

MIRACULOUS JOURNEY

キセキの旅

Q T Series

Gospel of John

"Come, follow me."



Gospel of John

Quiet Time Series: “Come Follow Me”

SEA Region, Indian subcontinent & Philippines

Introduction: “Follow Jesus the Lamb of God”

3,000 years ago a king sat in despair. He had everything he wanted. More gold, women, and power than anyone before him. He had no equal. Yet he was troubled. Fulfilment eluded him. He called for his scribe and dictated these words, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV11)

King Solomon was wrestling with the same questions we’ve been asking for all of humanity’s existence. How can God connect with humankind? How can we connect with the eternal? We know there is something more than what we see, but where is it, what is it, *who* is it?

Theologians discuss the challenge of how God’s transcendent nature (his otherness, his holiness, his all-powerful nature) can be reconciled with his immanence (his connection, relationship and presence with his creation). There is mystery in this, but there is also wonder, awe and majesty. John chapter 1 introduces us to the where, what, how and who of the transcendent God becoming immanent.

Now read John chapter 1.¹

John begins his story of how a transcendent God became immanent. He pulls back the curtain to reveal God - the one always in existence, the creator of all we see and do not see, the light, the life, the Word. He startles us with amazing news - that this God has become human. He has entered our world, put on our flesh, experienced our life. What does this mean? The rest of John’s story addresses this question.

Back in the day there was a saying, “Jesus is the answer”. Someone responded, “Fine, but what’s the question?” I’d say that Jesus is both question and answer, and John presents him this way. People are confused by Jesus and amazed by him. The question from John 8.25 is typical, ““Who are you?” they asked.” You are about to spend two weeks with John’s picture of Jesus. What will you learn? You will learn to question your assumptions, and to rejoice over your discoveries.

The first disciples provide a model of followership (Jn 1.35-51). They are pointed to Jesus (35), called to follow (39, 43), and inspired to invite others (41-42, 45-46).² John shows us the nature of discipleship.³ Part of that is to see following not as an individualistic activity, but as joining a community. Don’t forget to share with others what you are learning.

¹ Chapters 1-12 describe verse 11. Chapters 13-17 describe verse 12.

² Each time we meet Andrew in the Gospel he is bringing someone to Jesus (John 6:8; 12:22).

³ Discipleship involves: i) Finding Jesus (or having him pointed out); ii) Knowing something of his purpose (Lamb of God); iii) Following Jesus – personal encounter, not religious observance; iv) Humility; v) Being part of a community of followers; vi) Transformation

By the end of chapter one we already know that Jesus is 'Son of God', 'Lamb of God', 'Messiah', and 'King of Israel'. But do we have any real idea of what this means? Apparently not. When Jesus says, "You will see greater things...you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man.'" (John 1:50–51 NIV11), it's as if he is saying, "You ain't seen nothing yet!" And indeed, we have not.

Prepare yourself to follow Jesus, and prepare yourself to be a faithful disciple more than ever before. We are not those who despair like Solomon, instead we are those who rejoice because a transcendent God has become immanent and we can follow him.

Now pray for insight, faith and courage.

Day 1

John 2: "Follow Jesus and see his glory"

Read John chapter 2

Starter prayer: "Father, praise you that you are glorious, and deserving of glory. Help me to hear you speak to me through this chapter. Strengthen me to follow Jesus and see his glory.....
..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: Jesus told his disciples they would, "see greater things" (1.50). They are waiting to, "see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man.'" (John 1:51). The wait is over. Here they get their first glimpse of his glory (2.11). They start to see the one from heaven involved here on earth.

Imagination question: What's the best wedding you've ever attended (other than your own)? Why was it so good? It was 1991 when Carlos and Charlotte got married. We all rejoiced - and cried. They had no money, but a combination of family and church helped them to put on a basic ceremony. The flowers were few, the dresses inexpensive, the reception small (I'm not even sure there was a meal - it was in the church basement). None of that mattered. They were in love, and we rejoiced to share in that love. They had been in a relationship before becoming disciples, had purified that relationship in Christ, and now we were seeing their joy. A day I shall never forget. They are still together 25 years later, and their love is as strong as ever.⁴

Further questions: How might the bridegroom have been feeling knowing the wine was running out?⁵ What does it tell you about Mary that she asked Jesus to help? Why do you think he said, "My hour has not yet come"?⁶ And then why do you think he goes ahead? At what point in the story do you think the servants knew that Jesus had turned water into wine?⁷ In what way does this situation reveal his glory?⁸

⁴ There's even more to this story, but space is limited here. Email me if you want more details, mccx@mac.com.

⁵ Weddings often lasted a week with guests coming and going day by day. The bridegroom funded everything.

⁶ 'hour/time' theme in John: 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1

⁷ The jars were jars, holding 90 to 135 litres each

⁸ Abundant wine (oil or milk) are signs of the age of fulfilment: Jer. 31:12, Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13–14. The kingdom has arrived.

Contemplation point: Mary gives only one instruction in the entire Bible. It must be significant. She says, "Do whatever he tells you". Does this have something to do with why John included this incident? What's the connection between this statement and following Jesus?

Personal questions: The disciples follow Jesus to a wedding and witness his first "sign". Sometimes we miss Jesus in the 'ordinary' things of life. Are you aware of him being with you in the 'secular' parts of your day? Where are you going today? Who will you see? What are your tasks? They are all places in which Jesus can reveal his glory. He is going into those situations ahead of you. What would it look like today if you knew you were following him into those places, instead of thinking you were leading him into those places?

Call to action: Mary says, "Do whatever he tells you." Pick something from this passage that connects with a command of Jesus and do it (top tip - it might help to tell someone else that you are going to do it).

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 2

John 4: "Follow Jesus to the harvest"

Read John chapter 4

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you that you are spirit and I thank you for revealing your truth through Jesus. As I study your word today please help me to In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: Since yesterdays' Quiet Time Jesus has cleansed the temple, had a deep theological conversation with Nicodemus and received affirmation from his cousin. He has been baptising, but, like a wise leader, has delegated this activity to his trainees. To avoid a premature confrontation with the Pharisees he moves back to Galilee. The route takes him through Samaria.

Imagination question: Have you ever carried hidden shame? How does it feel trying to keep the secret? In 1979 I cycled 100 miles for charity. It was tough, but the feeling of accomplishment in aid of a good cause was magnificent.⁹ The money came in from my sponsors, but I was arriving at university and discovering the 'joys' of beer. The beer was drunk as quickly as the sponsor money arrived. The charity never saw a penny. I was terrified they would find out and expose me. The haunting of my shame went on for some time. Eventually guilt got the better of me, and I sent the money to the charity with an apologetic note. My conscience was now clear, but I've never forgotten the feeling of shame.

Further questions: Why do you suppose the woman is coming to the well at noon when the normal times were in the morning and evening? And why alone? How is Jesus feeling? What does the detail about his situation teach you about him? What is unusual in him talking to a woman? What's the issue between the Jews and Samaritans? What is the main point Jesus is trying to help the woman understand? What is the main point he wants the disciples to understand? Why do you think many from the town came out to hear Jesus and believed in him?

