

Contents

1	Signs That Point the Way — <i>September 28–October 4</i> —————	5
2	Signs of Divinity — <i>October 5–11</i> —————	18
3	The Backstory: The Prologue — <i>October 12–18</i> —————	31
4	Witnesses of Christ as the Messiah — <i>October 19–25</i> —————	44
5	The Testimony of the Samaritans — <i>October 26–November 1</i> —————	57
6	More Testimonies About Jesus — <i>November 2–8</i> —————	72
7	Blessed Are Those Who Believe — <i>November 9–15</i> —————	85
8	Fulfilling Old Testament Prophecies — <i>November 16–22</i> —————	98
9	The Source of Life — <i>November 23–29</i> —————	111
10	The Way, the Truth, and the Life — <i>November 30–December 6</i> —————	124
11	The Father, the Son, and the Spirit — <i>December 7–13</i> —————	137
12	The Hour of Glory: The Cross and Resurrection — <i>December 14–20</i> —————	150
13	Epilogue: Knowing Jesus and His Word — <i>December 21–27</i> —————	163

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Signs That Point *the* Way



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 2:1–11; John 4:46–54; John 5:1–16; Mark 3:22, 23; Matt. 12:9–14; John 5:16–47.*

Memory Text: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (*John 20:30, 31, NKJV*).

Why did John write his Gospel? Did he wish to emphasize Jesus' miracles or some specific teachings of Jesus? What was the reason for writing what he did?

Under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, John explains why. He says that though many more things could be written about the life of Christ (*John 21:25*), the stories he included were written in order “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (*John 20:31, NKJV*).

This week we're going to look at John's account of some of Jesus' early miracles—from His turning water to wine at a wedding, to restoring to health someone's very sick son, to the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda.

John calls these miracles “signs.” He does not mean something like a street sign, but rather a miraculous event that points toward a deeper reality: Jesus as the Messiah. In all these accounts, we see examples of people who responded by faith. And their examples invite us to do the same.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 5.

The Wedding at Cana

Read John 2:1–11. What sign did Jesus do at Cana, and how did this help His disciples in coming to believe in Him?

Seeing Jesus perform the miracle of changing the water into wine provided evidence in favor of the disciples' decision to follow Jesus. How could it not have been a powerful sign pointing to Him as being someone from God? (They probably were not yet ready to understand that He was God.)

Moses was the leader of the Israelites, and he brought Israel out of Egypt by many “signs and wonders” (*Deut. 6:22, Deut. 26:8, NKJV*). He was the one whom God used to free Israel from the Egyptians. (He was, in a sense, their “savior.”)

God prophesied through Moses that a prophet would come who was like Moses. God asked Israel to hear Him (*Deut. 18:15, Matt. 17:5, Acts 7:37*). That “prophet” was Jesus and, in John 2, Jesus performed His first sign, which itself pointed back to the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt.

The river Nile was a key resource and a deity for the Egyptians. One of the plagues was directed at the river—the changing of its waters to blood. At Cana, Jesus performed a similar miracle but, instead of turning water into blood, He turned it into wine.

The water came from six water pots used for purification purposes in Jewish rituals, linking the miracle even more closely to biblical themes of salvation. By recounting the incident of changing the water to wine, and thus referring back to the Exodus, John was pointing to Jesus as our Deliverer.

What did the master of the feast think of the unfermented wine that Jesus provided? He was indeed surprised by the quality of the drink and, not knowing the miracle that Jesus had performed there, thought that they had saved the best for last.

The Greek term *oinos* is used both for fresh and fermented grape juice (see *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, p. 1177). Ellen G. White states that the juice produced by the miracle was not alcoholic (see “At the Marriage Feast,” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 149). No doubt, those who knew what happened were astonished at what had taken place.

What are your reasons for following Jesus? (We have been given many, haven't we?)

The Second Sign in Galilee

All through His earthly ministry, Jesus performed miracles that helped people believe in Him. John recorded these miracles so that others would believe in Jesus, as well.

Read John 4:46–54. Why does the evangelist make a connection back to the miracle at the wedding feast?

In giving an account of the second sign that Jesus did in Galilee, John points back to the first sign at the wedding in Cana. John seems to be saying, *The signs that Jesus did will help you see who Jesus is*. Then, John adds, “This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee” (*John 4:54, NKJV*).

At first, Jesus’ response to the nobleman’s plea may seem harsh. Yet, this official had made the healing of his son the criterion for believing in Jesus. Jesus read his heart and pinpointed the spiritual sickness that was more profound than his son’s life-threatening illness. Like a lightning bolt from a blue sky, the man suddenly recognized that his spiritual poverty could cost the life of his son.

It is important to recognize that miracles, in and of themselves, did not prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Others have performed miracles. Some were true prophets, others false. Miracles reveal only the existence of the supernatural; they don’t, by themselves, mean that God must be the One doing them. (Satan can perform “miracles,” if by the word “miracles” we mean supernatural acts.)

The nobleman in anguish cast himself on Jesus’ mercy, pleading with Him to heal his son. Jesus’ response was reassuring. He said, “ ‘Go; your son will live’ ” (*John 4:50, ESV*). The verb “will live” in Greek is actually in the present tense. This usage is called a “futuristic present,” where a future event is spoken of with such certainty as if it were already happening. The man did not rush home but, believing Jesus, got home the next day—finding that, exactly when Jesus had said those words, the fever left his son.

What a powerful reason to believe in Jesus!

Even if we were to see a miracle, what other criteria must we look at before automatically assuming it is from God?

