was any of the Old Testament prophets yet to come. Instead he declared, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, that God sent him to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3). As much as the religious leaders tried to focus on him, John consistently turned the focus on the coming Christ.

The very next day after this confrontation, Jesus came to be baptized by John in the Jordan. While John, being a cousin of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:13-17,30-31,36), may have known Him before, at this point in time John recognized Jesus as the Messiah. God had previously revealed to John how he would recognize the Christ. When He came, John would see the Holy Spirit descend and rest upon Him. So it was that when he baptized Jesus, John clearly saw the Spirit descending in the form of a dove and remaining on Jesus.

Immediately, John declared Jesus superior to himself in importance and ministry and encouraged his own disciples to follow Him. The Baptist boldly introduced Jesus as "the Lamb of God<sup>2</sup> who takes away the world's sin" (1:29), as "He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (1:33),<sup>3</sup> and as "the Son of God" (1:34).

Therefore, Jesus began His public ministry with the entire ministry and *powerful* endorsement of John the Baptist behind Him. There, in the region of Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan where John baptized, Jesus began to collect His first disciples. John the Baptist, who had baptized all of these men, sent

John and Andrew to Jesus. Andrew brought his brother Simon, whom Jesus named Peter. Jesus called Philip who then brought Nathanael. Nathanael was skeptical, until Jesus revealed knowledge only God would have known about Nathanael's character and life. Nathanael was amazed, but Jesus promised them all that they would see more incredible revelations of God through their time with the "Son of Man."<sup>4</sup>

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Discovering Our Uniqueness**

While the lives of the disciples were not necessarily easy, they were no doubt full and meaningful as a result of their faith. John the Baptist, John the apostle, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael and Peter were distinct individuals to Jesus. He had special purposes for each of them, and He dealt with them as unique persons.

In a fast-paced world, we can easily feel lost in the crowd, like just a number in the masses. The media exposes us to people who are exceptionally gifted, wealthy, beautiful, intelligent, or just more "together." The predictable result is that we feel ordinary and insignificant.

But the Bible says, and Jesus demonstrates in His interactions with each of His disciples, that we are uniquely significant to God. He created us and knows our potential much better than we. As with Peter, He knows our personalities and what He can make of them. He does not focus on our limitations, rather factors them into the perfect equation of a special plan for your life and mine . . . if we will allow Him to work in our lives.

As we continue our study on the *Quest for Fulfillment*, let's look at the biblical foundation for building a deep and lasting sense of worth: our uniqueness to Jesus.

# LESSON 3

## AT A WEDDING & IN THE TEMPLE

### John 2

After a few days of travel from Bethany to Galilee, Jesus and his disciples attended a wedding in Cana to which His mother was also invited. In biblical times, a wedding was a week-long celebration attended by everyone in the village. At this particular event, however, a very embarrassing situation arose for the bridegroom. Before the party was over, the wine ran out. Jesus' mother came to Him with this problem.

Jesus' response to Mary is difficult to understand: "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come" (2:4). Perhaps she failed to realize that her son had now begun his Messianic ministry, and from now on their relationship would be different. Perhaps He was saying to her that His power was to be used for the purpose of drawing people to God's grace. Nevertheless, the second part of His statement, "My time (or hour) has not yet come," no doubt referred to the revelation of His glory that would come through His death and resurrection (cf. John 12:27, 13:1, 17:1).

Still Mary turned to the servants and told them to do whatever Jesus told them. They followed His instructions carefully, and Jesus turned 120 to 180 gallons of water into fine wine. This first incredible miracle strengthened his disciples' conviction that Jesus was truly the Messiah.

After a brief time in Capernaum, where Jesus later headquartered his ministry in Galilee, He and His family and disciples went to celebrate the Passover<sup>1</sup> in Jerusalem. This was the greatest of the Jewish annual feasts, and dealers took advantage of the situation by doing business in the Temple. Some provided foreign currency exchange while others sold animals for purification rites, both for an exorbitant profit. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He went straight to the Temple and proceeded to break up the greedy business dealings there. He made a whip of cords and moved through the Temple, overturning the tables of the moneychangers and driving out the merchants. He commanded they stop profaning "My Father's house" with their greedy trade.

This was no small event. As to be expected, the Jews demanded what authority Jesus had to do such things. To understand His answer, we must first understand that the Temple was the center of Jewish religion, representing the presence of God among them. Over time various temple practices had become corrupted and for many the Temple no longer reminded them of God's presence. So in answer to their challenge that Jesus prove His authority to clear the Temple, Jesus referred to *Himself* as the Temple (2:19,21). He was the actual living presence of God in their midst, a presence which some would be unable to see because greed and ritual had replaced their earnest desire for God.

Jesus went on to refer to His forthcoming death ("destroy this Temple") and resurrection ("and in three days I will raise it up."). Later the disciples would understand that Jesus spoke of the sacrifice of Himself that would end the need for Temple sacrifices. But at this time everyone thought He was speaking literally about the massive Temple structure, and they were shocked.

Even so, in the days ahead many began to believe in Jesus because of His miracles<sup>2</sup> of healing and deliverance He performed among them. Jesus could read their hearts like an open book and could see how much loyalty and understanding the people truly possessed. The faith of most would waver because it was conditioned upon what He did for them. Jesus would only give the understanding of His Person and purpose to those He knew were unquestionably faithful and allegiant.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Transformation We Seek**

Most people experience times when they feel the need for big changes. Some attack the problems by attempting to alter their circumstances or modify their environment. Others try to change the people around them rather than themselves--*always* a disappointing endeavor--while others embark on serious self-improvement programs. They make specific resolutions, but are soon exhausted and confused by lack of success. Professional counseling may bring light to many subjects but may also create confusion with new revelation of human complexities.

In our commitment to change, we often start off with high expectations and determination but end up in despair when, in spite of our great efforts, the problems persist.

But our situation is not at all hopeless in the eyes of God. The Bible states that not only does the Lord see our potential, as discussed in Lesson 2, but He is prepared to walk us through the transformation process step by step.

A beautiful word picture which illustrates the power of Christ to change us is in the story of the wedding at Cana where He turned *water into wine*. The promise of the Scriptures is that Christ can transform a life from the inside out. The good news of the New Testament is that in trusting Christ *and* continually yielding to His leadership and power, we are changed into the fulfilled individuals He created us to be. Not instantly, but steadily and in increments we can handle, the Lord brings about the transformation we seek. Let's look at what the Scriptures say about these biblical truths.

## **LESSON 4**

### **NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH**

#### **JOHN 3**

Shortly after Jesus had driven greedy businessmen from the Temple, a prominent religious leader named Nicodemus came by night to question



Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee<sup>1</sup> and a member of the powerful seventy-member Jewish council called the Sanhedrin. Later this man would be one of the few religious leaders to stand up for Jesus (7:50-52) and even assist with Jesus' burial (19:39-40).

At their first meeting, Nicodemus stated he was drawn to Jesus because of His character and miracles. He knew Jesus was from God (3:2), but he could not reconcile his religious understanding with the Person of Jesus. In forthrightness, he had come to see Jesus in an attempt to clear up his confusion.

In the conversation that resulted, Jesus addressed two needs in Nicodemus' life. The first was his need for a spiritual birth brought about by the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Fulfillment of this need was dependent on the second need, which was faith in God's way of entrance into His Kingdom--through belief in His Son. (Nicodemus believed being a descendant of Abraham assured him righteous standing before God.) As He talked with this honest and seeking religious leader, Jesus guaranteed Nicodemus that He had come from heaven and His witness about heavenly eternal truth was absolutely sure. The Son of Man,<sup>3</sup> Jesus promised, would be lifted up (a reference to the crucifixion), and only those who believed in Him would receive eternal life.

Many interpreters believe that Jesus' words to Nicodemus stop after 3:15, and the author adds his reflections. Whether the words are spoken by Jesus or John, they are God's word and speak of the incredible love of God. His infinite love compelled the Father to send the best He had to give--His only Son--not to condemn the world, but to draw it to Himself for eternal salvation and life. John proclaims that God sent His Son so that those who believe His testimony would be acquitted, not judged.

The crisis is that while God's light streams into the world through His Son, many uninterested in pleasing God will prefer to flee from that light. They will hide in the darkness of denial, illusion and ungodly practices. But all who love truth<sup>4</sup> will respond to God's light and welcome His Son.

After this, Jesus moved his ministry into the Judean countryside where apparently His disciples were baptizing under His authority (3:22, 4:2).<sup>5</sup> Some of John the Baptist's disciples were distressed when they heard this. They were also concerned that more and more people were flocking to Jesus rather than to John. When they approached John about this, his reply was gracious and humble. He stated that Jesus' ministry was God-given as his

own had been and restated that *his* God-given task was to herald the Messiah. Using the example of a bridegroom and friend, John showed how the friend is there to aid the bridegroom and rejoice when all goes well with the wedding. John was satisfied to have introduced Jesus to the faithful in Israel and see them begin to follow Him. "He must increase, but I must decrease," were the Baptist's last recorded words in this Gospel.

Now the author reflects further on John the Baptist's testimony. Anointed as this prophet and forerunner of Jesus was, he was 'from the earth' and so limited. Jesus, on the other hand, came from heaven and was able to tell of what He had actually seen and heard in heaven. He was sent by God, spoke God's words and had the power of God's Spirit without measure. The apostle once again declares his complete conviction: eternal life depends on faith in the Son, who the Father sent from above.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Free From the Inside Out**

Nicodemus not only had witnessed the teachings and miracles of Jesus, but he had seen firsthand Christ's integrity. There was an obviously patient and compassionate love for people which motivated Jesus as He ministered to rich and poor alike. Furthermore, Jesus seemed to at once see the spiritual realm on earth *and* in heaven. And Jesus spoke of God as a loving Father with whom He had a personal relationship and with whom He was at peace.

Nicodemus had observed many religious leaders over the years, but this One was quietly powerful and unique. The devout Pharisee was drawn irresistibly to seek counsel from Jesus, and Jesus met him at his point of need.

Spiritual wholeness, Jesus explained to Nicodemus, would never come from earthbound religious ritual and works. Rather, the Holy Spirit transforms a person, producing spiritual *new life* from the inside out. Nicodemus had only to *believe* in Jesus--to put his trust in Him--and the Spirit would give him spiritual birth, entrance into God's kingdom and eternal life.

The good news Jesus gave Nicodemus is for all of us: We need not strive to please God. God can produce the wholeness of Christ in our lives if we

simply trust Christ and take Him at His word. While our nature is to "do it by ourselves," God knows the impossibility of the task. We need His power--the strength and wisdom and transformation of His Spirit--from the inside out.