⁹ I did it for the Stoke Mandeville Hospital - a specialist unit for spinal injuries

Contemplation point: Jesus moves the conversation from social (v7) to spiritual (v10), to confrontational (v17-18), to transformational (v26). Why are all these phases important? How skilled are you in these four areas? How confident do you feel? Is it time to grow in one of these? How can you do that?

Personal questions: Key phrases from this story include, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (v24); "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." (v26); "open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (v35); "We know that this man really is the Saviour of the world." (v42) Can you see any way in which they are connected? Which phrase stands out to you as one with a message to you today? Why is that one standing out? Are you following Jesus to the harvest?

Call to action: Knowing you have done God's will is as good as a satisfying meal (v32-34). Jesus' harvesting of the woman has fed him so nutritiously that his hunger is forgotten. Do you have the faith to feed others with the truth even if it means going physically hungry yourself? The woman's sin had 'seeded' her to be ready for Jesus. She has clearly also been 'seeded' in the past by some discussion or teaching she had heard about worship. Now Jesus is able to harvest many people because she goes to seed the town. Jesus did none of the 'seeding'! But he now is able to do all the harvesting. Do you have this vision for your own harvest? If you see things this way, what difference will it make to the rest of your day?

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 3

John 6: "Follow Jesus when the teachings get hard"

Read John chapter 6

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you that you are a long-suffering God and have a divine patience. Thank you for sending Jesus as the bread of life, and that he satisfies us with spiritual food. As I study this chapter today, please help me to
..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: By the time we get to chapter 6 Jesus has performed his second 'sign' (Jn 4.54) - healing a boy remotely. We learn what faith means from the attitude of the father who takes Jesus at his word (4.50). In chapter 5 an invalid is healed (v8-9¹⁰) and Jesus is questioned about his authority. His claim is that he can give 'life' (v21), something he will unpack in chapter 10.¹¹ He feeds the five thousand (6.5-15)¹², walks on water (6.16-24), and we pick up the story in the second half of the chapter.

Imagination question: Have you ever eaten something that truly disgusted you? How did it feel? Sorry to bring back bad memories - I hope I've not put you off your breakfast! The grub I was served in South Africa never made it from the plate to my mouth. Cow's foot was a tough dish to take, and Durian is not a food I wish to try again!

¹⁰ Today this pool, complete with five porches, is located adjacent to the Church of St. Anne inside Jerusalem's Old City.

¹¹ Jn 5.18 is the first record of the desire to kill Jesus (see Jn 15.18-25).

¹² Presumably the reference to the Passover is significant. Is Jesus consciously setting the teaching regarding the bread of life within the context of the Passover's proximity so that the listeners will see him more clearly as the Passover lamb? Israel was hoping for a Prophet like Moses. They expected the Prophet to bring deliverance and provide 'manna' from heaven just like Moses.

Further questions: Jesus is getting more blunt, “..you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” Why do you think he is being so direct - almost rude? From what you know about Jesus, what does it mean to “believe in the one he has sent”?¹³ The crowd want to have a continual supply of physical bread (v31, 34), but Jesus wants to satisfy a different hunger. What kind of hunger is he talking about? How would you know you were filled with what he is offering? Jesus uses an “I am” saying here (v35). What is the significance of this?¹⁴ Why do you think people grumbled about his claim to come down from heaven?¹⁵ The drinking of blood was forbidden to an Israelite (Lev 17.10-14), so why does Jesus use this analogy? What is he saying to us about participation in him and his life?

Contemplation point: The crowd understand belief in him as a matter of accepting his competency on the basis of the miracles he performed. But for Jesus ‘belief’ in him was a decision to commit to a relationship based on trust in him. Do you base your relationship with Jesus primarily on his power, or his love? Whichever it is, do you know why?

Personal questions: Are you as fully committed to a relationship with Jesus as the day you were baptised? Is there anything going on in your mind or your heart that is preventing you from nutritious feeding on Jesus? Have any teachings of his got harder recently - so hard that you might actually turn back and no longer follow him?

Call to action: Remember that the teachings of Jesus are life and light. We have eternal life because of them. They may be hard, but they are salvation. This life is temporary, and perseverance will bring its reward (James 1.4; Rev 22.12). If you have been finding any particular command of Jesus a little tough recently, talk it over with a trusted friend and pray together.

Finish today’s Bible study with a prayer

Day 4

John 8: “Follow Jesus into the light”

Read John chapter 8

Starter prayer: “Father, I praise you that you are light and that you sent the light into this world so all could see and no longer live in darkness. Thank you for giving me access to this light. I pray today that, as I look at Jesus, my light, that I would find faith and strength to always seek the light and avoid the darkness..... In Jesus name, Amen”

Context: Six months have passed and, even though his brothers know about his miracles (7.3), they don’t believe in him (7.5). How painful that must have been for Jesus. At the right time he leaves Galilee for the final time, never to return to the place in which he grew up.¹⁶ In Jerusalem

¹³ Jesus as the one whom God sent is mentioned many times over in John’s gospel (3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 20:21) and especially in the chapter containing Jesus’ great prayer (17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25).

¹⁴ The first of seven distinct ‘I am’ sayings in the gospel (6.35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

¹⁵ Six times Jesus says that he “came down from heaven” (6:33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58). His claim to heavenly origin is unmistakable.

¹⁶ Until after his resurrection (21.1)

he is the subject of rumour (7.12, 25-27, 32), confusion (7.35-36, 40-43) and threat (7.30, 32, 44).¹⁷ The Feast of Tabernacles has provided a wonderful backdrop to his promise that "rivers of living water will flow" from people who believe in him (7.2, 37-39).¹⁸ Now he goes on to use another analogy closely tied to the Festival. When Jesus said that he was 'the light of the world', he was consciously connecting with another practice at the Feast of Tabernacles, that of the great nightly candle-lighting ceremonies. Here is a passage from the Mishnah¹⁹ (Sukkah 5:2-3) describing these ceremonies:

"At the close of the first Festival-day of the Feast they went down to the Court of the Women...There were golden candlesticks there with four golden bowls on the top of them and four ladders to each candlestick, and four youths of the priestly stock and in their hands jars of oil...which they poured into all the bowls. They made wicks from the worn out drawers and girdles of the priests and with them they set the candlesticks alight, and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the Beth ha-She'ubah."

Imagination question: If you visited Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles you'd find it hard to get away from light. Every courtyard in the city was lit up for a week. Have you ever craved light? Have you been stuck in a dark place? What did it feel like? We entered Baitu Cermin cave near Labuan Bajo. The cool air was a welcome relief from the humid heat. A sight of bats and the 'mirror rock' was our mission. The outside light faded and I found myself in a powerful darkness. Claustrophobia engulfed me and I scrambled back to the entrance, pushing people out of my way. I wanted light, I needed light, I felt as if I would die if I did not get to the light.

Further questions: When Jesus said that he was the "light of the world" (8.12), what do you think the people around him thought he meant by this? Why did it upset the Pharisees? As you look through the rest of the chapter what are the most radical claims of Jesus that you can see? If we follow Jesus we will "never walk in darkness", but there are other promises in this chapter - which ones can you find? When you've found them ask yourself what do they mean to you.