The Miracle at the Pool of Bethesda

The next sign John records took place at the Pool of Bethesda (*John 5:1–9*). It was believed that an angel caused movement in the water and that the first sick person to enter the water would be healed. As a result, the porches of the pool were crowded with those hoping to be cured at the next occurrence. Jesus went to Jerusalem, and as He passed by the pool, He saw the waiting throng.

What a sight it must have been, too! All these people, some surely quite ill, waiting and waiting by the water for a cure that surely will not come. What an opportunity for Jesus!

Read John 5:1–9. Because anyone by the pool obviously wanted to get well, why did Jesus ask the paralytic if he wanted to be healed (*John 5:6*)?

When one has been sick a long time, the sickness becomes the norm. And strange as it may seem, it can sometimes be a bit disturbing to leave the disability behind. The man implies in his answer that he wants healing. The problem is that he is looking for it in the wrong place—while the One who made man’s legs is standing right in front of him. Little did the man know who was talking to him; although after the healing, he might have started to understand that Jesus was, indeed, Someone very special.

“Jesus does not ask this sufferer to exercise faith in Him. He simply says, ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ But the man’s faith takes hold upon that word. Every nerve and muscle thrills with new life, and healthful action comes to his crippled limbs. Without question he sets his will to obey the command of Christ, and all his muscles respond to his will. Springing to his feet, he finds himself an active man. . . . Jesus had given him no assurance of divine help. The man might have stopped to doubt, and lost his one chance of healing. But he believed Christ’s word, and in acting upon it he received strength.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 202, 203.

Jesus later encountered the man in the temple and said, “ ‘You have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you’ ” (*John 5:14, NKJV*). What is the relationship between sickness and sin? Why must we understand that not all sickness is a direct result of specific sins in our life?

Hard Hearts

Signs, wonders, and miracles, in and of themselves, don't prove that something is of God. But, on the other hand, when they are of God, it's a dangerous thing to reject them.

Read John 5:10–16. What lessons can we take away from the amazing hardness of the religious leaders' hearts in regard to Jesus and the miracle He had just performed?

When Jesus revealed Himself to the man who had been healed, the man immediately told the religious leaders that it was Jesus. One would think this would be a time to praise God, but instead, the leaders “persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath” (*John 5:16, NKJV*).

Healings were allowed on the Sabbath only in an emergency. This man had been disabled for 38 years; thus, his healing was hardly an emergency. And then, too, what was the necessity of having him take up his bed? One would think that someone with the power from God to perform such a miracle would also know if it was permissible to carry a mat home on the Sabbath day. Clearly, Jesus was seeking to take them to deeper biblical truths beyond the man-made rules and regulations that had, in some cases, stifled true faith.

What do these other accounts teach about how spiritually hard people can become, regardless of the evidence? (Read John 9:1–16; Mark 3:22, 23; Matt. 12:9–14).

How could these religious leaders be so blind? The likely answer is that it was because of their own corrupt hearts, their false belief that the Messiah would deliver them from Rome now, and their love of power and lack of surrender to God. All these helped cause them to reject the truth that stood right before them.

Read John 5:38–42. What was Jesus' warning? What can we learn from these words? That is, what could be in us that blinds us to the truths we need to know and apply to our own lives?

Jesus' Claims

The miracle by the Pool of Bethesda provided an excellent opportunity for John to emphasize who Jesus is. John takes nine verses to describe the miracle and about 40 verses (see below) to describe the One who performed the miracle.

Read John 5:16–18. Why was Jesus persecuted for His action on the Sabbath?

John 5:18 can be disturbing because it seems to say that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath. However, a closer look at John 5:16–18 shows that Jesus argues that His “work” on the Sabbath is in line with His relationship to His Father. God does not stop sustaining the universe on the Sabbath. Consequently, Jesus’ Sabbath activity was part of His claim to divinity. The religious leaders persecuted Him on the basis of supposed Sabbath-breaking and a claim to equality to God.

Read John 5:19–47. What was Jesus saying in order to help the leaders see Him for who He truly is, a claim so powerfully attested by the miracle He had just done?

Jesus defends His actions in three steps. First, He explains His intimate relationship with the Father (*John 5:19–30*). Jesus indicates that He and His Father act in harmony, to the point that Jesus has the power both to judge and to raise the dead (*John 5:25–30*).

Second, Jesus calls four “witnesses” in rapid succession to His defense—John the Baptist (*John 5:31–35*), the miracles Jesus does (*John 5:36*), the Father (*John 5:37, 38*), and the Scriptures (*John 5:39*). Each of these “witnesses” gives testimony in favor of Jesus.

Finally, in John 5:40–47, Jesus sets before His accusers *their own condemnation*, revealing the contrast between His ministry and their self-seeking. Their condemnation, He says, will come from Moses (*John 5:45–47*), the one in whom they have set their hopes.

How can we be careful not to fall into the trap of believing in God, even having correct doctrines, but not surrendering fully to Christ? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Further Thought: “Jesus had given him [the disabled man] no assurance of divine help. The man might have stopped to doubt, and lost his one chance of healing. But he believed Christ’s word, and in acting upon it he received strength.