## **LESSON 5**

### **JESUS IN SAMARIA**

#### **John 4**

The Pharisees had learned that the popularity of Jesus was becoming greater than that of even John the Baptist. With this, Jesus determined to leave Judea and return to Galilee. By leaving, He would avoid the competition the Pharisees seemed to be trying to cultivate between Him and the Baptist, and He would curtail the growing opposition of Judean religious leaders.

The direct route back to Galilee was through Samaria, where Jesus and His disciples stopped around noon at Sychar. The disciples went to buy food while Jesus rested by Jacob's well. Then Jesus defied etiquette when he asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. No orthodox Jewish man would drink from a Samaritan<sup>1</sup> cup or initiate conversation with a woman in such a setting.

Regardless, Jesus proceeded to have a long talk with this woman. He told her about the gift of living water that He would give to anyone who asked. This water would forever quench thirst and would be like a well springing up into eternal life. "Sir, give me this water," was her natural response.

But Jesus asked her first to go and get her husband. She answered that she had no husband, and the Lord agreed, telling her she had had five and now lived with a man who was not her husband.

Perceiving Jesus to be a prophet, the Samaritan woman quickly changed the subject. She brought up the smoldering spiritual issue between Jews and Samaritans regarding where to worship. Most important to God, Jesus told

her, was not where one worshipped, but who and how one worshipped. He explained to her that *the Father* (a new concept of God to anyone of that day) "is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." Then Jesus told her that the Samaritans *did not* have the pure knowledge of God preserved by the Jews<sup>2</sup> and that the Messiah who would bring salvation would be a Jew.

"When the Messiah comes, He will tell us everything," she boldly stated. To this, Jesus replied, "I who speak to you am He."

Imagine the power with which this statement must have struck this woman, especially from One who knew "everything she ever did." She left her water jar and hurried into the city to tell others about this man who claimed to be the Christ.

The disciples had returned, and Jesus talked with them about the fulfillment that comes from simply doing the task God gives you. He explained the concept of sowing and reaping in God's "harvest field." "Look at the fields," He said, "they are ripe for harvest."

Meanwhile, the woman returned with many Samaritans who came to see Jesus because of her testimony. Obviously, these people were comfortable with Jesus, even though He was a Jew, and invited him to stay longer in Sychar. Many believed, and their conviction after being with Jesus was: "This man really is the Savior of the world" (4:42).

Upon returning to Galilee, Jesus began His second year of public ministry there. He received a warm reception because of the miracles they had seen Him do in Jerusalem. But He knew that "a prophet has no honor in his own country."

Upon arrival in Cana, a royal official--a Gentile in Herod's service-- came from Capernaum asking Jesus to heal his son who was at home critically ill. Jesus saw genuine faith in the heart of this man and healed the boy without even going to him. Jesus declared, "Your son lives," and the official took Jesus at His word and set out for home. While he was still traveling, his servants met him to announce that at one o'clock the day before the fever had left his son. That was the very hour Jesus had announced the child would live. As a result, the official and his entire household believed.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Fully Known and Fully Loved**

The woman at the well was surprised when a Jew actually lowered Himself to converse with her, a Samaritan woman. How much more surprised she must have been when she realized He knew everything about her embarrassing past and present failures. Yet He talked to her respectfully and treated her as a person of worth, even to the point of confiding in her that He was the promised Messiah.

We all have a desire to be fully known and fully loved. We are all wounded and imperfect people. While the society around us encourages us to hide our imperfection in order to be accepted, Jesus welcomes us as we are and sees us as we can be. Let's examine more about this One who knows us better than we know ourselves and still loves us perfectly.

## **LESSON 6**

### **TRIP TO JERUSALEM**

#### **John 5**

After a time of ministry in Galilee, Jesus went to Jerusalem to attend one of the annual Jewish feasts. In Jerusalem, there was a Pool called Bethesda where blind, crippled and paralyzed invalids waited in hopes of miraculous healing. At the pool, Jesus came upon a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. With the Lord's words, "Pick up your mat and walk," the man was able to get up and walk. As a crowd formed, Jesus slipped away without the man even knowing who had healed him.

Rather than rejoicing with the cured man who had been healed, the Jews<sup>1</sup> protested that the man carried his mat on the Sabbath. (The "tradition of the elders"<sup>2</sup> prohibited one from carrying any load on the Sabbath.) The man told them that the one who healed him commanded him to do this.

Later, Jesus recognized the man at the Temple and encouraged him, now that he was physically well, to turn from sin and be spiritually healed. Some believe that the words, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen," suggest that Jesus knew the man's lameness was the result of something he had done wrong. Nevertheless, Jesus' clear concern was for the man's soul.

After this, the man told the authorities that it was Jesus who healed him. Knowing Jesus was aware He had violated their Sabbath laws, the Jewish leaders launched a hostile campaign against Him. Their attacks did not cease until His crucifixion a year and a half later.

But Jesus took advantage of the conflict to teach His opponents about who He was, and none of what He shared pleased them. He claimed to be the Son of God who only worked in conjunction with His Father's wishes, received through firsthand communication. In this Father-Son relationship, Jesus claimed to have been given power and authority to give life, to judge man's sin and to be honored equally with the Father who sent Him. Jesus declared that those who believed the Father's words through the Son would be spared condemnation and receive eternal life. He told them that in the future, people would rise from death to life<sup>3</sup> because He was doing the Father's work.

These words only increased the Jewish leaders' determination to kill Jesus. Even so, Jesus continued to attempt to break through their denial of truth by giving evidence which supported His claims. The powerful prophet John the Baptist had testified that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. The miracles of healing Jesus was performing could not be done apart from God and were God's authentication of His Son's claims. The Father himself bore witness<sup>4</sup> of Jesus at His baptism and throughout the Scriptures, and the Scriptures themselves gave specific information which would identify Him as the Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

Then Jesus, knowing their hearts, confronted the Jewish leaders about the pride which was blinding them to God and his truth. "I know you," He told them. "I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. 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?" Furthermore, Jesus stated, even Moses, the supreme lawgiver to whom the Jewish leaders proudly attached themselves, had written prophecy<sup>6</sup> concerning the Messiah which would in the end condemn them.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Guarding Against Pride**

The Jewish leaders of the day held tremendous power over the people. Some of these leaders, no doubt, were faithful men, but most made a show of piety while using their spiritual leadership position to feed addictions to power, prestige, and pride.

The growing popularity of Jesus threatened the control that the religious leaders held over the people. Jesus cared only about God's approval. He lived simply, owned nothing and moved among the poor and common people as readily as the rich. The miracles He performed and His authoritative and equitable teaching drew the people to Him. They loved Him. But the religious leaders became more and more infuriated by Jesus, who exposed their hypocrisy and claimed, as the Son of God, to be spiritually superior to them.

Had they not been ruled by greed and status, the Jewish leaders would have recognized the Christ sent to them by God. Had their love and knowledge of God not been destroyed by pride and conceit, they would have heard the voice of God as Jesus stood before them. Had they been motivated by God's approval rather than the praise of men which gave them power and control, they might have recognized and embraced their Savior.

There is a great warning here for us. We, too, can easily become controlled by maintaining a certain image or status which gives us a sense of being in control or better than others. The world around us or our own family heritage may support such practices, but God has no part in them. He knows that pride can completely negate the truly fulfilling experience of knowing and loving God and others.

Conceit and feelings of superiority *toward anyone* is a warning sign to step back and, with God's help, make different choices. Let's make some observations from the Scriptures on these important principles.

### Major Prophecies Concerning the Messiah Fulfilled in Jesus

<b>Description of Prophecy</b>	<b>Prophecy</b>	<b>Fulfillment</b>
<i>"Offspring of a Woman"</i>	<i>Gen. 3:15</i>	<i>Gal. 4:4</i>
<i>Descendant of Abraham</i>	<i>Gen. 18:18</i>	<i>Acts 3:25</i>
<i>Descendant of Isaac</i>	<i>Gen. 17:19</i>	<i>Mt. 1:2</i>
<i>Descendant of Jacob</i>	<i>Num. 24:17</i>	<i>Lk 3:34</i>
<i>Descendant from tribe of Judah</i>	<i>Gen. 49:10</i>	<i>Lk 3:33</i>
Descendant of David	<i>Isa. 9:7</i>	<i>Mt. 1:1</i>
Place of birth	<i>Mic. 5:2</i>	<i>Mt. 2:1</i>
Born of a virgin	<i>Isa 7:14</i>	<i>Mt. 1:18</i>
Ministry in Galilee	<i>Isa 9:1-2,6</i>	<i>Mt. 4:12-16</i>
<i>As a Prophet</i>	<i>Dt. 18:15</i>	<i>John 6:14</i>
His rejection by Jews	<i>Isa. 53:3</i>	<i>John 1:11</i>
Some of his characteristics	<i>Is. 11:2</i>	<i>Lk. 2:52</i>
His triumphal entry	<i>Zec. 9:9</i>	<i>John 12:13-14</i>
Betrayed for thirty silver pieces	<i>Zec. 11:12</i>	<i>Mt. 26:15</i>
Money returned for potter's field	<i>Zec. 11:13</i>	<i>Mt. 27:6-7</i>
Silent when accused	<i>Is. 53:7</i>	<i>Mt. 26:62-63</i>
Struck and spit on	<i>Is. 50:6</i>	<i>Mk. 14:65</i>
Suffered vicariously	<i>Isa. 53:4-5</i>	<i>Mt. 8:16-17</i>
Crucified with sinners	<i>Isa 53:12</i>	<i>Mt. 27:38</i>
Hands and feet pierced	<i>Ps. 22:16</i>	<i>John 19:29</i>
Mocked and insulted	<i>Ps. 22:6-8</i>	<i>Mt. 27:39-40</i>
His side to be pierced	<i>Zec. 12:10</i>	<i>John 19:34</i>
Soldiers cast lots for his clothes	<i>Ps. 22:18</i>	<i>Mk. 15:24</i>
Buried with the rich	<i>Isa. 53:9</i>	<i>Mt. 27:57-60</i>



Resurrection  
Ascension

Ps. 16:10      Mt. 28:9  
Ps. 68:18-20    Lk. 24:50-51

## LESSON 7

### JESUS PROVIDES FOR HUNGRY PEOPLE

#### John 6:1-34

Around the end of Jesus' second year of ministry, He and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee and withdrew to a mountain northeast of the sea. Their respite did not last long, however, because so many knew of Jesus' miracles among the sick that thousands followed Him and His disciples. At mealtime, Jesus asked the Twelve how they thought they might feed the people. No doubt overwhelmed at the very idea of taking such responsibility, the disciples had no answers for Jesus.