Contemplation point: There is so much richness in v12 that it's hard to get it into one quiet time! Here are a few thoughts: Jesus' claim to be the light of the world has roots in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6, 51:4), which speak of the Servant of the Lord, and the Lord himself, as the light to the nations; we are people rescued from darkness (Col 1.13) and now have a new life in the light (Jn 1.4); living in the light means we love our brethren (1 John 2.9-11); not only were we once in darkness, but we were once darkness (Eph 5.8), but now that we are light we do our best to please God (Eph 5.8-10). What does it mean to you to "live in the light"?

¹⁷ Someone said that three questions are posed in this chapter: i. Where did Jesus go to school? (7:15); ii. Where is this man from? (7:25 - 27); iii. Where is this man going? (7:35). The answer to all three questions is "heaven".

¹⁸ The Feast of tabernacles had a daily water ceremony. Priests processed to the south of the city to the Gihon Spring. A priest filled a golden jar and a choir sang Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." This water was carried back up to the "Water Gate," followed by crowds carrying a lulab (tree branches representing the desert booths) and an ethrog (citrus branches representing the harvest). People shook these and sang the Hallel (Psalms 113-118). Once at the temple, a priest poured the water onto the altar while the crowd circled him and carried on singing. This was performed seven times on the seventh day. This was a prayer to God for rain (autumn is a time of drought). It was also rich in spiritual symbolism. In the desert, God gave his people water from a rock (Numbers 20:8, 10), and here water flowed from the temple rock altar. Zechariah and Ezekiel had foreseen rivers flowing from the temple in a display of God's blessing (Ezek 47:1; Zech 14:8). In a drought-stricken land, it was a spectacular vision of water, life-giving water flowing from God's life-giving temple. People believed that when the Messiah came he would provide water (as he would provide manna) just as Moses had done: "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias." (Joel 3:18)

¹⁹ The Mishnah was one of the earliest collections of traditions compiled by Rabbis

Personal questions: Have you decisively turned your back on the darkness? Is the darkness tempting? Why is this?²⁰ Can you remember why you chose the light? Is it time to refresh your memory of why you made that decision?

Call to action: I have two suggestions today. 1. Here's something that may help your evangelism when talking to people who are as ignorant about who Jesus really was as the Pharisees: write out a list of the most outrageous things Jesus said about himself, and the scriptures that refer to those sayings. Keep the list handy, and the next time you meet someone who thinks Jesus was an ordinary human, share one or more of those statements with them and ask them what they think. 2. Make a list of the good things that living in the light has brought you and pray through them.

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 5

John 10: "Follow Jesus the good shepherd"

Read John chapter 10

Starter prayer: "Father, I thank you that you have been a wonderful shepherd to me, making me lie down in green pastures and leading me beside quiet waters. As I study today's passage, please help me to feed on what you have provided..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: The 'light' theme continues as the eyes of a blind man receive light for the first time in his life (9.6-7). The Pharisees prefer darkness even while, oddly, they think they are in the light - a warning against spiritual complacency for any of us. We go on from manna, water and light to another passage rich with spiritual symbolism. Let's visit the sheep farm with Jesus. Families in villages had only a few sheep kept in a walled courtyard. Households clubbed together to provide a shepherd (usually a child from one of the families). Each morning the shepherd went house to house, and doorkeepers opened their courtyard doors. The sheep heard him call and followed him into the open country to feed because they knew his voice. The courtyard walls were up to two meters high. A false shepherd had to climb over them because no doorkeeper would allow him in, and, of course, the sheep would not recognise his voice. Instead, they would run away from him.

Imagination question: What's your favourite voice in the world? One you recognise and trust. A voice that makes you feel safe. Why do you like that voice? One voice I treasure hearing is my mother's. She is 80 this year and I call her as often as I can. My blood pressure drops as soon as I hear her say, "hello". Our conversations always begin the same way, ME: "Hello mother"; HER: "Hello"; ME: "How is one?"; HER: "Oh, one is very well indeed, thank you." Our ritual is something I do with no one else, it's special to us. The point of course is not the words, nor the sound of the voice, but the trust in the relationship.

Further questions: Why do you think Jesus uses the sheep analogy for his followers? And why does he use the shepherd idea about himself? Who was the first shepherd in the Bible? Is there any significance in that when thinking about Jesus? What do you think Jesus had in mind when he

²⁰ It is ironic and tragic that the people of God rejected Jesus and turned their backs on him at this Feast. The Mishnah tells us about something that happened each day at the Feast: 'When they [two priests] reached the gate that leads out to the east, they turned their faces to the west and said, "Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord"' (Sukkah 5:4). Even as their priests were proclaiming themselves to be faithful in contrast to their forefathers who turned their backs on the temple of the Lord and worshipped the sun, they were in fact turning their backs on the Lord himself as he visited them in the person of his Son.

said he came to provide “life to the full”? What kind of ‘fullness’?²¹ Good shepherds protected their sheep at some risk to themselves, but what is different about the kind of sacrifice Jesus made for us?

Contemplation point: Life in all its fullness is glimpsed briefly in Eden (Genesis 2). We catch a vision of it in Revelation (Revelation 21 & 22). However, we live in the ‘in-between’ times. While still here on earth we will not have all the fullness of what awaits us in the next life, but we can enjoy the promises of John 10.9 - namely, i. Salvation; ii. Safety; iii Sustenance.

Personal questions: Are you grateful for the life Jesus has given you? If you don’t feel it’s a very ‘full’ life, why might this be? How do you know you are listening to his voice? What does it mean to ‘listen’ to his voice? What kind of ‘pasture’ has Jesus given you to feed on? How does it make you feel when you think about the fact that he could have saved himself, but did not?

Call to action: Jesus says, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). When we really believe that it gives us tremendous confidence. Such confidence makes us very bold, and gives us the courage to face our fears. Read over that verse again, pray and go face a fear today.

Finish today’s Bible study with a prayer

Day 6

John 11: “Follow Jesus and weep”

Read John chapter 11

Starter prayer: “Father, I praise you that you are not only transcendent, but also able to understand and even feel my pain. Thank you that Jesus was as human as me and that he cares about my struggles and the struggles of people around me. Help me, as I study this chapter today, to take on the heart of Jesus and to proclaim his resurrection power.....
..... In Jesus name, Amen”

Context: Men are selecting stones to throw at Jesus (10.31). They want to seize him (10.39), but the time is not right. Back in a safe place with happy memories, Jesus carries on doing good, and teaching the good news (10.40-41). Many people believe in him and accept him for who he is: Messiah, Son of God and Lamb of God. Now we see his mastery not only over water, wine and thirst, bread and hunger, gravity, sickness and blindness, but even death. This is the last miracle/sign that John records Jesus doing. He is telling us that if we’ve not got Jesus by now, we’ve not been paying attention!

Imagination question: Have you ever sent someone an urgent message? One that needed an instant reply? How did it feel while you were waiting for the reply? Could you do anything or think about anything until you received the answer? Were you sitting, standing, pacing up and down, chewing your nails?