“Through the same faith we may receive spiritual healing. By sin we have been severed from the life of God. Our souls are palsied. Of ourselves we are no more capable of living a holy life than was the impotent man capable of walking. . . . Let these desponding, struggling ones look up. The Saviour is bending over the purchase of His blood, saying with inexpressible tenderness and pity, ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ He bids you arise in health and peace. Do not wait to feel that you are made whole. Believe His word, and it will be fulfilled. Put your will on the side of Christ. Will to serve Him, and in acting upon His word you will receive strength. Whatever may be the evil practice, the master passion which through long indulgence binds both soul and body, Christ is able and longs to deliver. He will impart life to the soul that is ‘dead in trespasses.’ Eph. 2:1. He will set free the captive that is held by weakness and misfortune and the chains of sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 203.

“Jesus repelled the charge of blasphemy. My authority, He said, for doing the work of which you accuse Me, is that I am the Son of God, one with Him in nature, in will, and in purpose.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 208.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Reflect upon this week’s lesson. Faith was the key that made these healings possible. The leaders, in contrast, revealed the dangers of doubt and unbelief. Why must we not confuse having questions (which we all do) with having doubt? Why are they not the same thing, and why is it important to know the difference between them?
- 2 Look at Thursday’s final question. Why, as Seventh-day Adventists, must we be especially careful about this danger? However important, for instance, knowing and even keeping the right Sabbath day, or knowing about the state of the dead—why do these truths not save us? What does save us, and how?
- 3 Look carefully at John 5:47. How are those today who, for instance, deny the universality of the Flood, or the literal six-day Creation, doing exactly what Jesus warned against here?

Signs of Divinity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 6:1–15, Isa. 53:4–6, 1 Cor. 5:7, John 6:26–36, John 9:1–41, 1 Cor. 1:26–29, John 11.*

Memory Text: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ ” (*John 11:25, 26, NKJV*).

The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, one with the Father, underived and uncreated. Jesus is the One who created all that was made (*John 1:1–3*). Thus, Jesus has always existed; there never was a time when He didn't exist. Though Jesus came to this world and took upon Himself our humanity, He always kept His divinity. And at specific times, Jesus said and did things that revealed this divinity.

This truth was important for John, which is why, when recounting some of Jesus' miracles, John used them to point to Christ's divinity. Jesus not only said things that revealed His divinity but backed up His words with works that manifested His divinity.

This week's lesson looks at three of the greatest signs of Jesus' divinity. What is striking is that, in every case, some people did not believe the miracle or perceive its significance. For some, it was a time of turning away from Jesus; for others, a time for deepening blindness; and for others, a time to plot Jesus' death. And for others—a time to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 12.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

In John 6:4, 5, the apostle goes out of his way to state that the timing of the feeding of the 5,000 was near the Passover. The Passover was a commemoration of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The Passover lamb took the place of the death of the firstborn. This sacrifice symbolized the death of Jesus in our behalf. On the cross, the punishment that we deserved because of our sins fell on Jesus instead. Christ, our Passover, was indeed slain for us (*1 Cor. 5:7*).

“He bore the guilt of transgression, and the hiding of His Father’s face, until His heart was broken and His life crushed out. All this sacrifice was made that sinners might be redeemed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 540.

Read John 6:1–14. What parallels can be found here between Jesus and Moses? That is, what did Jesus do here that should have reminded the people of the deliverance that their ancestors had received through the ministry of Moses?

Numerous details of this story place Jesus in parallel to Moses in the Exodus. The time of the Passover (*John 6:4*) points to the great deliverance from Egypt. Jesus goes up on a mountain (*John 6:3*) as Moses went up Sinai. Jesus tests Philip (*John 6:5, 6*) as the Israelites were tested in the wilderness. The multiplication of the loaves (*John 6:11*) is reminiscent of the manna. The gathering of the leftover food (*John 6:12*) harks back to the Israelites’ gathering the manna. Twelve baskets of leftovers are picked up (*John 6:13*), the same number as the twelve tribes of Israel. And the people comment that Jesus is the prophet coming into the world (*John 6:14*), parallel to the “prophet like Moses” predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15. All of this points to Jesus as the new Moses—come to deliver His people.

Thus, John is showing Jesus not only doing signs and wonders but doing signs and wonders that, in their context, should have had special meaning for the Jewish people. Jesus was pointing them, in essence, to His own divinity.

Read Isaiah 53:4–6 and 1 Peter 2:24. What great truth do these texts teach about Jesus as the Lamb of God? How does His divinity tie into this truth, and why is this truth the most important truth we can ever know?

“Surely, He Is the Prophet”

Read John 6:14, 15, 26–36. How did the people respond to His miracle, and how did Jesus use this to try to teach them who He was?

The Judeans were expecting an earthly messiah who would deliver them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. Two of the most difficult things encountered in war are feeding the troops and caring for the wounded and dead. By His miracles, Jesus showed that He could do both.

But that’s not why Jesus had come, and that wasn’t the purpose of His miracle. Instead, the account of the feeding of the 5,000 provided the opportunity to illustrate that Jesus is the Bread of Life, that God Himself came down from heaven. “ ‘I am the bread of life,’ ” He said. “ ‘He who comes to Me shall never hunger’ ” (*John 6:35, NKJV*).

This is the first of the seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John, where “I am” is connected with some predicate (“bread of life,” *John 6:35*; “light of the world,” *John 8:12*; “door,” *John 10:7, 9*; “Good Shepherd,” *John 10:11, 14*; “resurrection and the life,” *John 11:25*; “the way, the truth, and the life,” *John 14:6*; “true vine,” *John 15:1, 5*). Each of these points to an important truth about Jesus. The “I am” statements point back to Exodus 3, where God presents Himself to Moses as the great I AM (*compare with John 8:58*). Jesus is that great I AM.

But the people missed all this.