Then a young boy offered five small barley loaves and two small fish to meet the need. Jesus instructed everyone to be seated on the grass (5,000 men plus women and children; cf. Matthew 14:21), then gave thanks to God for the food and proceeded to multiply the loaves and fish to feed *everyone* in the crowd! After everyone had eaten their fill, there were still twelve baskets of bread remaining.

The people were thrilled and decided to make Jesus their king. Knowing that the people were still more focused on what He could give them physically and materially than spiritually, Jesus withdrew to the mountains to be alone.

That evening, the disciples, without Jesus, headed back across the Sea of Galilee for Capernaum in a boat. A storm came up, making the sea very turbulent. But the disciples were even more terrified when they saw Jesus, whom they thought to be a ghost (cf. Mark 6:49), walking on the waves toward them! "It is I; don't be afraid," He said as He approached them. Jesus entered the boat, and they quickly reached their destination.

Meanwhile, the crowds continued to search and finally found Jesus in Capernaum. They wanted more of the miracles Jesus could give them. But Jesus sought to turn their focus away from the gifts and onto the Giver. The purpose of His miracles were to lead them to believe in the Son of God and bread of life. A relationship with Him, He promised, would sustain life eternally.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Provisions for Body & Soul**

All of us face circumstances when the task seems too overwhelming or the need too great. There are wonderful implications for these times from the accounts of Jesus feeding the hungry thousands and later walking across the water to join his fearful disciples on the stormy sea. One clear implication is that God can do the impossible to meet our needs. When our human capacity and resources fall short, the problem is still not too difficult for God.

But there is a second very important principle to be learned from these stories. It is that God's priority is the need within our soul. This is seen in Christ's concern that the people focus on knowing and walking with Him rather than seeking Him simply as One to meet basic needs and alleviate temporal problems. Beyond meeting our physical needs, the great fulfillment Jesus offers is intimacy with God, the source of food for the soul and provision for the emotional needs of the heart.

# LESSON 8

## JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE

### John 6:35-71

Jesus had miraculously fed thousands of people on the plain near Bethsaida, and many of those wanted to make Him their king. Even though Jesus sought to evade these people, they finally found Him back in Capernaum.

Knowing they wanted Him as king only because of His ability to give them food and healing, Jesus explained that the food He wanted to give was far more valuable. Unlike the perishable manna which God rained down to feed the Israelites in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 16:4), the life-giving Bread which God now sent from heaven could give power over death. Jesus claimed to be this Bread of Life and declared that those who made Him king in their hearts would receive food that sustained unending life. The one who would unite with Him, or, figuratively speaking, who would "eat His flesh and drink His blood,"<sup>1</sup> would live forever.

While the Jewish hearers knew Jesus was not suggesting cannibalism, the word picture was thoroughly repulsive to them because of their laws (cf. Leviticus 17:10-11). For this reason, many of Jesus' disciples ceased to follow Him. He then turned to the Twelve and asked if they, too, would leave. Peter, their spokesperson, replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." To this Jesus replied that even one of the Twelve would betray Him.

## BUILDING ON THE BASICS

### Satisfying the Hunger of the Heart

Pascal, the French physicist and philosopher said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which only God can fill through His Son, Jesus Christ." He was describing a hunger in the heart of man that must be filled by the Bread of Life.

People attempt to feed this hunger with different things: relationships, accomplishments, new acquisitions, travel, even excessive work or play. Living with the illusion that the hunger inside will at last be satisfied by that *thing* we do not yet possess, we strive to secure *it*. If we are successful, we discover *it* doesn't fill the vacuum. The relationships take work; friends, spouses and children can often disappoint us. Material things take maintenance and wear out with time. New experiences become memories. The quest to fill the vacuum can lead to extreme disillusionment, even hopelessness. The hunger remains, coupled with the longing for something *permanently* fulfilling.

When Jesus announced that He was the Bread of Life, He was bringing wonderful news. He was claiming that knowing Him personally could satisfy the hungry heart. In calling Himself the Bread of Life, Jesus created a word picture which describes our *daily* need for interaction with Him in a loving and everlasting relationship. He offers Himself to us as daily "manna," to fill the need which God created in us for a secure relationship with our Creator and for permanence in that relationship.

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote centuries ago, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Let's look at how Jesus offers rest and eternal fulfillment to satisfy the hunger of the heart.

# LESSON 9

## AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

### JOHN 7

Jesus continued to preach and perform miracles in Galilee instead of Judea, where the religious leaders were seeking to kill Him. In the autumn, as the Feast of Tabernacles approached, his brothers urged Jesus to go to Jerusalem and make a public display of His miracles.<sup>1</sup> Although His brothers later became believers (cf. Acts 1:14), at this time Jesus had utterly disappointed them regarding their expectation of a kingly Messiah,<sup>2</sup> and they did not believe in Him. Jesus explained to them that it was not God's timing for Him to go and display His power. To do so would hasten His death.

But after His family left, Jesus went quietly to the celebration in Jerusalem, hiding from the mobs, because everyone wanted to see Him. Halfway through the Feast of Tabernacles, He began to teach in the Temple. Jewish leaders were astounded at His learning; even so, they questioned His authority to teach. Jesus answered as before. He declared his words to be utterly true and His teaching to be the message of God from whose presence He had come.

Knowing the hostility of some, Jesus rebuked their murderous intentions. Most of the crowd were unaware of plans to kill Jesus, and some accused Him of being demon-possessed in His accusations. The people remained perplexed over Christ's identity. However, they were intimidated about openly discussing the subject because the religious leaders had threatened to excommunicate those who believed in Jesus.

Because it was not yet time for His death, none of those seeking to kill Jesus were able to lay a hand on Him. Then Jesus began to teach that He would soon be going where they could not follow. The people, already confused over who Jesus was, were now even more confused about His destiny, as were the religious leaders.

On the last day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out an invitation to follow Him. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink," He said.

"Whoever believes in Me," He promised, "streams of living water will flow from within him" (7:37-38).

The Temple police, who had been instructed to arrest Jesus, came back to the chief priests and Pharisees without having done so. They explained that they had never heard anyone speak like this man. The religious leaders were infuriated with the guards and cursed the crowd who continued to be drawn to Jesus.

Then Nicodemus, himself a Pharisee who had talked with Jesus earlier (John 3:1-15), rebuked the leaders for not judging Jesus through their own laws of fairness. But the leaders, now blinded by pride, became obsessed with killing Jesus. They were beyond reasoning fairly.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Understanding Perfect Timing**

Throughout the Gospel of John and particularly in John 7, there are many references made to the *timing* of God. Jesus expressed sensitivity to God's timing regarding when to go to Jerusalem and what to do there. Again and again, the Jewish leaders were unable to lay hands on Jesus because it was not *time* for His death. Even so, Jesus told them that the *time* was coming soon when they would no longer be able to see and hear and touch Him. He would soon go back to the Father. And He spoke of the time to come when the Spirit would indwell every believer.<sup>3</sup>

In a broader sense, it was not *time* for the Messiah to reign, but it was now time for Him to die for the sin of the world. It was not *time* to reveal the power of God, but time to demonstrate the sacrificial love and humility of God. It was not time to glorify Israel but time to draw the faithful in Israel to their Savior.

While Jesus continually submitted to God's perfect timing, He also experienced the difficulty of submission to God's plan. Although He never gave in to the temptation, He experienced the desire that we are born with to be in control of our circumstances. We want what *we* want when *we* want it, and can become very frustrated when we cannot get life to work that way.

Jesus knows from experience this human struggle, but because He understood that God's plan and timing are perfect, He found peace and even

joy (Hebrews 12:2) on the difficult road of His earthly mission. He was motivated to persevere in spite of the hideous criticism and death He faced. He found present joy in His ministry to receptive people (John 15:11) and experienced deep love for His disciples (John 15:9).

If we do not cultivate trust in God's timing, worry and bewilderment can rob us of the good in the present moment that will never come again. Like the crowd who did not appreciate the privilege of actually being in the presence of the Son of God, we miss the blessings and the wholeness God desires to produce in us through the difficulties. But if we seek His plans and timing for our individual lives, the Bible promises peace and fulfillment.

Jesus moved perfectly and fearlessly with the timing of God, and so can we. Let's observe how understanding and embracing God's timing is essential in our quest for fulfillment.

**1 MIRACLES OF JESUS.** John clearly stated that Jesus did many miracles not recorded in his gospel (20:30; 21:25). He chose only eight of Jesus' miracles to reveal His divinity and validate His claims to be sent from God to give life. The following are a list of the miracles of Jesus recorded in the gospels. (\*Healed on the Sabbath.)

*Water changed to wine*, Jn 2:9.

*Nobleman's son cured*, Jn 4:46.

*Catch of fishes*, Lk 5:6.

*\*Demoniac in the synagogue delivered*, Mk 1:26; Lk 4:35.

*\*Peter's mother-in-law healed*, Mat 8:14; Mk 1:31; Lk 4:38.

*Cleansing the leper*, Mat 8:3; Mk 1:41; Lk 5:13.

*Paralytic*, Mat 9:2; Mk 2:3; Lk 5:18.

*\*Invalid healed*, Jn 5:5.

*\*Shriveled hand healed*, Mat 12:10; Mk 3:1; Lk 6:6.

*Centurion's servant healed*, Mat 8:5; Lk 7:2.

*Raising the widow's son from death*, Lk 7:11.

*Demoniac delivered*, Mat 12:22; Lk 11:14.

*Tempest stilled*, Mat 8:26; Mk 4:39; Lk 8:24.

*Demoniacs of Gadara*, Mat 8:28; Mk 5:1; Lk 8:26.

*Raising of Jairus' daughter*, Mat 9:18; Mk 5:42; Lk 8:41.

*Bleeding woman healed*, Mat 9:20; Mk 5:25; Lk 8:43.

*Blind men*, Mat 9:27. *Demoniac*, Mat 9:32.

*Feeding five thousand*, Mat 14:15; Mk 6:41; Lk 9:12; Jn 6:5.

*Walking on the sea*, Mat 14:25; Mk 6:49; Jn 6:19.

*Daughter of Canaanite or Syrophenician*, Mat 15:22; Mk 7:25.

*Feeding the four thousand*, Mat 15:32; Mk 8:8.

*Deaf and dumb healed*, Mk 7:33.

*Blind man*, Mk 8:23. *Malchus healed*, Lk 22:51.

*Afflicted child*, Mat 17:14; Mk 9:26; Lk 9:37.

*Tribute money*, Mat 17:24.

*Ten lepers*, Lk 17:12.

\**Blind man*, Jn 9:1.

*Lazarus raised*, Jn 11.