Further questions: Why do you think Jesus delayed going to see his friends even though he must have known they were tense and fearful?²² What does Thomas’ comment (11.16) tell you about the

²¹ The Greek word here, ‘perissos’ implies there will be more than enough, extraordinary or excessive provision, full abundance. It carries the idea of a table overlaid with food evidencing God’s blessings of shalom as well as His justice (Neh 5:17; Job 36:16; Ps 23:5; 78:19).

²² The spirit of a dead person was thought to hover around the body for three days before finally departing

scale of the threat to Jesus' life? What does it reveal about Thomas?²³ Jesus goes back to a place where his personal safety was endangered - what does this tell you about love? What progression do you see in Martha's understanding of Jesus and his power? Why do you suppose Jesus wept when he already knew he was going to bring Lazarus back to life?²⁴ What impact did this have on the bystanders? Why do you think Martha is worried about the smell? (v39) Didn't she believe in Jesus as the Messiah?

Contemplation point: Jesus does not rebuke anyone for weeping here. He weeps too. You can bring your pain to him - it's safe. We were sitting in a cafe drinking coffee. It was a busy. Tables were close, customers talking loudly, waiters bumping into chairs. I told my friend about a very painful situation in my family. He started to cry. The noise, the clutter, the crowd all vanished in that instant of connected compassion. I felt my eyes moisten as I came into contact with his compassion on my behalf. That's a true friend. Someone who weeps with you and for you. Jesus is our best friend.

Personal questions: Have you become impatient with Jesus for delaying answering your requests? Can you trust him for his timing? Have you taken your greatest fears and pain to him? Have you dared to weep with him? What about weeping with others in their pain? Do you worry about the 'smell', or trust in the miracle?

Call to action: Jesus wants all people to know about his resurrection power (11.25-26) — who can you tell today about his wonderful hope? If you've held back from weeping with Jesus or with friends, why not pray today to open your heart to this level of Christlike compassion?

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 7

John 12: "Follow Jesus and die"

Read John chapter 12

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you that Jesus did not shrink from death, and that he did not allow fear of people to prevent him from doing your will. I thank you that he died for me, and pray that today's quiet time will give me the strength to live a life of self-sacrifice.....
..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: The irony is heavy. Raising Lazarus from the dead has made Jesus' own death more likely (Jn 11.53). The Sanhedrin decide that one man is worth sacrificing for their nation (11.50), while Jesus has decided that his own sacrifice is worth it for the salvation of the whole of humankind. God always works on a bigger scale than us! Jesus knows the time is not quite right for the final showdown in Jerusalem, so he goes to Ephraim with his disciples. Chapter 12 is like a slideshow where each picture builds a clearer and clearer picture of why Jesus is about to die and what it means for those who follow him.²⁵

Imagination question: What's the most expensive gift you've ever been given? Or that you've given someone else? It might not have cost a lot of money, but it cost you everything you had. A

²³ See also Jn 14.5; 20.24-29; 21.22-23

²⁴ "deeply moved" (v33) is 'embrimaomai' in Greek, often translated 'to rebuke', or 'to give a stern warning. If so, towards what? The faithlessness of Mary & Martha, death itself, or something else?

²⁵ Death is a thread through the chapter: vv1, 7, 9, 10, 17, 24, 33

child's pocket money spent on a gift for a parent is a greater sacrifice than a working adult spending some of their spare cash on a present.

Further questions: Why do you think Mary poured out this expensive perfume at this time, and not earlier? They'd know each other for a while at this point. What do we learn about Judas (vv4-6)? Why did the chief priests want to kill Lazarus? For what reason do you think Jesus chose a colt instead of a horse?²⁶ Wouldn't a horse be more fitting for a king?²⁷ Can you think of a reason John includes the story about the Greeks (v20ff)? God's voice is heard (v28) in answer to Jesus' prayer - why might God have spoken at this time? Many believe in Jesus (including leaders (v42), but fear prevents them from being open about their faith. What do you suppose they feared most? Why wouldn't they follow Jesus?

Contemplation point: A plant from Nepal (*Nardostachys jatamansi*) provides nard. It was hard to collect, and expensive to buy. A year's wages was the amount poured out by Mary. That's serious devotion.²⁸ I've never spent a year's wages on a gift. Or have I? If I total up the money I've donated to the church, to missions and to helping people in need (Christians and non-Christian), I suppose it would come to a total well in excess of a year's wages. If I've been giving this money out of gratitude (like Mary), and I've been doing it for Jesus (like Mary), then I too have offered a fragrant gift to the Lord. It all depends on the attitude, doesn't it? Jesus gave himself to death willingly (12.23-33), and that example inspires us to give ourselves to a lifestyle of death to self for the sake of others in glory to God.

Personal questions: Are you giving gratefully or grudgingly? When was the last time you found yourself giving money, time and energy to God with a good heart? If you've lost that, can you recapture it? Are you afraid to die to self (vv25-26)?

Call to action: Following Jesus is a life of joy, peace *and* sacrifice. It is in the sacrifice that we find joy and peace. Seeking the joy and the peace as goals in themselves leads to anxiety and self-absorption. Jesus is squeezed out of the picture. However, a life of service on behalf of Christ, while requiring self-sacrifice, leads to joy and peace - because we end up inhabiting the same space as him. And where he is, joy and peace are to be found. What step could you make today to recapture or revitalise a life of self-sacrifice?

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

²⁶ This is one of the few events that is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 21:1–11/Mark 11:1–11/ Luke 19:28–40/John 12:12–19).

²⁷ See Psalm 118.25-27; Zech 9.9-10;

²⁸ Not to mention wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. Women were only allowed to let down their hair in the presence of their husbands. Even today in some stricter parts of the Islamic world, male hairdressers will not cut women's hair.

Day 8

John 13: 'Follow Jesus and love'

Read John chapter 13

Starter prayer: "Father, praise you that you are love. I have nothing to fear from that love, and everything to gain. Thank you that you love me because you want to, and I do not need to persuade you to love me. I pray that you will help my heart to love as Jesus loved.....
..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: The public scene becomes a private one. As if John has become a theatre director, he turns on a spotlight. The stage full of characters (the crowds, the Pharisees, the family and the wider group of disciples) fall outside the pool of light, and our attention is directed to those centre-stage - Jesus and the Apostles. The second main section of John's gospel begins here, in a small room, upstairs, around a table. The Apostles do not realise the significance of this meal, but Jesus does. It is his final supper with them this side of his resurrection.

Imagination question: What's the most memorable meal you've eaten? What made it so significant? Was it the occasion, the people, the setting? How did you feel? Excited, nervous, joyful, discouraged?

Further questions: Jesus always has many things to do, and he could be forgiven for wanting to spend this evening alone, so why do you think he took the time to eat with his disciples? He washes their feet as if he were their slave. Why do you think he does this, and what point was he trying to make to them? As far as you can tell, what is going through Peter's mind as Jesus comes to him? Jesus knows who will betray him, but he treats Judas no differently to the rest. What does this tell you about the way Jesus thinks about people? If we love one another as Jesus loved his disciples, what will that look like in the church? Peter claims he will follow Jesus even if it means laying down his life for him (v37). Why do you think he makes such a claim? What has he not considered fully?