“Their dissatisfied hearts queried why, if Jesus could perform so many wondrous works as they had witnessed, could He not give health, strength, and riches to all His people, free them from their oppressors, and exalt them to power and honor? The fact that He claimed to be the Sent of God, and yet refused to be Israel’s king, was a mystery which they could not fathom. His refusal was misinterpreted. Many concluded that He dared not assert His claims because He Himself doubted as to the divine character of His mission. Thus they opened their hearts to unbelief, and the seed which Satan had sown bore fruit of its kind, in misunderstanding and defection.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 385.

They were looking for material benefit instead of truth that endures to eternal life. This is a trap that we all potentially face if we are not careful.

How can we avoid getting caught up in material things at the expense of the spiritual?

The Healing of the Blind Man: Part 1

Read John 9:1–16. What did the disciples think was the cause of this man’s blindness, and how did Jesus correct their false beliefs?

The disciples made a connection between sickness and sin. A number of Old Testament passages point in that direction (*compare with Exod. 20:5, 2 Kings 5:15–27, 2 Kings 15:5, and 2 Chron. 26:16–21*), but the story of Job should have led to caution about whether such a connection always occurred.

Jesus sets the matter straight, not denying any connection between sin and suffering but, in this case, pointing to a higher purpose: that God would be glorified by the healing. The account contains certain affinities to the Creation story, that of God’s forming the first man from the dust of the ground (*Gen. 2:7*), just as Jesus makes clay to provide the blind man what was missing from the womb.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, miracle stories follow a common pattern: an expression of the problem, the bringing of the individual to Jesus, the cure, and recognition of the cure with praise to God.

In the story in John 9, this sequence is completed in John 9:7. But typical of John, the significance of the miracle becomes the much wider point of discussion, leading to a long interaction between the healed man and the religious leaders. This striking discussion revolves around two intertwined contrasting pairs of concepts—sin/works of God and blindness/sight.

The narrator does not tell the reader until John 9:14 that Jesus did this healing on the Sabbath, which, according to tradition and not Scripture, violated the Sabbath. And thus, He was counted as a Sabbath breaker by the Pharisees. Their conclusion was that He was not from God because they maintained that “He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others found it troubling that a sinner could do such signs (*John 9:16*).

The discussion is far from over, but already a division appears. The blind man is becoming more and more clear about who Jesus is, but the religious leaders are becoming more and more confused or blind as to His real identity.

What should this story tell us about the dangers of being so blinded by our own beliefs and traditions that we can miss important truths right before our own eyes?

The Healing of the Blind Man: Part 2

Read John 9:17–34. What questions did the leaders ask, and how did the blind man respond?

This long section of John 9 is the only portion of John where Jesus is not the main actor on the stage, though He is certainly the subject of discussion. Just as the question of sin started the story (*John 9:2*), the Pharisees think Jesus is a sinner because He healed on the Sabbath (*John 9:16, 24*), and they will slander the healed man as “born in utter sin” (*John 9:34, ESV*).

A curious reversal occurs. The blind man comes to see more and more, not just physically but spiritually, as he is growing in his appreciation for Jesus and believing more strongly in Him. The Pharisees, in contrast, become more and more blind in their understanding, first being divided over Jesus (*John 9:16*) and then not knowing where He came from (*John 9:29*).

Meanwhile, his recounting of this miracle gives John the opportunity to tell us who Jesus is. The theme of signs in John 9 intersects with several other themes in the Gospel. John reaffirms that Jesus is the Light of the world (*John 9:5; compare with John 8:12*). The story also deals with Jesus’ mysterious origin. Who is He, where is He from, what is His mission (*John 9:12, 29; compare with John 1:14*)? The figure of Moses, who is referenced in previous miracle accounts, also appears in this chapter (*John 9:28, 29; compare with John 5:45, 46 and John 6:32*). Finally, there is the theme of the response of the crowd. Some love darkness rather than light, while others respond in faith (*John 9:16–18, 35–41; compare with John 1:9–16, John 3:16–21, and John 6:60–71*).

So scary here is the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders. A once-blind beggar can declare, “ ‘Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing’ ” (*John 9:32, 33, NKJV*). And yet the religious leaders, the spiritual guides of the nation, the ones who should have been the first to recognize Jesus and accept Him as the Messiah—they, despite all the powerful evidence, cannot see it, or they don’t really want to see it. What a powerful warning about how our hearts can deceive us!

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–29. How does what Paul writes in these verses fit with John’s account above and how does the same principle apply even now?

The Resurrection of Lazarus

John 11 is filled with sadness—the sad news of a dear friend’s illness (*John 11:1–3*); the weeping over his death (*John 11:19, 31, 33*); the sisters’ lament that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been present (*John 11:21, 32*); and Jesus’ own tears (*John 11:35*).

But Jesus had delayed two days before starting His journey to Lazarus (*John 11:6*), even indicating that He was glad that He had not gone earlier (*John 11:14, 15*). This action was not from any cold-heartedness. Rather, it was to reveal God’s glory.

By the time we get to John 11:17–27, Lazarus had been dead four days. After four days, his body would already be rotting and, as Martha said, “ ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days’ ” (*John 11:39, NKJV*). No doubt, Jesus’ delay only helped to make the miracle that followed even more astonishing. To raise a rotting corpse? What more proof could Jesus have given that indeed He was God Himself?

And, as God, as the One who created life to begin with—Jesus had power over death. Thus, Jesus uses this opportunity, that of Lazarus’s death, to reveal a crucial truth about Himself. “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die’ ” (*John 11:25, 26, ESV*).