\**Heals woman with the spirit of infirmity*, Lk 13:11.

\**Man with dropsy*, Lk 14:2. *Cursing the fig tree*, Mat 21:19.

*Blind men*, Mat 20:30; Mk 10:46.

*Second catch of fishes*, Jn 21:6.

*His resurrection*, Luke 24:6; Jn 10:18.

*Resurrection appearances*, Mk 16:9; Mt 28:9,17; Lk 24:15,36,50;

Jn 20:19,26; 21:1; Ac 9:5; I Co 15:5-8.

**2 Reference:** Note 5, *Scripture Prophecy Concerning Messiah*, p. 50.

**3 Reference:** Note 3, *baptize with the Holy Spirit*, page 18.

## LESSON 10

### CHRIST CONFIRMS HIS TEACHING

#### John 8:1-30

After the feast was over, the people returned to their homes, but Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives. He arrived at the Temple at dawn to teach the people that crowded around to hear Him. In an attempt to get a charge against Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Him who had been caught in adultery and asked Him to pronounce a judgment on her case. The law of Moses stated that such a person must be put to death (Leviticus 20:10), but Roman law reserved rights to all capital punishment. If Jesus pardoned her, He could be accused of encouraging people to commit adultery and break the laws of Moses. If He condemned her, however, He would be undermining Roman authority.

Jesus answered, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." His answer did not pardon the woman's sin nor negate the laws of Moses, but rather turned the focus onto the harsh, judgmental



ways of the Jewish leaders. In response to His statement, the leaders left one by one, starting with the oldest. The woman was left with Jesus, who said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (8:11). The religious leaders tried to use the woman's situation to put Jesus on trial, but He used the trial to free the woman and attempt to open the eyes of those persecuting Him.

As He continued to teach in the Temple, Jesus made the second of seven "I am" statements recorded in the Gospel of John.<sup>1</sup> "I am the light of the world," He said. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

In Jewish thought, "light" was another word associated with a claim to be God or Messiah. (Cf. Psalm 27:1; Job 29:3; Micah 7:8; Isaiah 60:19.) The Jewish leaders insisted that Jesus' word about Himself was not enough. His claims must be supported by more than one witness. In the past, Jesus supported His claims by the miracles<sup>2</sup> God enabled Him to do and by Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> But this time, Jesus used only the witness of the Father who sent Him. Jesus simply stated that they would hear and receive the Father's witness about Him if they knew the Father. Jesus went on to say that those who did not believe in Him would die in their sins, having missed the way to God.

The religious leaders' animosity continued to grow. In the midst of the hostility, however, many who heard Jesus put their faith in Him.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Importance of Compassion**

As Jesus' responded to the woman caught in adultery, He modeled a character quality essential to fulfillment: compassion.

Maintaining a heart of compassion instead of falling into patterns of judgment and insensitivity requires unselfishness. In the end, however, this choice leads to tremendous blessing. The person who lives only for himself

and does not cultivate a heart of compassion will ultimately find life empty, unfulfilling and purposeless. It is essential that we foster compassion in our quest for fulfillment.

While it comes naturally for most to show compassion on the helpless, it is much more difficult to extend mercy to the wrongdoer and nearly impossible to show compassion to those who declare themselves our enemies. In this regard, it is important to notice that from a heart of compassion, Jesus responded differently to different people. He was merciful to the woman caught in adultery, but firm and unyielding with the hypocritical religious leaders. With the woman, He knew mercy and acceptance could change her life. But with the Pharisees, Jesus knew that exposing their hypocrisy and repeating the truth about Himself was the only possible way to break through their denial. Jesus refused to choose the natural defensive responses of retaliation or compromising the truth, but rather continued to take the only path He could to make repentance available to them.

A life of compassion requires that we continually seek the best for other individuals. With this goal in mind, we respond to each situation to the best of our ability. Wisdom, or skill at living, is knowing what form compassion should take with a given person in a given situation.

God wants to give us the wisdom and compassion we need in our quest for fulfillment. In this lesson, we will observe the biblical guidelines related to a life of compassion.

## **LESSON 11**

### **MORE PUBLIC DEBATE**

#### **JOHN 8:31-59**

Still teaching in the Temple, Jesus instructed those who had professed belief in Him to hold to His teachings. "Then you will know the truth," He promised, "and the truth will set you free" (8:32).

With this statement, pride welled up within the Jews.<sup>1</sup> Obviously disregarding their oppressive political bondage to Rome, the Jewish leaders declared that as descendants of Abraham, they were in bondage to no man. But Jesus explained that He was referring to the human bondage to sin that dominates and controls people. As the Son, He claimed the power to set a person free from sin and give him an increased knowledge of godly truth. "Then you will know the truth," He said, "and the truth will set you free" (8:32).

While Jesus agreed that the Jews were related to Abraham as they claimed, He begged the point that a person akin to Abraham *spiritually* would not be seeking to kill Him, an innocent man. Not only this, but Jesus said that one as obedient to God as Abraham would also recognize Jesus as sent from God the Father.

Angered by these words, the Jews retaliated with a slur most likely aimed at Jesus' virgin birth: "We are not illegitimate children. The only Father we have is God Himself" (8:41).

"If God were your Father," Jesus replied, "you would love me, for I came from God...He sent me" (8:42). Then Jesus stated that their intent to kill Him, one guilty of no crime, proved that they were not inspired by God, but by Satan,<sup>2</sup> the father of lies and a murderer.

Desperate to undermine Jesus' logic and authority, the Jewish leaders called Jesus a demon-possessed Samaritan.<sup>3</sup> After denying these unfounded accusations, Jesus claimed He sought no honor for Himself. But He warned His enemies that they would answer to the Father for dishonoring the Son whom He had sent. Boldly, Jesus went on to make an unquestionable claim to eternal power. "I tell you the truth," He said, "if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (8:51).

Again His enemies accused Jesus of being possessed by a demon, since His claim would make Him eternal and greater than Abraham and the prophets.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day;"<sup>4</sup> Jesus stated. "He saw it and was glad" (8:56). Protesting that Jesus, not even 50 years old, should claim to have seen Abraham, they received an even more shocking statement:

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" Jesus thus identified Himself with the Old Testament name of God, "I Am" (Exodus 3:14),<sup>5</sup> thus making an undeniable claim to be God.

Immediately, the Jewish leaders picked up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy, but Jesus slipped away from the Temple area untouched.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Standing on the Side of Truth I**

Lies and deceit are at the foundational levels of injustice, selfish ambition and hatred in our world. Because Jesus experienced firsthand the dishonesty and deceit of our world, we can know He understands the suffering we experience here. He knows our struggle with the lies that cause innocent people to suffer. He also understands our human struggle to be completely honest and the courage it takes not to compromise truth or become complacent in our stand against untruth. And He knows the confusion over right and wrong we have apart from His help.

With this full understanding, Jesus promises to free us from the power of deceit and lies. By revealing more and more truth to the teachable heart, He promises to impart wisdom and courage to stand fearlessly and sensitively on the side of truth as He did. Jesus promises that holding to the truth He teaches not only allows one to be a part of God's eternal family, but also to experience freedom from the deceitfulness of sin in our own hearts and in the world around us.

There is freedom and fulfillment in knowing and standing for truth. Let's survey the wonderful biblical principles regarding truth and the place standing on the side of truth must take in our *Quest for Fulfillment*.

## **LESSON 12**

## HEALING OF THE MAN BORN BLIND

### John 9

It was the Sabbath, possibly the day after Jesus fled the angry religious leaders at the Temple (8:59). Walking along with the disciples, He saw a beggar man who had been born blind. The Jewish rabbis espoused the belief that people suffered disabilities because of their sin or the sin of their parents.<sup>1</sup> But Jesus explained to the disciples that the blind man's condition had nothing to do with sin, but that God would use his condition to reveal His work in the man's life. With this, Jesus placed mud on the blind man's eyes and instructed him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. There the blind man discovered he could see.

Quite a stir resulted as people began to realize what had happened. However, the commotion was not a celebration but rather a debate over the incident and who Jesus was. The people took the man to the Pharisees, who became focused on the fact that Jesus broke their Sabbath laws when He healed the man.<sup>2</sup> They repeatedly interrogated the man, and at one point his parents, about his prior blindness and how he was healed. Finally, the Pharisees became divided among themselves about whether Jesus was from God or was a sinner, so they asked the healed man who *he* thought Jesus was. The man, amazed that they should wonder, stated what was obvious to him: Jesus had to be from God because God would not enable a sinful man to do such a miracle of healing.

Enraged with both the man's answer and his obvious faith in Jesus, the religious leaders threw the man out of the meeting place, claiming he was "steeped in sin at birth" and not worthy to lecture them. Jesus heard of his expulsion, found the man, and gently revealed to him that He was the Messiah. The man immediately believed and worshipped Jesus.

Later turning to the Pharisees, Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (9:39). The Pharisees had demonstrated by their response to Jesus' miracles<sup>3</sup> that while they claimed to have spiritual insight they refused to accept truth if it did not fit into their agenda. In so doing, they left themselves condemned.

But the story of the blind man remains a dramatic and vivid illustration in the physical realm of Jesus' power to bring those who are willing out of spiritual blindness to see the truth of who He is.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Standing on the Side of Truth II**

Jesus had gloriously healed the blind man's life-long disability and forever freed him from begging to become a responsible citizen. Yet the people around the healed man did not rejoice with him, but rather became focused on how to overpower Jesus. The man who should have enjoyed celebration found himself in a meat grinder of religious politics.

When our eyes are initially opened to see spiritual truth and understand who Jesus is, the natural response is to be overjoyed as we begin to trust Him. But when others ask us about our faith, our truthful answers may provoke a response similar to that of the healed man in John 9. Rather than encouragement and celebration, we may be met with discouragement and even disdain from those who want to hang onto their own views and agendas.

There are two very important messages from this story that we will look at now. One is the importance of being wide open to the truth and refusing to become stuck in a teaching that does not fit reality. The second is the importance of expecting, and knowing biblical principles about dealing with, persecution for faith in Christ.

As we continue to study the importance of standing on the side of truth in our *Quest for Fulfillment*, let's observe some of the Scriptures that relate to these very important issues.

## **LESSON 13**

### **JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

## John 10

When Jesus healed a man born blind, much turmoil resulted with the Jewish leaders (chapter 9). At last, the healed man was cast out of the synagogue for his testimony about Jesus. But Jesus sought this man out, established His relationship with him, and used the occasion to tell him and the crowd some things about Himself as the Good Shepherd.