Contemplation point: The tendency we Christians have is to define Biblical things by comparison to our experiences in the world. We read passages on marriage and interpret them in the light of our parents' marriage. We study joy in the Scriptures and understand it through the lens of people we know who are more "joyful" than us. We examine characters like Moses and see his inspirational qualities reflected in political, artistic and sporting heroes of our own. We do this because such people are "flesh and blood" and we know them (or think we do). However, this greatly limits our ability to fully grasp the wonders of Scripture. We cannot understand 'heavenly' truths by comparing them with 'earthly' realities. Instead, we will do well to allow the Bible to interpret its own concepts. Hence, we must study the life of Jesus over and over and over again until we get a three-dimensional full-colour picture of how he lived, thought, felt, touched, spoke, looked, encountered, listened, walked and taught. And in reference to today's topic, we must allow him to define love, and learn, with his power, to love like that. It's the only way to save people, keep them saved, and make a lasting impact in this world for him.

Personal questions: What lessons are there for you in the way Jesus treats Judas? Since I'm sure you are planning to love people as Jesus loved you, what difference will that make to the way you live today?

Call to action: Love someone today as Jesus loves them. Who is that going to be? What will you do for them? Don't tell anyone who it is or what you've going to do until after you've done it - and even maybe not then either.

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 9

John 14: “Follow Jesus and enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit”

Read John chapter 14¹

Starter prayer: “Father, I praise you for revealing your heart through Jesus and the Spirit. Thank you that I have access to the way, the truth and the life. I am so grateful not to be alone in this world, but to have the helper with me. I pray that today, as I study this passage, I will understand the Spirit’s role in my life just a little better In Jesus name, Amen”

Context: Jesus knows the path for his disciples will be a rocky one. One of his “rocks” (Peter) will crumble despite his protestations of undying loyalty (13:37; 18:17, 25, 26–27). It is already night (v30), and there are only a few hours left before the cock crows (v38). What can Jesus do to give Peter and the others their best chance of holding on to their faith despite their failures? Chapters 14-17 give us the answer, and this chapter introduces us to the first solution - the Spirit.

Imagination question: It was 1984. My girlfriend had been in Africa for 3 months. I was in England. She might as well have been on Mars (no texts, WhatsApp, Skype or email in those days!). After what seemed like an eternity she returned. We met, had a meal and promptly got engaged. I said to her, “That’s never happening again. It was too painful to be parted for so long. Let’s get married and we’ll be together for ever.” We married a year later and have never endured such a separation since. Even though it was over 30 years ago I’ll never forget the eager anticipation of her return. Have you ever had a situation like that? What did it feel like?

Further questions: Why do you think Jesus feels the need to reassure his disciples about their ultimate destiny (14.3)? What does it tell you about Jesus that, while he is the one about to die, he is thinking about the encouragement of his followers? What does it mean that Jesus is the “way”, the “truth”², and the “life”^{3,4}? What are the “even greater things” his followers will do (v12)? What is the purpose of the Spirit? Why is he given? What should the results be for the disciples? How will they feel, what will they do? What benefits will they enjoy?

Contemplation point: Jesus promises his disciples, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (see also James 1:27) Orphans are vulnerable. Jesus knows we are vulnerable in this world, and thus he has a plan. That plan is to remain with us as a helper (vv23, 28). The Spirit’s presence means that the victorious Jesus is with us, in us, now and for eternity. Sin has no power over us, and death holds no fear for us. Instead, we are offered intimacy with Jesus himself. What a privilege! What a joy! And what a difference from any other religion.

Personal questions: If you are guaranteed a “room” (vv2-3), what does that do for your confidence in your salvation? When you hear Jesus say, “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it”, how does that effect the way you pray and live? What is the connection for you between obedience (v15, 21, 23), the Spirit (v16, 26) and peace (v27)? Are you a ‘peace-filled’ person? Are there any clues in this passage to help you grow in Christ-like peace?

¹ We’re not studying chapter 16 in this quiet time series, but it has some inspiring things to say about the Spirit, so if you have time today read that chapter as well.

² Jesus was the truth of God in the world (1:14, 17; 8:32, 40, 45–46; 14:6; 18:37).

³ See: 1:4; 5:26; 6:33, 35, 48, 51; 11:25

⁴ We have here the sixth of seven ‘I am’ sayings (6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5)

Call to action: Take a situation over which you do not have peace, and prayerfully imagine that Jesus is right there in the middle of that situation. What do you notice? What difference does that make? Now, go back to that situation with faith - and with the helper.

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 10

John 15: "Follow Jesus and enjoy his friendship"

Read John chapter 15

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you for tending your vine with such care and patience over the centuries. There is no better gardener than you. Help me to abide in Christ and remain in the vine. Give me what I need today so that I will go and bear much fruit.....
..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: Jesus' death on the cross is not far off. By going to the cross he will show the world two things: How much God loves humankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:8); And how much he loves his followers (John 15:13; Galatians 2:20). However, there is an even more important aspect to the cross, and John 14.31 tells what that is. The death of Jesus shows us his love for the Father, and that this love is expressed obedience. This reminder that all of human history and God's actions are more about him than us sets us up well for the next chapter. As we move into chapter 15 we are encouraged to centre our thoughts and desires on Jesus, and not on what we want from him.

Imagination question: If you could pick any person in the world to be your friend, who would it be? Someone wealthy? Someone famous, powerful or supremely intelligent? Why would you choose that person, and what difference would you hope it might make to your life?

Further questions: Why would Jesus need pruning by the Father? And what does it tell you about Jesus that he was willing to submit to such pruning? If we remain in Jesus, what are the benefits to us? And what are the costs if we do not? What does it mean to "remain" in Christ? And what will help us to do so?⁵ What is the difference between abiding in the vineyard, and abiding in the vine? What is the connection between obedience and joy? They sound like a strange connection. How does this work? Jesus commands us to love each other as he has loved us. What impact will that make in the world?⁶ What kind of 'fruit' do you think Jesus is talking about?

Contemplation point: When I sent invitations to my 50th birthday party I included people on other continents. Not because I thought they would come, but because I wanted them to know they were important to me. Little did I expect one of them to come, but a dear friend travelled all the way from Africa to England to be at my party. I was humbled, shocked and stirred. Dolapo Ogundipe is my friend. There is something even more shocking and stirring in the idea of Jesus being our 'friend'. His friendship is more committed than even the most devoted human friendship. He died for us when we were still his enemies (Romans 5.8). I'd suggest that we cannot fully embrace this friendship without a deep appreciation of the Lord's Supper (communion). Does participating in the communion help you to see Jesus as a friend? Jesus & his disciples have just had the last supper (chapter 13) where they have drunk some of the fruit of the vine – symbolising his blood shed on the cross. Perhaps one way to 'abide' in him & be his friend is to be committed to communion.

⁵ Jesus uses the vine in teaching: Matt 20 (God runs a vineyard how he likes), Matt 21 (Kingdom of God is a vineyard), Mark 12 & Lk 13 (fig tree in vineyard – give it one more year).

⁶ John 13.34; 1 John 4.11-12, 17, 20.