Read John 11:38–44. What did Jesus do that supported His claim?

Just as Jesus showed He is the Light of the world (*John 8:12, John 9:5*) by giving the blind man sight (*John 9:7*), so here He raises Lazarus from the dead (*John 11:43, 44*), demonstrating that He is the Resurrection and the Life (*John 11:25*).

This miracle, more than any other, points to Jesus as the Life-Giver, as God Himself. It provides strong support for John’s theme that Jesus is the divine Son of God and that, by believing, we can have life through Him (*John 20:30, 31*).

However, by the time we get to the end of this incredible story (*John 11:45–54*), in which many who saw believed (*John 11:45*), a powerful but sad irony unfolds. Jesus shows that He can bring the dead back to life, and yet, these men think that they can stop Him by *killing Him*? What an example of the foibles of humanity in contrast to the wisdom and power of God!

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” pp. 383–394; “‘Lazarus, Come Forth,’ ” pp. 524–536; and “Priestly Plottings,” pp. 537–542, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The life of Christ that gives life to the world is in His word. It was by His word that Jesus healed disease and cast out demons; by His word He stilled the sea, and raised the dead; and the people bore witness that His word was with power. He spoke the word of God, as He had spoken through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament. The whole Bible is a manifestation of Christ, and the Saviour desired to fix the faith of His followers on the word. When His visible presence should be withdrawn, the word must be their source of power. Like their Master, they were to live ‘by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’ Matt. 4:4.

“As our physical life is sustained by food, so our spiritual life is sustained by the word of God. And every soul is to receive life from God’s word for himself. As we must eat for ourselves in order to receive nourishment, so we must receive the word for ourselves. We are not to obtain it merely through the medium of another’s mind. We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 390.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** This week we looked at Jesus feeding the 5,000, healing a man blind from birth, and then raising Lazarus from the dead. In each case, Jesus provided powerful evidence for His divinity. Yet, these miracles, as amazing as they were, created division. Some responded with faith, others with doubt. What does this teach us about how, even in the face of powerful evidence, people can still choose to reject God?
- ②** These stories all point toward Christ as the divine Son of God. Why is His divinity so important to faith in Jesus as the Savior?
- ③** Look again at 1 Corinthians 1:26–29. In what ways in the twenty-first century do we see this same principle at work? What are some of the “foolish things” that Christians believe, things that the “wise according to the flesh” mock and reject? What do we believe that also “put to shame” the “things that are mighty”?

The Backstory: The Prologue



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1–5, Gen. 1:1, John 1:9–13, John 3:16–21, John 9:35–41, Matt. 7:21–23, John 17:1–5.*

Memory Text: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*John 1:1*).

Week one dealt with the end of the book of John, which explained why he wrote his Gospel. This week's lesson returns to the beginning of the Gospel, where John sets forth the direction that he, inspired by the Holy Spirit, intends to take the reader. In the first words and paragraphs of their writing, New Testament writers often present the themes that they intend to cover. So does John, whose themes are presented as part of a grand cosmic sweep that depicts overriding truths about Jesus Christ—truths that reach back to even before Creation.

This presentation, at the opening of the book, gives readers, who already know that Jesus is the Messiah, an advantage that the characters in the book itself did not have. The reader can clearly see the grand themes that the evangelist returns to as he tells the story of Jesus. These great themes are placed within the historical period of Jesus' earthly life.

This week's lesson will begin with the Prologue (*John 1:1–18*) and summarize its major themes. These themes will then be looked at in other places in John's Gospel, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 19.

In the Beginning—The Divine Logos

Read John 1:1–5. What do these words reveal about the Word, Jesus Christ?

The Gospel of John begins with this amazing thought: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*John 1:1*). This one beautiful sentence contains a depth of thought that we can barely grasp.

First, the evangelist alludes to the Creation story in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning.” The Word was already there before the beginning of the universe. Thus, John affirms Jesus’ eternal existence.

Next, “And the Word was with God.” In John 1:18, John indicates that He is “in the bosom of the Father.” No matter how we may try to envision what this exactly means, one thing is sure: Jesus and the Father are intimately close.

And then, he says, “And the Word was God.” But how can the Word be *with God* and at the same time *be God*? The answer is found in the Greek. Greek has a definite article, “the,” but no indefinite article, “a/an.” What’s important for us, then, is that the Greek definite article, “the,” points to particularity, some particular object or person.

In the phrase “the Word was with God,” the term “God” has the definite article, thus, pointing to a particular individual, the Father. *And the Word was with the Father*. In the phrase, “and the Word was God,” the term “God” does not have the article, which, in this setting, points to the characteristics of divinity. Jesus is God—not the Father, but He is still the divine Son of God, the second Person of the Godhead.

The apostle verifies this understanding, for John 1:3, 4 says that Jesus is the Creator of all things created. Anything that once didn’t exist but then came into existence did so only through Jesus, the Creator God.

“From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

Why is the full deity of Christ such an important part of our theology? What would we lose if Jesus were, in any way, a mere created being? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath, and be prepared to discuss why Christ’s eternal deity is so important to our faith.

The *Word* Made Flesh

Read John 1:1–3, 14. What are these verses telling us that Jesus, God Himself, did—and why is this truth the most important truth that we could ever know?

John starts his Gospel not with the name “Jesus” or His role as Messiah/Christ but with the term *logos*. Around the time John wrote, various philosophies used the term *logos* to refer to the rational structure of the universe, or to refer to the idea of logic and reason themselves.