Unlike the religious leaders who claimed to be God's shepherds but did not even care for the blind man, Jesus presented Himself as the Good Shepherd. His sheep, the faithful in Israel, would hear and follow Him without fear. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus described Himself as the door, or way, into the fold for the sheep. All who entered through Him would be saved and have abundant life. Unlike the thieves, robbers, hirelings and wolves who would scatter and kill the flock, Jesus stated that He had come to give His own life for the sheep. He also spoke of other sheep (non-Jews) who would hear His voice and become part of His flock. Jesus further declared that the Father, in love, had given Him the right to give His life for the sake of the sheep and then take His life back again.

Hearing Jesus' words, the Jews were divided in their reactions. Some said Jesus had a demon, but others argued that a demon possessed man could not heal the blind or formulate such teachings.

During the eight-day Feast of the Dedication, Jesus was walking in the Temple when the Jews challenged Him to openly declare Himself the Messiah. Jesus answered that He had already done so, and though His miracles<sup>1</sup> and integrity proved His words, they would not believe because they were not His sheep. Jesus went on to say that His sheep would hear and recognize His voice and follow Him. They would be eternally secure in the hands of Jesus and the Father. Then Jesus made the clearest of His claims to deity: "I and the Father are One" (10:30). When the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy (claiming to be God), Jesus implored them to open their eyes to the evidence for His claim. They could point to no sinful words or actions in His life, and His miraculous deeds of mercy reflected the character of God, the Father, in Him. Unmoved by His words, Jesus' enemies attempted to seize Him, but he eluded their grasp.

After this, Jesus crossed the Jordan to Perea and went to the area of John the Baptist's earlier ministry. Many people came to Jesus there and believed in Him.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Overcoming Insecurity**

Throughout the Bible, God refers to Himself as a shepherd. People in biblical times were very familiar with the shepherding role, as sheep tending was very common. When Jesus began to describe Himself as the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for His sheep, He was using beautiful and familiar imagery to promise protection, guidance and security for His followers.

Like sheep, who are very skittish animals, we must be secure to be at peace. No matter what our achievements or possessions, we cannot be content and satisfied unless we are free from anxiety and fear of present and future dangers.

In revealing Himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus was promising to overcome anxiety and put fears to rest for those who trust in Him. Let's take a closer look at this refreshing and hopeful message in light of our personal quest for fulfillment.

## **LESSON 14**

### **LAZARUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD**



## John 11

During Jesus' time of ministry across the Jordan in Perea, He received word that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was very sick. These beloved friends of Jesus lived in Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem.

Upon receiving word of Lazarus' condition, Jesus told his disciples that this sickness was for the purpose of glorifying God and His Son. However, Jesus did not go directly to Bethany, but rather stayed in Perea two more days. The disciples were no doubt relieved that Jesus did not return to Judea, where His enemies had recently attempted to stone Him.

Then Jesus announced that it was time to go to Bethany to awaken Lazarus out of sleep--that is, out of death. The disciples feared for Jesus' life, and protested that He should not go back to Judea. But Jesus said that He was glad to go because the event to come would greatly build their faith. Then Thomas rallied the disciples' courage with the words, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Jesus arrived on the outskirts of Bethany four days after Lazarus had died. Martha met Him with words of faith: "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." "Your brother will rise again," Jesus assured 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 not die."<sup>1</sup>

Then Martha brought Mary to Jesus, and he wept with her as they and many Jewish mourners went to Lazarus' tomb. After having the stone removed that sealed the tomb, Jesus prayed aloud to His Father. He wanted those present to see God's affirmation of His Son in the miracle about to take place. After this, Jesus called into the tomb with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus came out, bound in grave clothes, which Jesus instructed to be taken off of him. Lazarus was released, alive and well.

Many of the Jews who saw this miracle were amazed and put their faith in Jesus. Others went straight to the religious authorities to inform them of what Jesus had done. The Sanhedrin<sup>2</sup> held a special meeting at which Caiaphas, the high priest, declared that Jesus should die because His growing popularity threatened the Jewish nation's peace with Rome. From this point on, the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Jesus.

Jesus and His disciples withdrew from the public to the village of Ephraim northeast of Jerusalem on the edge of the wilderness. As crowds began to arrive in Jerusalem for cleansing rites before the Passover, everyone was looking for Jesus and discussing what might become of the conflict between this Galilean carpenter and the mighty Jewish religious and political authorities. The chief priests and Pharisees had classified Jesus as an outlaw, and anyone who knew of His whereabouts was instructed to inform the authorities so that they might arrest Him.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Ultimate Fulfillment**

One of the most dreaded of human experiences is death. The greatest insecurity, the reality that brings us all back to our inability to ultimately control life, comes from being powerless over death. The natural human yearning is that we and those we love should never die.<sup>5</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:11 says this desire is God-given. "He [God] has also set eternity in the hearts of men."

We must embrace the message of hope in the power of Jesus Christ over death to fully experience peace in our quest for fulfillment. Thus, the words of Jesus in John 11:25, ". . . whoever lives and believes in me will never die" are some of the most beautiful and hopeful in the Bible. In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus assured His followers of both spiritual life in the present and eternal life in the hereafter.

Before he died, Edward the Confessor said: "Weep not, I shall not die; and as I leave the land of the dying I trust to see the blessings of the Lord in the land of the living." William Barclay wrote: "Through Jesus Christ we know that we are journeying, not to the sunset, but to the sunrise. In the most real sense we are not on our way to death, but on our way to life."

For the believer, Jesus promises to fulfill the yearning for everlasting life. He said with certainty that death is not the end, and God raised Him from the dead to prove His words were true. Let us take a closer look at Jesus' claim

to destroy the power of death and give the believer the ultimate fulfillment: eternal life.

## **LESSON 15**

### **THE CLOSE OF PUBLIC MINISTRY**

#### **John 12**

Six days before the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples returned to Bethany. There, a dinner was held in the home of Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6) in Jesus' honor. Martha served at this dinner while her brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, reclined at the table with Jesus.

During the dinner, Lazarus' sister Mary proceeded to anoint Jesus' feet with an expensive imported Indian perfume worth a years' wages. The fragrance filled the house. But Judas, who managed and often pilfered the money given toward Jesus' ministry, complained that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Knowing that His death was imminent, Jesus defended Mary's act of devotion, declaring that she was preparing Him for His burial.

Meanwhile, many people had come to Simon's house when they heard that Jesus and Lazarus were there. Jesus had become such a controversial figure that He could not be so near Jerusalem without being noticed. It was now common knowledge that He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and many Jews were putting their faith in Him because of that miracle. As a result, the chief priests, who had already decided to kill Jesus, determined to kill Lazarus, too.

After spending Saturday (the Sabbath) in Bethany, Jesus made His final entry into Jerusalem on Sunday. He rode on a donkey colt, which was a sign of peace, and which also fulfilled the ancient Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Multitudes of wildly enthusiastic people crowded around Jesus. The crowd grew as people who had witnessed the miracle of Lazarus told others along the way. Also, thousands of Galileans who had seen the many miracles of Jesus had come for the Passover and joined the crowd.

Earlier, they had wanted to make Jesus an earthly king, but He refused. Perhaps they thought that now as He entered "the city of the great King," Jesus would consent.

The excited crowd spread palm branches on the road before Jesus and cried, "Hosanna!" (an expression of praise which meant "Please save!" cf. Psalm 118:25). They hailed Jesus, calling Him the one "who comes in the name of the Lord!" and "the King of Israel!" He entered the city with throngs of shouting people all around Him.

Even before this, Jesus' popularity had been continually increasing. To avoid a riot, the Jewish leaders were looking for an underhanded way to arrest and kill Him. Even though most of the crowd did not truly believe in Jesus, the religious leaders grumbled among themselves, saying, "The whole world has gone after Him!"

After arriving in the city, some God-fearing Greeks who had come to worship during the Passover asked to speak with Jesus. He recognized these Gentiles' request as the sign that the time for His death had come. It was time for the waiting Gentile world to receive the message of God's salvation along with the Jews.

Jesus began to explain that His imminent death was actually His way to glory. He used the analogy of a kernel of wheat "dying" in the soil before it could produce a harvest. His death for others' sins in obedience to the Father (Isaiah 53:10,12) would bring about the opportunity for spiritual life for all. Jesus explained that one who "loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:25). In other words, one who lives for himself only will never know eternal fulfillment. On the other hand, Jesus promised, "My Father will honor the one who serves Me" (12:26).

As His distress deepened, Jesus reiterated that He had come for this hour of sacrifice and would not evade it. "Father, glorify your name!" He exclaimed, to which God responded from heaven in an audible voice, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (12:28).

Jesus explained that the time had come for the prince of this world to be overthrown. Jesus must be lifted up on the cross to draw all men to God. One last time, He encouraged the crowd around Him to respond to the light while they had the opportunity. Then He withdrew from the people to prepare for the days ahead.

In spite of His countless miracles, most people did not believe in Jesus. John noted that the prophet Isaiah had predicted this hardness of heart hundreds of years before. Even so, many did believe, even Jewish leaders, who remained silent about their faith because they feared rejection by their peers.

It was Tuesday, of what is now known as the Passion Week, when Jesus reached the end of His public ministry. He would spend the next two days privately ministering to His disciples before His death and resurrection. Many times He had repeated His message: "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. 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" (12:44-46,49-50a).

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Right Focus**

Only days remained before Jesus would fulfill the purpose for which He had come: to die for the sin of the world so that those who believed in Him would receive forgiveness and eternal life. In the face of bitter hatred against Him and as the turmoil increased within His heart, He gently reminded Himself and told others that it was for this purpose that He had come: not to judge the world, but to save it (12:47).

In this context, He illustrated from nature a very important principle of fulfillment. "Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal" (12:24-25, *The Message* translation).

Jesus emphasized two elements of real fulfillment. One was wholehearted devotion to the Lord, like that of Mary when she spent what may have

constituted a life's savings anointing Jesus' feet. The other was wholehearted abandonment, like that of the Son of God, to following God in serving the needs of others.

## ***PART II***

# ***PRIVATE MINISTRY TO THE DISCIPLES***

## **LESSON 16**

### **THE LAST SUPPER BEGINS**

#### **John 13**

Knowing the time for His death was upon Him, Jesus withdrew from the public to be with His disciples. On Thursday evening of the Passion Week, Jesus and His disciples gathered to celebrate the Passover meal<sup>1</sup> in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem. This event, later known as the Last Supper, began at twilight the evening before the crucifixion of Jesus, which took place at 9 a.m. the following morning. Within 24 hours, Jesus would be in the grave. In John 13-17, the apostle John recorded the most complete existent eyewitness account of what Jesus said and did during His last hours. Jesus used these last hours to show His absolute love and devotion to His disciples and to all who would believe in Him.