Personal questions: In the Bible, Israel was often referred to as God's vine. But most of the Old Testament references are negative.⁷ It seems they were reluctant to be 'pruned'. Why do we fear the Father's pruning? Have you seen any benefits from his pruning in your life? What are they?⁸ What does friendship with Jesus mean to you? Is there anything stopping you from accepting him as a friend and not just as a Lord & Master? Would a personal Bible study on the Lord's Supper help? Is there 'fruit' in your life? Jesus has a vision for 'fruit' in your life. What kind of 'fruit' might that be? How are your relationships with your fellow-disciples? Do you like people in your church? What is your part in taking your relationships to the next level?

Call to action: Abiding in Christ is vital if we are to grow, if we are to experience his joy, if we are to bear fruit, if we are to make an impact on this world, if we are to enjoy his friendship and if we are to make it to the end and enjoy our eternal inheritance. Is there a more important passage in the New Testament than this one? Today's call to action is pick one thing that will help you abide in Christ, and to focus on it for this week. What is that action? Do yourself a favour and tell someone else what that is - working together as friends will make a big difference.

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 11

John 17: "Follow Jesus to be 'one'"

Read John chapter 17

Starter prayer: "Great God, I praise you that you are not divided. Father, Son and Spirit are one, and of a clear purpose - that we would know you through Jesus Christ and have eternal life. Give me a heart to understand what it means for your church to be one as you are one, and what my part is in maintaining that oneness In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: We've skipped chapter 16, but we must pause long enough to glance at what we've missed. Jesus is concerned for his friends - they're going to have a tough time (John 15:18-19; 16:1-2).⁹ He will send the 'Paraclete' (advocate) when he has departed. This is no second-best option. He will defend them, strengthen their witness (John 15:26-27), and help them remember the things Jesus taught them (John 14:26). Now we proceed to the most inspiring prayer ever prayed.¹⁰

Imagination question: Memorable prayer times are essential to a Christian. Some are remembered for less than spiritual reasons, such as the time when Steve started to snore during an all-night men's prayer and another brother prayed that the Holy Spirit would give him a kick in the

⁷ Isaiah 5.1-7; Psalm 80.7-19

⁸ We moved in to our home three years ago. The garden was a mess. My wife was undaunted, being a good gardener and a determined person. We are now seeing the fruit of her vision and hard work. Just this evening she pointed out a laburnum shrub that is flowering beautifully. She reminded me that when we arrived it was sickly and overshadowed by two large aggressive plants. She doubted it would survive. So what did she do to this poor, weak, oppressed shrub? Did she stake it, feed it, clear the ground around it? No. She pruned it. Savagely (her word). A stump was all that was left in the ground. A barely visible piece of brown wood. Such pruning stimulated it to vigorous growth, and three years later it is one of the glories of our garden.

⁹ Difficult decisions (Acts 1:15-26); Imprisonment (Acts 4:3, Act 12:3-4); Opposition by authorities (Acts 4:18; Act 5:17-18, Act 5.40); Internal church crises (Acts 5:1-11, Acts 6:1-6, Acts 15:1-35); Martyrdoms (Acts 7:59-60, Acts 12:1-2)

¹⁰ This is the third prayer of Jesus recorded by John. The others are at the Tomb of Lazarus (John 11:41-42) and when Jesus was approached by the Greeks (John 12:27-28).

stomach to wake him up! However, there are other prayer times we remember because we knew God was there with us. He was listening, reacting, comforting, guiding and prompting. The sky was turning indigo and stars were emerging as I lay on the green grassy hilltop in August 1984. My prayer? To find men of faith who could show me the way to live a life of faith when I moved to London. A week later I was in London attending the Central London church of Christ, and soon Douglas Arthur was teaching me the Bible. 2003 found me on a Welsh mountain weeping before God over shattered dreams. I heard God reassure me. He told me it was not all over, that He would heal, help and strengthen me. He did. What are your special prayer memories? Either on your own or with other people?

Further questions: What does this prayer tell you about the relationship Jesus has with the Father? God will not give his glory to anyone else (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11), so what does it tell you that Jesus can pray for himself to be glorified? Jesus knows what is coming for him, but he does not pray to escape it. What does he pray for instead? How does Jesus feel towards his followers - those present at the time, and those to come in the future? What concerns does he have for them? What hopes does he have for them? How did Jesus reveal the Father? (v6) What kind of "oneness" do you think Jesus is praying for between disciples?¹¹ Where did Jesus' joy come from, and what kind of joy did he hope his followers would experience? (v13)¹²

Contemplation point: How many times is the word "unity" used in chapter 17? Just the once (v23, depending on your translation). This chapter is known as the passage where Jesus prays for the church to be unified. I'm suggesting that's not the most helpful emphasis. The word that's important to us is the Greek word "heis", which is translated "one" through most of the chapter ("unity" in v23). Jesus is not so much calling for unity, but rather 'oneness'. Of course the words carry similar ideas, but an overemphasis on 'unity' can lead to a conscious or subconscious shift towards structural concerns, while 'oneness' is about relational health. The Father, Son and Spirit are not structurally constructed into some kind of interconnected unit. Rather, they are one. One in mind, purpose, concern, heart, desire, thought, expression, love, joy and relationship. Perhaps we would do well to be less concerned with the question, "Am I *united* with my leaders/members/brothers/sisters", and instead be asking the question, "Am I *one* with my leaders/members/brothers/sisters?" What difference does that question make to you?

Personal questions: Jesus prays to his "Father", (vv1, 5, 21, 24) "Holy Father", (v11) "Righteous Father", (v25). How many ways do you have of addressing the Father in prayer? Is there a vision expressed in this prayer that you can adopt for yourself? What difference will that vision make to your life today? John mentions eternal life more than the other Gospel writers.¹³ Have you ever done a personal Bible study on the topic of eternal life and what it means? Could you plan to do that and see if it might enrich your faith?¹⁴ If Jesus' ministry and mission was to reveal the Father (v6), how can you do this today (v20-21)?

Call to action: Prayerfully examine the true state of your relationships with your spiritual brothers and sisters. Can you say you are 'one' with them? Especially consider those close to you in your family group/small group/discipleship group. Pick one relationship where work is needed on your behalf, pray about it and do something today to take your 'oneness' closer to that for which Jesus prayed.

¹¹ Some ideas include: Unity in mission and for the sake of mission, Jn 10.27-30. A unity founded on relationship with Father/Son, Jn 17.21-23. A unity springing from a common shared new life together. What else can you think of?

¹² See: John 4.32-34; 15.9-11; 16.24; Acts 5:41

¹³ John 3.15, 16, 36; 4.14, 36; 5.24, 39; 6.27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10.28; 12.25, 50; 17.2, 3.

¹⁴ Just as an aside, we see here that "this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ," (John 17:3 NIV11). In other words, eternal life is relational, not just a state of being. Eternal life is given so that we might *know* God.