Also, the teaching of the influential ancient philosopher Plato had divided reality into two realms. One is the heavenly and immutable realm, where absolute perfection exists. The other is the realm here—perishable, changing, a very imperfect representation of the perfect realm above, wherever it supposedly existed. (Plato never answered that question.) Some philosophies identified the *logos* as some abstract intermediary between the eternal forms and the perishable, earthly forms here.

John uses the term in a completely different manner. He maintains that the truth, the *logos*, is not some ethereal and abstract concept floating between heaven and earth. The *logos* is a person: Jesus Christ, who became flesh and dwelt among us (*John 1:14*).

For John, the *logos* is the Word of God. More important, God communicated; that is, He revealed Himself to humanity in the most radical way: God *became* one of us.

In the Gospel of John, the *logos* represents the eternal God, who enters time and space, who speaks, acts, and interrelates with humans on a personal level. The eternal God became a human being, one of us.

In John 1:14 the apostle indicates that the *logos* “became flesh and dwelt among us” (*NKJV*). The underlying Greek word, translated *dwelt*, means *to pitch a tent*. John is alluding to Exodus 25:8, where God told the Israelites to make a sanctuary, a tent structure, so that He could dwell in their midst. In the same way, in the Incarnation, Jesus, the divine Son of God, stepped into human flesh, veiling His glory so that people could come in contact with Him.

Dwell on the implications of what John has written here. God Himself, the Creator, became a human being, one of us, and lived here among us. (We haven’t even gotten to His dying for us yet!) What does this tell us about the reality of God’s love for humanity? Why should we draw so much comfort from this amazing truth?

Hearing or Not Hearing the *Word*

Read John 1:9–13. What harsh reality is John depicting here about how people respond to Jesus?

The Prologue, John 1:1–18, describes not only who Jesus Christ, the Word (*logos*), is but also how people in the world related to Him. In John 1:9, He is called *the true Light*, who enlightens every person coming into the world. That light illumines the world, making it understandable. As C. S. Lewis puts it, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”—“Is Theology Poetry?” (n. p.: Samizdat University Press, 2014), p. 15, originally presented in 1944.

Also, look at the implications of what John 1:9 is saying. Light comes to everyone, but not everyone welcomes the light. As we will see in tomorrow’s study, a major theme in the Gospel of John is how people receive or reject Jesus. That theme begins here. The sad litany is that the Messiah came to His own people, the people of Israel, and many did not receive Him as the Messiah.

In Romans 9–11, Paul deals with the same tragic theme, of many Jews rejecting Jesus. But Paul doesn’t end on a negative note, saying in fact that many Jews, along with Gentiles, will accept Jesus as their Messiah. Indeed, he warns the Gentiles not to boast against the Jews. “For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” (*Rom. 11:24, NKJV*).

In a similar vein, John says that all who do receive Jesus as their Savior will become the children of God. This happens by believing on His name. (*See John 1:12, 13.*)

Here is the connection between the prologue and the conclusion of the Gospel. In John 20:31, the apostle presents why he wrote—that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life by His name. Thus, the introduction and conclusion form a kind of unity. They are related concepts that enclose all that occurs between them. This linkage points to the overarching goal of the Gospel of John—that people will be saved by believing on Jesus Christ as their Savior.

How has your life changed by becoming a son or a daughter of God?

Reappearing Themes—Belief/Unbelief

Read John 3:16–21, John 9:35–41, and John 12:36–46. How do these texts repeat the theme of belief/unbelief found in the prologue?

In John's Gospel, humanity seems to be divided into two overarching groups: those who believe in Jesus and accept Him as the Messiah and those who, having the opportunity to believe, choose not to.

Eleven of the disciples are in the first group, as are others such as Nicodemus (who comes to faith slowly), the woman at the well, and the man born blind. In the second group are Pharisees and high priests, people at the miracle of feeding the 5,000, and even one of the disciples, Judas.

It is interesting that the noun *pistis* (Greek for faith/belief) never appears in the Gospel of John. However, the verb *pisteuō* (believe) appears 98 times, compared to 241 times total in the entire New Testament! This verb is, indeed, a very big theme in John. This use of the verb instead of the noun may point to a very active sense of becoming a Christian. Being a believer in Jesus is something that we do, and this is expressed in how we live and not just in a set of beliefs. As we know, the devil believes in Jesus, as well (*see James 2:19*).

In John, the major difference between the two groups is the way that they relate to Jesus. Believers, or those who come to believe, have an openness toward Him, even when He confronts or rebukes them. They come to Jesus and do not run away. He is the Light that shines on them. And by faith, by believing, they become the children of God.

Unbelievers, on the other hand, typically come to Jesus to fight with Him. They are characterized by those who love darkness rather than light. They find His sayings hard to accept or they see Him breaking old traditions and not fulfilling their expectations. They stand in judgment on Him rather than letting His light measure and judge them. This attitude, of course, had been seen again and again in the religious leaders, who ideally, as the spiritual guides of the nation, should have been the first ones to have accepted Jesus.

In what ways do you live out your faith in Jesus, as opposed to merely holding an intellectual assent to Him as the Messiah? Why it is important to know the difference? (*See Matt. 7:21–23.*)

Reappearing Themes—Glory

Read John 17:1–5. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (ESV)?

Yesterday’s study looked at the earthly, human storyline of the Gospel of John with its clash and interplay between people, always revolving around who Jesus is and what He is doing. Today’s study focuses on the divine, cosmic storyline, also found in John.