Jesus knew that Satan<sup>2</sup> had persuaded Judas Iscariot to betray Him. He also knew that God was in control and that the cross was the appointed way back to the glory He had always known with the Father. With this perspective, Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water in a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet. Certainly this was uncomfortable for the disciples, who viewed Jesus as their Teacher and Lord. Only a slave would normally perform such a task as washing feet.

Even so, they all remained silent except Peter. When Jesus came to him, the disciple refused to have his Master wash his feet. But Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." So Peter insisted that Jesus wash "not just my feet but my hands and head as well!" Using symbolism He knew Peter would not fully comprehend until later, Jesus explained to them that after a bath,<sup>3</sup> one need only have a foot washing in order to remain clean.

When Jesus arose from the task of foot washing, He taught the lessons that went with what He had just done. Other gospels record that at this dinner, a dispute broke out among the disciples about who was the greatest among them (cf. Luke 22:24-27). Jesus told them that the greatest would be the servant of all. He stated that if He, their Lord and Teacher, served them, service of others should be their focus as His followers. "I have set you an example," Jesus said, "that you should do as I have done for you. No servant is greater than his master. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (13:15-17).

Then, as Jesus contemplated Judas' imminent betrayal, He became visibly and deeply troubled. He told the disciples that He was distressed because one of them who pretended devotion to Him would cruelly turn against Him. In curiosity, Peter motioned to John, who was reclining beside Jesus at the table, to ask Jesus which man would betray Him. Jesus quietly told John that the next person to whom He gave bread would be the one. That person was Judas. As Judas took the bread, Satan took full control of him.<sup>4</sup> Then Jesus commanded Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly." With this, Jesus knowingly gave the directive that would lead to His death.<sup>5</sup> The disciples, including John, paid no attention as Judas went out into the night, thinking Jesus had instructed him to carry out some noble task.

Now alone with His beloved faithful disciples in the last hours before His death, Jesus began what have become known as the "Upper Room Discourses" (John 13:31-16:33). In these teachings, Jesus reflected upon what would be the crowning revelation of the glory of God: the sacrifice of His Son to provide salvation for mankind. Jesus' words, which would be fully comprehended by the disciples only after His resurrection, focused on two main topics: (1) His departure and subsequent reunion with them, and (2) the love relationship between Christ and His people.

Jesus told His disciples that in order to be glorified, He must go where they could not follow. With this, He gave the principal command for them to



obey in His absence. "Love one another," Jesus said. "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" (13:34-35).

But Peter wanted to know where Jesus was going and why he could not follow. "I will lay down my life for you," Peter declared. "Will you really lay down your life for Me?" Jesus responded. "I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **More on Giving Living**

As Jesus humbly knelt to wash the disciples' feet, His actions depicted the Son of God's incarnate condescension to meet the needs of mankind (cf. Philippians 2:4-8). While the disciples were bothered that their Lord should stoop to wash their feet, they were probably more bothered by the fact that Jesus' humble actions bore no resemblance to the powerful earthly king whom they expected the Messiah to be.

But all during His earthly ministry, Jesus mirrored the fact that God's representatives and the greatest of leaders must be humble servants. In carrying out His purpose of glorifying, or revealing, God's heart to mankind, Jesus' time was completely devoted to serving the needs of people. In offering Himself on the cross, only hours after the Last Supper, Jesus would humble Himself and suffer a terrible death to provide for man's greatest need: the opportunity for forgiveness and an authentic love relationship with his Creator. Even so, at the same time that this loving act would be cherished by many, it would be unappreciated by most.

There are many lessons to be learned here about the kind of "giving living" that produces lasting fulfillment. Last week in our Building on the Basics topic, "The Right Focus," we saw that the deepest fulfillment comes from commitment to God and to serving others. This week, we will probe further into this topic. In the context of Christ's humble service, we will make some observations about the right motivations and the obstacles we all face amidst the fulfillment of "giving living"

# LESSON 17

## JESUS COMFORTS HIS DISCIPLES

### John 14

Still in the Upper Room, Jesus began His final teachings to His disciples. They were troubled because Jesus had warned them that one of them would betray Him and that He was going where they could not follow. But Jesus told them to set their hearts at rest through faith in God and in Him. Jesus had never let them down, and He assured them that no matter how bad things appeared, He would not fail them.

Jesus explained that He was going to prepare a place for them in heaven and promised to come back to personally take them there to be with Him.<sup>1</sup> When Thomas asked the way to where the Lord was going, Jesus declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>2</sup> He was stating clearly that it is impossible to have access to God without faith in God incarnate, whom Jesus had always claimed to be. One could not truly know God without having faith in Jesus, the One in whom God the Father had represented Himself in human form.

Then Philip requested, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus replied, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. 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." Jesus explained that He would now go to the Father, and, as the disciples continued His ministry, they would be doing even greater miracles<sup>3</sup> than He had done. Whatever they asked in His name,<sup>4</sup> He would do so that the Father might be glorified through them.

To further comfort and assure His disciples, Jesus told them that after going to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup> to be their Helper and Teacher. The Holy Spirit would be *with* them as Jesus had been, and would abide *in* them to produce Christ's character and works through them.

Referring to His imminent death and resurrection, which the disciples at this point did not comprehend, Jesus declared that the world would not see Him again. However, He promised to return for the faithful,<sup>6</sup> who would be able to see Him with spiritual eyes and be a part of His resurrection life.

Then Jesus described the mark of a true disciple: "If anyone loves Me, he will obey my teaching." Jesus said that those who remained faithful to His teaching would be given special love from God. "My Father will love him," Jesus promised, "and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Judas (probably Thaddaeus; Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18), asked why Jesus would no longer be seen by the world, but only by believers. This did not fit in with their expectation that Jesus would become the Messianic king Scripture had prophesied (cf. Note 5, page 50). Jesus responded that revelation of God would come from within the one who responded to Jesus in love and faithful obedience.

Then He announced that the "ruler of this world," or Satan, was now being given control. But he would meet his downfall (cf. 12:31),<sup>7</sup> as Christ proved His great love for the Father through submission to the cross. Also, the faith of His disciples would be secured as they watched all of Jesus' predictions come to pass.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Peace that Passes Understanding**

Jesus was only hours away from His crucifixion. The disciples whom He loved dearly were facing disappointment and loss which they did not understand. Why couldn't the Son of God, their Messiah, the One who calmed storms, fed thousands and raised people from the dead, just establish His kingdom on earth and put the disciples into places of leadership? Why did He have to leave them and die? There was no way Jesus could help them fully understand at this time. He probably grieved for His faithful followers as much as He grieved over the painful path He must take in the next hours.

Yet *Jesus had peace and offered peace* in the midst of the darkest hour of human history--when sinful man would crucify the gracious Son of God. At this time, Jesus knew and offered a peace that comes from within and can

endure even the worst of difficulty, pain or sorrow. This peace, Jesus explained, comes from the assurance of a glorious eternal future, from the comfort and constant camaraderie of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and through the power of prayer.

Peace among men and nations is a major issue in our world today, as it has been in every generation of history. And personal peace is essential to experiencing fulfillment in life. In search of peace, many sought Jesus as a political king who would alleviate human suffering. Would this have brought peace to their world?

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." Jesus said. "I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (14:27). Let's take a closer look at the peace Jesus offers--a peace that passes understanding.

## **LESSON 18**

### **MORE TEACHING ON DISCIPLESHIP**

#### **John 15**

As Jesus continued His farewell discourses to the disciples, He used the analogy of a vineyard to show God's careful work in the life of each believer. In the analogy, God the Father is the gardener (owner and caretaker), Jesus is the vine, and each believer is a branch on the vine. The Father continually works to prune the vine of unfruitful branches and trim the fruitful branches so that they produce more and more fruit. The branches depend on the vine for nourishment and the ability to bear fruit. Without being nourished by the vine, the branches dry up and become worthless.

This illustration was simple for the disciples to understand. Every year in Palestine, the gardeners pruned their vineyards, cutting off dead lifeless wood and clipping the good branches to increase their yield. Jesus used this effective word picture to explain the Father's diligent attention to increasing the fruitfulness (i.e. the character and works of Christ) of each believer. Through abiding in Christ, the believer would draw the sustenance to *naturally* produce the "fruit" of a Christlike life. This fruitfulness would increase with time and the Father's care.

Jesus went on to explain His greatest desire for the disciples: that they live everyday in the presence of God's love. Jesus explained that He had experienced the love of His Father as He continually chose to do the Father's will. They, too, would abide in the amazing love of God through obedience to Jesus' one command: "Love each other as I have loved you." Those who obeyed this command, Jesus promised, would experience the friendship of Jesus, would have the privilege of fruitful service for God, and would see the Father glorified as He faithfully answered their prayers.

But as they cultivated and enjoyed loving fellowship with other believers, Jesus warned about persecution that would come from those outside that fellowship. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first," He said. "I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."<sup>1</sup> The world would look on the disciples as aliens because Jesus had chosen them to be His people. Jesus warned them that they would experience the same severe hostility He experienced from those who did not know the Father. But the faithful would recognize and appreciate their relationship to God.

Jesus declared that those who were hostile toward Him had no excuse for their sin, because with their own eyes they had witnessed Jesus' miracles<sup>2</sup> His godly teaching and holy lifestyle. The greatest judgment of all time would come to those cities and that generation which witnessed the very presence of the Son of God and still rejected Him (cf. Matthew 11:20-24).

In the face of the persecution they would encounter, the disciples were to testify about the Son of God, whose ministry they had witnessed firsthand. Jesus promised that the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom He would send, would also testify about Him. The Spirit would give them the words and courage to stand firm in their faith.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Power to Live By**

As the disciples walked with Jesus, they saw a man whom they wanted to be like. He was kind, patient and compassionate, yet firm about the truth. He had access to the infinite wisdom of God and was able to at once see the spiritual world as well as the physical. He was a whole person, at peace with God and Himself and able to unselfishly serve the needs of others. His calm and fearless walk of faith in the face of deadly enemies was awesome to the disciples.

In our quest for fulfillment, we all yearn to be whole, at peace, and significant to the lives of others as Jesus was. We long to overcome the fears, self-doubts, anxiety, indecisiveness and selfishness that keep us from functioning as God created us to function. We yearn to experience the joy, or inner well of strength, Jesus had in the midst of heartache and hardship.