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 12

John 18: "Follow Jesus into risky places"

Read John chapter 18

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you that you are never thwarted by the schemes of men and women when they try to derail your plans. You are sovereign, and you will see your will done. No politician, religious leader or rebellious disciple stands in your way. Thank you for the example of Jesus - his confidence, his poise, his peace, his strength, his sacrifice. Please help me to open my heart to your word today. Give me a learning spirit and a soft conscience

..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: Jesus has prayed for himself, his disciples and future believers. The 'oneness' he dreams of is an intimacy that fuels witness (17.20-21). This witness is made effective by love (13.34-35), and produces unity in diversity (Gal 3.26-29). Jesus says he "will continue to make you known" (17:26), so that his followers will experience God's love. But how will this take place? We're about to find out as we move towards the cross. The prayer is over and Jesus is ready for the final events of his earthly life which are about to unfold rapidly. His disciples are not ready, but they are as ready as he could make them, they have been prayed for and they will come through eventually.

Imagination question: Have you ever gone somewhere and suddenly realised it was riskier than you expected? How did it feel at the moment when it dawned on you that you shouldn't be there? What was it like when you felt the fear? What did you do?

Further questions: Why do you think the arrest party "drew back and fell to the ground"? (v6) The phrase, "I am he" is repeated three times (vv5, 6, 8). Can you think of a particular reason why John might have recorded these statements of Jesus? Is there any significance in the fact that Jesus identifies himself three times, and Peter denies he knows Jesus three times? (vv17, 25, 27). Apart from the deeper meaning of this phrase, what does the fact that Jesus stepped forward to identify himself and protect his disciples tell you about his heart?¹⁵ Why do you think Peter attacked Malchus? And then, why does he become so quick to deny his association with Jesus (v17)? Peter's three-fold refusal to be associated with Jesus is tragic, but all-too understandable. What do you think was going through his mind as the cock crowed? (v27) His is not the only betrayal in this chapter. The Jewish leaders are scrupulous in avoiding ceremonial uncleanness (v28) while at the same time becoming guilty of something far worse - scheming the death of an innocent man. What do you think causes so-called spiritual people to compromise what they say they believe in? Why would the crowd prefer Barabbas over Jesus?¹⁶

Contemplation point: Jesus is not intimidated by soldiers with swords, religious authorities or secular authority. He chooses when to speak and when to be silent.¹⁷ His abandonment by friends and betrayal by a disciple does not deflect him from his purpose. When interrogated by Pilate he responds to the governor's question with a question (v34), makes a provocative statement about his kingdom (v36) and invites Pilate to contemplate his own relationship with truth (v37). Quite a lot

¹⁵ John 10.11-13

¹⁶ "Barabbas" means "son of the father" in Aramaic. Another irony. The earthly "son of the father" is set free, but the heavenly "Son of the Father" is put on a cross.

¹⁷ See also John 19.9-11

to pack in to a short conversation! We can learn a lot about godly confidence, responding to critics and sharing our faith from this chapter.

Personal questions: The contrast between Peter and Jesus is stark. We'll look at the poignant resolution to what happens in this chapter in two days' time, but for now, we must ask ourselves some questions. What situations do you find yourself in where you feel intimidated? Think through the various places you go and people you see. Work, family, friends, neighbours and so on. Where is it that people might not even know you are a Christian? In front of which people do you feel your heart thumping, your mouth going dry, your head spinning? What's going through your mind at times like that? How might you react next time in a way that is more like Jesus?

Call to action: Decide to imitate Jesus's confidence in sharing your faith in a risky situation. Don't do something foolish (there's no glory for God when we act without thinking), and you might like to share your idea with a friend to get their perspective beforehand, but sometimes we need to act in faith even if the risks are significant. Who will you speak to, and when? My heart was in my mouth when I sat down with my Uncle John. I was taking him out to lunch for his birthday and planning to speak to him about Jesus. I've known him all my life, and I know he is an atheist, but I've never talked to him about God. He is my only Uncle, and I don't want to offend him. My children stand to benefit from his will when he dies. Lunch was good, the conversation varied, we came to coffee and it was soon time to depart, so I took the plunge. "Uncle John, you know I'm a Christian, but we've never talked about faith." It felt as if the whole pub was looking at me. "Do you mind if I ask you about your beliefs?" I could hardly breathe. Claustrophobia. "Well," he replied, "You know I'm an atheist..." "Yes," I said, "I'd like to know why." My Uncle then started to talk about his beliefs and I was able to share some of the Gospel with him. He did not declare himself open to changing his beliefs, but he did agree that I could talk to him some more about Jesus. I was elated - not only because he agreed to let me talk to him more about faith, but also that God had given me the strength to do something I felt was risky. What about you?

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 13

John 19-20: "Follow Jesus to the cross - and new life"

Read John chapters 19-20¹⁸

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you for your compassion, kindness, patience, justice and love. I thank you that Jesus went to the cross willingly and died there so that I could have new life. Please help me to remember the cost of the cross, and the promise of the new life and never stop being grateful. I ask you today to help me love you more as I study these chapters

..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: Pilate has found that he cannot control Jesus, the crowd, or the Jewish leaders. He still has the power to do whatever he wants with Jesus. We now see the true nature of this political animal. He has Jesus flogged.¹⁹

Imagination question: Have you had a tragedy in your life that led to something good? The sort of thing you would never ask for, pray for or hope for, but that you look back on with gratitude. With hindsight you can see that the hand of God was at work. I have been made redundant three times and each time was traumatic. The first time I was consumed with fear, the second time I developed

¹⁸ It's a longer reading today, so if you don't have time to read it all concentrate on 19.17-30 and 20.11-29

¹⁹ Pilate is described by his contemporary Philo, and later by Josephus, as being one who was greedy, inflexible, cruel, and who resorted to robbery and oppression. He was removed from his position after a number of cruel acts.

depression and other illnesses, the third time I struggled with cynicism. However, now I can see how God gave birth to many good things through these events. Listing just a few: First time - I moved to London and became a disciple; Second time - I was able to realise a long-held dream to study theology; Third time - it led to planting a church where I live. There's much, much more, but space will not permit. What about you? Where in your life has God brought forth sweetness from bitterness?

Further questions: What are the soldiers hoping to achieve by the flogging, crown and robe? Why do you think Pilate says, "You take him and crucify him" (19.6) to the chief priests and officials when he knows they have no authority to do so? What might be the reason for Pilate's fear when he hears that Jesus claims to be the Son of God? (vv7-8). Jewish leaders acclaim Caesar (a pagan) as their king (v15). Why would they do such a thing knowing that God viewed it as rejection when they asked for one of their own to be king, let alone a Gentile?²⁰ Jesus gives his mother into the care of "the disciple whom he loved". What does this tell you about their relationship? What do you most admire about Jesus as he is on the cross, and why? Jesus is in control of his destiny to the end. He decides when he will give up his spirit. v30 can be translated, "he laid his head to rest and dismissed his spirit." What is Jesus telling us with this statement?²¹ The only reference in the entire New Testament to men running is in John 20.4. What does this tell you about Peter and John's state of mind? What do you think motivated Mary to stay near the tomb (v11)? Can you think of a reason as to why she did not recognise Jesus to start with? He does not want her to "hold on" to him. Is that physical, emotional or something else? If the Holy Spirit has not yet indwelt them (Act 1.4), what kind of reception of the Spirit is Jesus talking about in v22? What take do you have on how Jesus felt about Thomas' doubts? Was he understanding? Indignant? Another feeling?