The Prologue begins with that cosmic storyline. Jesus is presented as the divine Son of God, the Creator of the universe. Again, anything that once didn’t exist but came into existence did so only through Jesus. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:3, NKJV*). But it goes on to note the glory of His becoming a human being in the Incarnation (*John 1:14*). John uses the terms *glory* (*doxsa*: brightness, splendor, fame, honor) and *glorify* (*doxazō*: to praise, honor, extol, glorify) to speak both of receiving honor from humans and of receiving honor or glory from God.

In John, the idea of glorifying Jesus is linked to the concept of His hour; that is, the time of His death (*compare with John 2:4, John 7:30, John 8:20, John 12:23–27, John 13:1, John 16:32, and John 17:1*). The cross is His hour of glory.

This idea is quite paradoxical because crucifixion was the most shameful and humiliating way of execution in the ancient Roman world. This incredible contrast, God on a cross, illustrates the intertwining of the human story plot with the divine.

On the human level, Jesus died in agony, a despised criminal in weakness crying out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” This human, dark side of the cross is particularly presented in Matthew and Mark (*Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34, NKJV*).

But the glorious side of the cross is especially presented in Luke and John (*Luke 23:32–47, John 19:25–30*). It is a place of salvation, of mercy, and where the Son of God gives Himself to His Father.

How ironic: God’s greatest glory is revealed in His greatest shame—bearing the sins of the world in Himself.

Think about what it means that it took such a drastic thing, God Himself on the cross, to save us from sin. What should this tell us about just how bad sin really is?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “‘God With Us,’ ” pp. 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by Him as His right. This was no robbery of God [Prov. 8:22–27 quoted].

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was One with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light unapproachable and incomprehensible.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1126.

“Jesus has said, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.’ John 12:32. Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul. . . . Whenever they [people] make an effort to reform, from a sincere desire to do right, it is the power of Christ that is drawing them. An influence of which they are unconscious works upon the soul, and the conscience is quickened, and the outward life is amended. And as Christ draws them to look upon His cross, to behold Him whom their sins have pierced, the commandment comes home to the conscience.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 26, 27.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why would John start out talking about Jesus in His role as Creator? What does this tell us about the importance of Creation in all theology? Why, then, is it important that we have a correct understanding of Creation, as revealed in Scripture?
- 2 Dwell more on the question asked at the end of Sunday’s study. What happens to the cross if, instead of the eternal God dying on it, a created being did? What do we lose if Jesus were anything but the eternal God?

Witnesses of Christ as the Messiah



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:19–23, Isa. 40:1–5, John 1:29–37, Rom. 5:6, John 1:35–39, John 1:43–51, John 3:1–21.*

Memory Text: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ ” (*John 3:3, NKJV*).

No question, Jesus provided people with powerful scriptural evidence to back up the claims that He had been making about Himself, including “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (*John 6:47*).

But there’s more: turning water into wine; feeding thousands with a few loaves of bread; healing the nobleman’s son; restoring the man at the pool of Bethesda; giving sight to the one blind from birth; raising Lazarus from the dead. The evangelist calls on a variety of events, and people—Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, male, female, rulers, commoners, educated, and uneducated—to bear witness to who Jesus is.

John points even to the witness of the Father Himself, and to Scripture, all giving evidence of Jesus’ identity.

This week begins with the powerful witness of John the Baptist. Other witnesses come on the stage as well: Andrew and Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael, and a most unexpected witness, the Pharisee Nicodemus. But another witness stands back in the shadows (that other disciple with Andrew, in *John 1:35, 40*)—John himself.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 26.

The Testimony of John the Baptist

As last week's lesson illustrated, the Gospel of John begins with Jesus Christ, the Word, in His eternal existence before Creation. But in that same prologue, John the Baptist appears as a witness to Jesus. Some Jews in Jesus' time expected two messiahs, one priestly and the other royal. John clearly teaches that John the Baptist did not claim to be one of these messiahs but, rather, was a witness to the one true Messiah.

Read John 1:19–23. How did John the Baptist explain his ministry and mission?

The religious leaders sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. With Messianic expectations high in Judea, it was important for John the Baptist to clarify his relationship to those expectations. He was not the Light, but he was sent from God to bear witness to the Light and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah (*John 1:6–8*). That's why he answered them as plainly as he could, saying: "I am not the Christ" (*John 1:20*).

Also, John baptized with water, but Christ would baptize with the Spirit (*John 1:26, 33*). John was not worthy to loosen Jesus' sandal strap (*John 1:27*). Christ was preferred before John because He was before John (*John 1:30*). Jesus was the Son of God, and John merely pointed to Him (*John 1:34*).

Read Isaiah 40:1–5 and John 1:23. How does John use these verses?

In the days of rutted and rock-filled roads, servants were sometimes sent ahead of the king to level the surfaces of roadways and to take out sharp turns so as to smooth the way of the king. So, in fulfillment of prophecy, John came in order to prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus.

In what way should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, do the same kind of ministry as did John the Baptist? What are the parallels?

The Lamb of God

The Hebrew nation was looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from Rome. The goal of the Gospel of John was to change their understanding of the Messiah so that they could recognize in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the coming King. The Messiah would not be an earthly ruler. He came to fulfill all the Old Testament promises concerning Himself, which include His self-sacrifice in behalf of the world, and to renew the relationship between God and His people.

Read John 1:29–37. What proclamation does John the Baptist make about Jesus? What image does he use to depict Him, and why is it so significant in understanding who Jesus was and what His mission would be?