The wonderful news of John 15 is that Jesus does not ask us to live the Christian life in our own strength. He speaks of a relationship where He provides what is needed within to produce the fruits of His character that lead to wholeness and fulfillment. As we live in obedience to His Word, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8;4:23;6:63;7:39) to indwell each believer (14:15-16,25). The Holy Spirit produces the very life of Christ in those who choose to yield to His leadership and draw spiritual life from the Word of God. The one who abides in Christ not only naturally bears the fruit of a Christlike life, but also experiences an effective prayer life and access to God with any request (15:7,16). He/she has a sense of the presence of God's love (15:9-10), the complete joy of Christ within (15:11), the sacrificial friendship and camaraderie of Jesus Christ (15:13-15), and the privilege of being His hand-picked co-worker (15:16).

The kindest words of Jesus from the Gospel of John are found in His teaching that we do not have to produce the Christian life--the wholeness of Christ--through our own efforts. By abiding in His Word and drawing on the life-giving Spirit, we are able to allow Jesus Christ to walk in our shoes and live His life through us.

# LESSON 19

## JESUS' FAREWELL

### John 16

Still in the Upper Room with His disciples the night before His death, Jesus continued to prepare them for His departure. He had already warned them of persecution, but further explained that because of their faith, they would be expelled from the synagogue.<sup>1</sup> Some would even view killing Jesus' disciples as worship to God. Jesus gave such warnings so that these events would not surprise His followers, but instead would prove His knowledge of all things.

Understandably, Jesus' words about leaving them filled the disciples' hearts with sorrow. "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away," Jesus said. "Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." Jesus promised that the Counselor,<sup>2</sup> the Holy Spirit, would replace Jesus' visible presence. The Spirit would be like Jesus had been to them and would equip them to face the persecution and new challenges ahead.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus also explained that the Holy Spirit would have a ministry like His to the unbelieving world. Jesus had been His disciples' defense in the world, but His presence and testimony had been an indictment on those who rejected the truth. Soon the Spirit would assume the place of Christ to the unbelieving world. He would expose sin, reveal God's standard of righteousness in Christ, and judge Satan, the "prince of this world," who stood behind those who opposed the One sent by God. The very presence of the Holy Spirit in the world would show that Jesus had won the battle against the evil one.

The Holy Spirit would also become the resident advocate and teacher of Jesus' disciples, continuing to unfold the truth about God and His Son to each succeeding generation of believers. The Gospel of John and all the New Testament Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:21) would exemplify fulfillment of this prophecy.

The disciples still did not understand what Jesus meant when He said, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." Knowing their frustration, Jesus used the analogy of the birth of a child to explain further. His imminent departure (His death) would bring tremendous pain, but His return (His resurrection) would produce in them an indescribable joy. After that, the Father would welcome their prayer requests in the name of His Son. "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name," Jesus said. "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."<sup>4</sup>

Not only this, but soon His teachings would cease to be figurative and puzzling. The Holy Spirit would teach them in terms that they could easily understand. And they could be assured that as they prayed to the Father "in Jesus' name,"<sup>5</sup> God would not only answer but also be a Father *to them*. He would love and welcome them because they had loved and welcomed His Son.

In closing, Jesus reiterated what was still a painful and baffling proclamation to the disciples. "I came from the Father and entered the world," He said. "Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

Despite their confusion, the disciples still declared their faith. They believed Jesus was from God and knew all things. But Jesus knew that in the hours to come, as they were scattered and forced to abandon Him, they would not understand. In the midst of the trouble they would face, Jesus encouraged His faithful and dearly loved followers to find peace *in Him*. "In this world you will have trouble," He declared. "But take heart! I have overcome the world."

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **The Fulfillment of Prayer**

As Jesus prepared His disciples for the challenges that would face them after He left, He told them that they could not live for Him without drawing on



His power. As they allowed the Holy Spirit to control their lives, they would experience God's presence and witness incredible miracles. In this context, Jesus emphasized that an effective prayer life would "complete their joy" (16:24). The one who believed in and welcomed the Son would be put in open communication with a loving heavenly Father, to whom he/she could speak with all honesty and without fear.

The joy of prayer to which Jesus referred is not only found in answers to prayer requests, but even more in the privilege of direct interaction with a loving heavenly Father. Communication with Him fulfills the heart's desire to worship as well as the need for "a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). This One who hears our every plea is all-wise, all-powerful and infinitely loving. He knows and accepts us completely and is available anywhere, anytime, and under any circumstances. In His presence we encounter His love and are transformed into His image (II Corinthians 3:18). In these facets of prayer are found the greatest treasures and keys to fulfillment.

Prayer is a natural instinct of man, and an effective prayer life is *essential* for fulfillment in life. In this lesson, we will be looking at biblical principles that instruct us in how to experience the joy of prayer.

## LESSON 20

## JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS OWN

### John 17

Probably still in the Upper Room before leaving for the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus lifted His face to heaven and prayed before the disciples. In this prayer, known as His high-priestly prayer, Jesus first prayed for Himself, then for His disciples, and finally for all those who would believe as a result of the first disciples' witness.

"Father, the hour has come," He began. "Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you." It was time for the cross, which Jesus had known all along would climax His earthly ministry. The dignity with which He would endure the cross, God's means of redemption for mankind,<sup>1</sup> would reveal both the character of Jesus Christ and the limitless love of God for man.

Above all, the cross would make eternal life possible for those who would become God's children. In His prayer, Jesus defined eternal life as an intimate relationship with God. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (17:3). Jesus stated that the cross would complete the work the Father had for Him on earth, and was the obedient way for the Son to return to His Father's presence. There, Jesus would resume His eternal place of glory where all that belonged to His Father--dominion, wisdom and power--also belonged to Him (17:5,10).

After praying for Himself regarding the cross before Him, Jesus prayed for His disciples, whom He described as "those whom you gave me out of the world" (17:6).<sup>2</sup> In response to the promptings of God's Spirit, Jesus' disciples had come to believe with certainty that Jesus had come from God and had spoken God's words. Jesus did not pray that God would take these men and women out of the world, for they would be His ambassadors in reaching the world (17:21,23; II Corinthians 5:18-20). He prayed instead that God would protect them from the evil one<sup>3</sup> and sanctify them (set them apart and produce His character in them) as they went about the task of witnessing for Him in a hostile world.<sup>4</sup> Jesus committed Himself to the sanctification of His disciples (17:19).

After this, Jesus prayed for all those who would believe in Him as a result of the first disciples' witness. With utter confidence in God's ability to reach the

world through this small band of followers, Jesus looked forward to the millions who would be redeemed as a result of their faithful testimony. The essence of Jesus' prayer for all who would believe was for unity, or oneness.<sup>5</sup> This would come from oneness with God. "Just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe..." (17:21). Jesus prayed that the love which united Him with His Father would fill His church and would demonstrate Christ's reality and God's redemptive love to the world.

Finally, Jesus prayed that those who believed in Him would be with Him forever, beholding and sharing His eternal glory. Even after His departure to heaven, Jesus promised that He would continue to reveal the Father to believers so that they would experience the Father's love and Christ's abiding presence.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Bonds of Love**

The deepest need in our quest for fulfillment is identity, a place of belonging, among people who love us unconditionally. This is the need Jesus addressed in His high priestly prayer the night before His death. In this prayer, He revealed God's desire that we first and foremost experience bonds of love with Him and a place in His eternal family. This oneness with God and sanctification through His word produces unity and loving relationships with other believers. The love and unity among believers then bears witness to the unbelieving world of the reality of Christ, drawing many to the light of God's love (John 17:23).

But mighty forces are at work to destroy the bonds of love and unity which fulfill individual believers and build the body of Christ. Jesus prayed against these forces in His intercession for those who would believe. First He prayed for protection against the evil one (17:15), who is behind all destruction of faith and healthy relationships (Ephesians 6:11-12). Selfishness and pride can also destroy oneness among believers, so Jesus prayed that His people would be filled with the Father's love and would be unified by Jesus' indwelling presence.

The unity in God's family for which Jesus prayed can produce the purest bonds of love because it is sustained by the infinite love of God within individual believers. This love, unselfish and always with the best interest of

others in mind, allows the believer to give and receive the sense of identity and unconditional love that fulfills human longing. As we continue our study of *Quest for Fulfillment*, let's take a look at the bonds of love God has designed to fulfill the children in His family.

## LESSON 21

### ARREST, TRIAL & CRUCIFIXION

#### John 18-19

After Jesus' prayer of John 17, He and His disciples left the house where they had celebrated the Passover meal. They went outside the city to a place where they had often met in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Because it was familiar, Judas led the Roman troops and Jewish officials straight to Jesus for arrest. Carrying torches and weapons, they seemed to have expected a search for Jesus among the trees and caves. Instead, He stepped out before them and asked, "Who is it you want?" When they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth," He replied, "I am He." With this, the entire company drew back and fell to the ground.<sup>1</sup> Surely Judas, who was leading them, stood out to the shocked disciples.

Repeating that He was the one they sought, Jesus requested that they take Him and let the disciples go. But Peter took out his sword and attacked, cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus touched the man's ear and healed it (Luke 22:51) and instructed Peter to put away his sword. "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Jesus asked, bringing calm to the volatile situation.

Then the high priest's officers bound Jesus and took Him to Annas,<sup>2</sup> a former high priest and the father-in-law of the current high priest, Caiaphas. Annas questioned Jesus in an attempt to get evidence to convict Him of

blasphemy. Jewish law required that witnesses produce evidence of a criminal's guilt, so Jesus asked why Annas did not question those who had heard Him speak instead. For this answer, one of the high priest officials rebuked Jesus and struck Him in the face. Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas, who had already determined that Jesus should die (18:14).

In the meantime, Peter and another disciple, perhaps John,<sup>3</sup> had followed Jesus. The other disciple was known and was admitted at the high priest's home, and he facilitated Peter's entry. There, Peter was first questioned about his association with Jesus by the maid-servant and door-keeper, then by men standing by the fire, and finally by one of the high priest's servants related to the man whose ear Peter cut off in the garden. With each inquiry, Peter emphatically denied knowing Jesus. Then the rooster crowed, completing the fulfillment of Peter's denial which Jesus had predicted (13:37-38).

During night proceedings with the Jewish council (cf. Luke 22:63-71), it was determined that Jesus should die for blasphemy. But before Roman authorities, the Jewish leaders would accuse Jesus of treason in order to obtain a death sentence. Under Roman rule, the Jews had no authority to carry out a death penalty, or they would have killed Jesus by stoning. John notes that Jesus had predicted His death would come by crucifixion (cf. 18:32; Matthew 20:18-19).

Completing their trial in the very early morning hours, the Jewish leaders took Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate, at his palace. They did not even have a written indictment against Jesus when they approached Pilate, probably assuming Pilate would take them at their word. Because the case was so vaguely presented, Pilate did not initially assess that it was worth his time to hear (18:31). But when they charged Jesus with claiming to be king of the nation (cf. Luke 23:2-3), which suggested revolutionary intent, Pilate took Jesus aside to question Him.