Contemplation point: Think back to the story of Lazarus in chapter 11. What similarities and differences do you see between him and Jesus? Here's a thought. When Lazarus comes out of his tomb he is still wrapped in "strips of linen". He needs friends to remove the cloth. However, Jesus is different. His burial cloth is left behind when he rises from the dead. He emerges from the tomb free of restraint. I suspect John meant us to notice these differences. Both he and Lazarus have life, but only Jesus has *new* life. Lazarus is resuscitated, but Jesus is resurrected. Why does this matter? Because Lazarus will die at some point, but Jesus lives forever (Hebrews 7.24). We are following a resurrected eternal-living Jesus to the cross and a new life. We bear our cross in this world (Lk 9.23), we are called to die to self (Rom 6.6), we offer ourselves to death (Rom 8.36), we die so that we may be fruitful (Jn 12.24) - and we begin enjoying the fruits of a new life that will find its fullest expression after our physical death (Rom 6.3-10). We will have a body like Jesus in the next life (Phil 3.20-21). What an amazing thought! What does this mean to you now? How might that encourage you? We follow an inspiring Saviour and will inherit an awesome new body.

Personal questions: Who do you relate to most in these chapters? Joseph, Nicodemus, Mary, Peter, John, Thomas? Jesus himself? Think about it and choose one. Why have you picked that person? What stands out to you as the main lesson about the cross and new life? Are you fully committed to following Jesus to the cross and are you fully confident that you have new life?

Call to action: One song says, "If you cannot bear a cross You can't wear a crown". Another encourages us, "I will cling to the old rugged Cross, And exchange it some day for a crown." The cross and new life go together. This new life is only meaningful when it is lived *and* shared with others. Finally, here is one more song: "Some folks may ask me, some folks may say, "Who is this Jesus, you talk about every day?" He is my Saviour, He set me free; Now listen while I tell you, what He means to me. CHORUS: He is my everything, He is my all. He is my everything, both

²⁰ 1 Samuel 8.6-9; 12:17; 15:11; 16:1

²¹ John 10:18 is being fulfilled here. His work is completed - giving his flesh (6:51), as the good shepherd (10:11, 14), dying for the nation (11:50), falling to the ground to produce many seeds (12:24), showing greater love (15:13).

great and small. He gave His life for me, made everything new. He is my everything, now how about you?" Jesus made everything new for us - who can you share this with today?

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Day 14

John 21: "Follow Jesus to the end"

Read John 21

Starter prayer: "Father, I praise you that you never give up on anyone. Praise you for your patience and your perseverance with humankind. I thank you that I'm able to read this amazing passage of scripture today. It's inspiring to see Jesus' compassion for Peter. Help me to hear you speak to me through this chapter. Give me the heart to follow Jesus to the end..... In Jesus name, Amen"

Context: We're somewhere between day 8 and day 40 after the resurrection. Peter and his companions have returned to the familiarity of Galilee and fishing. Perhaps this is in response to the instructions of the angel (Matt 28:7; Mark 16:7), perhaps because they felt Jerusalem was too dangerous a place to hang around, or perhaps because they were hungry! In any case, it forms the perfect setting for Jesus to set the seal on his relationship with his followers.

Imagination question: What's the best meal anyone has ever cooked for you? Not a restaurant meal, but one made by a friend or relative. What made it so good? Was it the food, the occasion, the person preparing it? How did you feel at the time, and how do you feel now thinking back to it?²²

Further questions: How do you think the disciples felt when the miraculous catch happened?²³ What do you think motivated Peter to dive in and swim to shore? Can you think of any particular reason as to why Jesus cooked a meal? How might the disciples have been feeling as Jesus reached out to give them some bread and some fish? Jesus waited until the meal was finished before talking directly to Peter. Why do you think he waited until this point, and what does this tell you about Jesus? The question to Peter is whether he loves Jesus "more than these?" What do you think the "these" are?²⁴ Why did Jesus ask Peter the same question three times? What reason can you think of as to why Peter felt hurt after the third time (v17)? Jesus tells Peter to feed lambs (v15), care for sheep (v16) and feed sheep (v17). Can you think of why these slightly different instructions are given? What do you suppose Peter's feeling might have been when he was told about his death by Jesus?

Contemplation point: My NIV11 translates the Greek as, "love me" (vv15, 16, 17) each time. But the Greek words are different. For questions 1 and 2 Jesus uses the word "agapao" meaning a sacrificial love. The third time he uses "phileo" meaning a brotherly love. Peter's reply is the same each time (vv15, 16, 17 - phileo). It could be that Jesus is asking whether Peter loves him in the way he loves Peter. But Peter only has the faith or confidence to reply that he loves him with a lesser love. "Agape" love is the quality with which Jesus loved his disciples and is the standard for

²² One of the best meals I've ever eaten was the first meal my wife cooked me after we got married. I can't remember what was on my plate, but I can remember who was there with me on the other side of the table! It was the company, not the recipe that made it special.

²³ Have a look at Luke 5.1-11 if you have time and think about how Peter might feel when he compares the two events.

²⁴ Some people think the question could be, i. Do you love me more than these other men do? ii. Do you love me more than you love these men? iii. Do you love me more than these things—the boats, the fish, etc.? What are your theories?

their love for one another (Jn 13.34-35).²⁵ Is that what explains the reason Peter was hurt in v17? Is Jesus saying, "If you cannot love me with a divine love, can you at least love me as a friend?" What's the standard with which you aspire to love Jesus?

Personal questions: What does this passage teach you about the heart of Jesus? Is there something you can identify in him that you can imitate? How does the challenge to Peter ("You must follow me", v22) apply to you today? Is there anything holding you back from full commitment to following Jesus? Are you confident in remaining faithful from now until you die? If so, why is that? And if not, why is that?

Call to action: Pick one insight from today's passage that can help strengthen your followership of Jesus. What one decision can you make today that will make it more likely that you will follow Jesus to the end? Who can you share your conviction with today?

Finish today's Bible study with a prayer

Conclusion

It's likely that John's Gospel was the last one of the four to be written. By that time most if not all the Apostles were dead and the future of the church depended on the next generation having the same faith as the first generation of disciples. At the end of chapter 20 John wrote, "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The words carry meaning for people who may come to faith, but they also have meaning for those of us who already have faith.²⁶ John is concerned that the people he is writing to continue in the faith and take it on to the future - one where he is no longer around. The Gospel is given to us both for the purpose of evangelism and edification.

I would finish this quiet time series on John with two simple but profoundly important questions.

In these last two weeks.....

1. What has been the most important insight God has given you about growing your faith in following Jesus?
2. What has been the most important insight God has given you about sharing your faith in Jesus with other people?

And actually, one more vital question.....

What decision can you make today that will take you forward with what you have learned?

I pray that God has spoken to you through His Word, and that what you have learned helps you to follow Jesus faithfully from now to the end of your time on this earth.

Your brother,

Malcolm Cox

²⁵ Since the conversation was in Aramaic and not Greek we must be careful about reading too much into the word differences. However, it could well be that John specifically chose those Greek words to reflect the meaning of the conversation.

²⁶ The various Greek texts have variants that be translated as "continue to believe", or "come to belief". In my estimation, both are intended.