"Are *you* the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked Him, his emphasis on "you" signifying that to Pilate the prisoner appeared anything but kingly. Jesus responded, "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."

Even though Jesus admitted to being a king, Pilate saw a man harmless in manner with no political agenda. He went back to the Jews and declared Jesus innocent, suggesting that he release Jesus under the yearly practice of

releasing one prisoner at Passover. But the Jews responded by demanding the release of a criminal named Barabbas,<sup>4</sup> not Jesus.

To appease the Jews, Pilate had Jesus flogged,<sup>5</sup> after which the soldiers mocked Him, putting a crown of thorns and purple robe on Him and striking Him repeatedly in the face. After this brutal treatment, Pilate presented Jesus to the Jews and pronounced Him innocent. Immediately, the chief priests and their officials shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" They insisted that because Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, Pilate should allow them to crucify Jesus for blasphemy according to their law.

With this new information, Pilate became superstitiously troubled with the thought of God being involved in the situation. He took Jesus into the palace and asked Him, "Where do you come from?" When Jesus did not answer, Pilate reminded Jesus that he had the power to free or crucify Him. Jesus responded, "You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above." He told Pilate that those who actually brought Him to the governor carried greater guilt.

Pilate, probably moved by fear of the inexplicable person before him as well as by a conviction of Jesus' innocence, renewed his effort to release Jesus. But the Jews kept shouting and accused Pilate of disloyalty to Caesar if he set Jesus free. Finally, Pilate sat down in the judgment seat to make a decision and asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" Desperate to see Jesus die, the chief priests answered with a shocking statement of blasphemy for a Jew: "We have no king but Caesar."

So Pilate relented to the death sentence, sending a sign to be placed on the cross that read in Aramaic, Latin and Greek: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. The chief priests protested, but Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

The soldiers led Jesus to Golgotha outside the city where He was crucified between two other men at 9 a.m. (Mark 15:25). Three hours later at noon, as the Passover sacrifices were being prepared in Jerusalem, the Lamb of God<sup>7</sup> still hung on the cross. Some bystanders, like the soldiers and religious leaders, jeered (cf. Matthew 27:41-44; Luke 23:35-37) while others, like His mother, aunt, a few other women, and the apostle John, stood by the cross filled with grief. Looking down upon them, Jesus asked His mother and John to care for each other, and Mary lived in John's home thereafter.

Between noon and 3 p.m., there was darkness over the land (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45). Then, after four to six hours on the cross, Jesus knew that the time of His death had come. He asked for a drink and received wine vinegar from the soldiers. Then with the words, "It is finished," Jesus bowed His head, and offered up His spirit.

The Jewish leaders had insisted that the bodies be taken down before the special Passover Sabbath, so the soldiers broke the legs of the two other men to hasten their death. But when they came to Jesus and found Him dead, they made certain of His death by piercing His side with a spear.

After this, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus<sup>8</sup> secured Jesus' body from Pilate and buried it in a nearby tomb.

## **LESSON 22**

### **THE RESURRECTION**

#### **John 20**

In her love for Jesus, Mary Magdalene could hardly wait to go to the tomb of her Lord after the Sabbath had ended. She was up before daybreak on the first day of the week. In the darkness, she made her way to the tomb. But to her horror, Mary found the tomb open and empty. She ran to tell Peter and John, who quickly returned to investigate. They found the tomb vacant with the grave clothes lying as if the body had moved through them. This was not the work of a grave robber. Jesus had to have risen, as He promised. But the disciples still did not understand the Scriptures that had prophesied the resurrection (cf. Psalm 16:10; Psalm 110:1,4; Isaiah 53:11; Luke 18:33).

After Peter and John had left, Mary came back and remained outside the tomb, crying. As she looked inside again, she saw two angels sitting where Jesus' body had been. They asked her why she was crying. In her grief, Mary responded, "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put Him." Turning around, she saw someone standing there, although she did not recognize that person as Jesus until He said, "Mary." She cried out, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). "Don't cling to Me," He told her. "Instead, go and tell the disciples that you have seen Me and that soon I will go back to the Father." Mary ran to tell the disciples.

That evening, when the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. "Peace be with you!" He said, and He showed them His wounded hands and side. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you," Jesus told the disciples. Then He gave them authority to proclaim forgiveness in His name to all who would believe.

But Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not among them when Jesus appeared. When the disciples told him about seeing the Lord, Thomas insisted he must see and feel the wounds in the Lord's hands and side before he would believe. Jesus granted his request eight days later when once again He appeared to the disciples. With this, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Absolute Assurance**

The reality of the resurrection became certain as over a 40 day period, Jesus appeared in bodily form to more than 500 people<sup>7</sup>--too many to support the hallucination theory of skeptics. After this, Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9), but later appeared to Stephen (Acts 7:55-60), then Paul (Acts 9:3-8;18:9-10;22:17-21;23:11), and again to the apostle John (Revelation 1:10-19).

It is hard to imagine the overwhelming feelings the disciples must have experienced as they encountered their resurrected Lord. It was enough to see Jesus turn water into wine, still storms on open seas, heal the sick, blind and



lame, feed thousands with virtually nothing, cast out demons, walk on water, and raise the dead. But now His predictions of His own resurrection had come true; He stood before them in bodily form. Suddenly it became clear that Jesus was *far* more powerful than those who had ordered His death. He had *allowed* the cross to happen. What did this mean? Seeing the resurrected Lord was only the beginning of their spiritual journey, as it is of ours.

While their understanding would unfold with time, the resurrection of Jesus Christ immediately became the foundation of the early believers' faith. "If Christ has not been raised," Paul declared in his letter to the Corinthian believers, "our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (I Corinthians 15:14). Why? Because biblical Christianity is born and sustained through a personal relationship with the *living* Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, the early believers began their journey into the grace of God with their eyes fixed on their risen Savior. The resurrection meant everything to them as they proclaimed Jesus to the world as *the* way to receive God's forgiveness and everlasting fulfillment.

The resurrection remains the foundation for our faith today. The fulfillment Christ is able to give us is made possible because He is a living Savior and Lord. As we near the close of this study, we will reflect on the absolute assurance that this, the most outstanding truth of history, provides for our faith and fulfillment.

## **FORTY DAYS--from Resurrection to Ascension**

### **SUNDAY MORNING**

1. An angel rolled away the stone from Jesus' tomb before sunrise (Matt. 28:2-4).
2. Women who followed Jesus visited Jesus' tomb and discovered Him missing (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1-4; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1).
3. Mary Magdalene left to tell Peter and John (John 20:1-2).
4. The other women, remaining at the tomb, saw two angels who told them about the Resurrection (Matt. 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-8).
5. Peter and John visited Jesus' tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:3-10).
6. Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb and Jesus appeared to her alone in the garden (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18): *His first appearance*.
7. Jesus appeared to the other women (Mary, mother of James, Salome, and Joanna) (Matt. 28:8-10): *His second appearance*.

8. Those who guarded Jesus' tomb reported to the religious rulers how the angel rolled away the stone. They were then bribed (Matt. 28:11-15).
9. Jesus appeared to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5): *His third appearance.*

#### **SUNDAY AFTERNOON**

10. Jesus appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32): *His fourth appearance.*

#### **SUNDAY EVENING**

11. The two disciples from Emmaus told others they saw Jesus (Luke 24:33-35).
12. Jesus appeared to 10 apostles, with Thomas absent, in the Upper Room (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25): *His fifth appearance.*

#### **THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY**

13. Jesus appeared to the 11 Apostles, including Thomas, and Thomas believed (John 20:26-28): *His sixth appearance.*

#### **THE FOLLOWING 32 DAYS**

14. Jesus appeared to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee and performed a miracle of fish (John 21:1-14): *His seventh appearance.*
15. Jesus appeared to 500 (including the Eleven) at the mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:6): *His eighth appearance.*
16. Jesus appeared to His half-brother James (1 Cor. 15:7): *His ninth appearance.*
17. At Jerusalem Jesus appeared again to His disciples (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8): *His 10th appearance.*
18. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus ascended into heaven while the disciples watched (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12).

#### **7 Six proofs that Jesus actually rose from the dead.**

1. The resurrection was foretold by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. The resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for His empty tomb.
3. The resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the appearances of Jesus Christ to His disciples.
4. The resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the beginning of the Christian Church.
5. The resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the transformation of the disciples.
6. The witness of the Apostle Paul, and the transformation of his life, can only be reasonably explained because of the resurrection. *Ten Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity Teacher's Manual*, Here's Life Publishers, pages 58-64.

## LESSON 23

### "FEED MY SHEEP"

#### Epilogue (John 21)

In closing his book, John recounts the third appearance of Jesus to a group of His disciples. It was early one morning at the Sea of Galilee when seven of the disciples had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Jesus, whom they did not recognize at first, stood on the shore and called out to them to cast their net on the right side of the boat for a catch. When the disciples followed His instructions, their net filled up with so many fish that they could not even pull it into the boat. John turned to Peter and said, "It is the Lord." Immediately, Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to shore. The rest followed in the boat, dragging the 153 large fish in a miraculously unbroken net. When they all reached the shore, Jesus had made a charcoal fire and cooked breakfast for them.

After they had finished eating, Jesus began an important conversation with Peter. As they walked together, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" Repeatedly Peter answered, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love you." Each time Jesus responded, "Feed my sheep." Then Jesus warned Peter that his life of service would end in glorifying God through martyrdom. Even so, "Follow Me!" was Jesus' command to this faithful disciple. Then Peter looked back to see John following them and asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus replied that this was none of Peter's concern. "You must follow Me."

John closed his gospel with a vow that his account had been recorded with absolute honesty. "Jesus did many other things as well," the aged apostle added. "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."

#### BUILDING ON THE BASICS

## Ongoing Fulfillment

John's record of Jesus' appearance by the Sea of Galilee captures how Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, remained committed and active in the lives of His disciples. His actions that day leave us with images of the gracious and caring aspects of God's nature which were embodied in His Son. Through the miraculous catch, Jesus displayed His bountiful providence in the face of human helplessness and inadequacy. As He cooked and served His disciples breakfast, Jesus demonstrated the kind of down-to-earth humility and joy in serving people's needs that characterize the heart of God. In choosing not to keep Peter's devotion for Himself, but to channel it into "feeding My sheep," Jesus showed God's desire to translate our love for Him into acts of caring for the needs of others.

The cross was not the end of Jesus Christ's love and service to us. "Because I live, you also will live" (14:19), He promised. So today, as then by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus lives and stands ready to lead, provide for and serve each one who loves Him. As we choose to follow Him, He promises to see to our ongoing fulfillment. We will close our study with a look at these important truths.