The statement of the Baptist regarding Jesus as the Lamb of God supports the purpose of John’s Gospel, which is to bring about a renewed understanding of the work and nature of the Messiah. Jesus would, indeed, be the fulfillment of the promise of the sacrificial system, going back to the promise of the Redeemer first given in Genesis 3:15.

“When at the baptism of Jesus, John pointed to Him as the Lamb of God, a new light was shed upon the Messiah’s work. The prophet’s mind was directed to the words of Isaiah, ‘He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.’ Isa. 53:7.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 136.

Read Mark 10:45, Romans 5:6, and 1 Peter 2:24. How do these verses help us understand the role of Jesus as “the Lamb of God”?

However much more John the Baptist needed to know about the ministry of Jesus, he was certain that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the One who had come in fulfillment of prophecy.

Consider deeply Jesus’ title as “the Lamb of God.” What images does it bring to mind, and how does its linkage to the Old Testament sacrificial system help you appreciate the great price of our salvation?

The Two Disciples of John

Two disciples of John the Baptist were standing with him when Jesus walked by. John declared, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36, NKJV). The two disciples had listened to John’s message about the Christ, who would fulfill the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. The disciples left John to follow Jesus, recognizing that Jesus was greater than John the Baptist and that He was the fulfillment of John’s message.

Read John 1:35–39. What did these two disciples do after hearing John’s witness about Jesus?

Desiring to be with Jesus, the two spent the day with Him. Who knows what amazing things they had learned and experienced then!

They must have been great things because, before long, their desire was to share their experience with others. Andrew, one of the two disciples, immediately found his brother, Simon, and said, “We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ)” (John 1:41, NKJV). When Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, Jesus immediately showed that He knew him, saying, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas’ ” (John 1:42, NKJV). Jesus knew and understood Peter. That Jesus knows a person is a motif of the Gospel of John. (See, for example, John 2:24, 25.)

“If John and Andrew had possessed the unbelieving spirit of the priests and rulers, they would not have been found as learners at the feet of Jesus. They would have come to Him as critics, to judge His words. . . . But not so did these first disciples. They had responded to the Holy Spirit’s call in the preaching of John the Baptist. Now they recognized the voice of the heavenly Teacher. . . . A divine illumination was shed upon the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. The many-sided themes of truth stood out in new light.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

The entire emphasis of the Gospel of John is to bring to light who Jesus is so that this good news may be shared with the world.

In what ways has Christ, and your faith in Christ, changed your life? What other changes would you still like to see happen?

Philip and Nathanael

Read John 1:43–46. What did Philip’s message reveal about his faith in Jesus already?

Philip was from Bethsaida, as were Andrew and Peter. He found his friend, Nathanael, and told him about Jesus. John the Baptist had called Jesus “the Lamb of God.” Andrew had told Peter that he had found “the Messiah.” But Philip calls Jesus the one Moses and the prophets wrote about and adds the name “Jesus of Nazareth.” His reference to Nazareth sets off a sharp reaction from his friend.

Nathanael seems to have been prejudiced against the little town of Nazareth. Surely a king would not come from such a wayside location. Prejudice easily blinds the eyes from seeing people for what they are really worth. Philip seems to have recognized, possibly from previous conversations with Nathanael, that the proper way to deal with prejudice is not some exalted philosophical or theological argumentation but rather to invite the individual to experience the truth personally for themselves. He simply said, “Come and see.” And that is exactly what Nathanael did. He went and saw.

Read John 1:47–51. How did Jesus convince Nathanael of who He was, and what was Nathanael’s response?

Missing between verse 46 and verse 47 is the crucial detail of just how Nathanael responded to Philip’s invitation. He got up and went to see, however. His friendship with Philip was stronger than his prejudice, and his life would be changed from that moment on.

Jesus says nice words about Nathanael, calling him an Israelite in whom there is no deceit (*John 1:47*), a great contrast from what Nathanael had said about Jesus (*John 1:46*). Nathanael responds with surprise because he had not met Jesus before.

Then Jesus refers to seeing him under a fig tree, and this small statement convinces Nathanael. Jesus, by divine insight, had seen Nathanael praying, searching for truth under that tree (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 140, 141). Nathanael then makes an exalted confession, calling Jesus Rabbi, the Son of God, and the King of Israel. Note how this seemingly small revelation leads to a grand confession of faith.

The Witness of Nicodemus

Read John 3:1–21. How does the testimony of Nicodemus support the theme of the Gospel of John?

Nicodemus was a respected teacher in Israel and a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. His testimony plays an important part in John’s Gospel for several reasons. He referred to Jesus as “Rabbi” and pointed to the signs that Jesus performed as evidence of His divine mission. Hence, even before Nicodemus realized what he was doing, he was giving evidence in support of the Messiahship of Jesus.

Nicodemus viewed the signs themselves as evidence of Jesus’ divine calling but did not see them as pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah. So, Nicodemus came with some doubt; he did not yet at this point recognize Jesus as the Christ.

Read John 3:3–21. What did Jesus say to Nicodemus to show that He could see right through him?

Jesus knows the heart of each individual. His response to Nicodemus may seem abrupt, but He goes directly to the issue. Though the Jews believed that Gentiles needed to be converted, many didn’t understand that they, too, the chosen people, needed a conversion experience. No one is born saved, regardless of their nationality or the church that they were raised in.

Without question, the Jews’ wonderful heritage, going back to Abraham, offered them many distinct advantages (*see Rom. 3:1, 2*). But, in and of itself, that was not enough. Jesus told Nicodemus the unthinkable—that he, a teacher and ruler in Israel, must be born again from above!

Jesus then confronted Nicodemus with his own spiritual ignorance: “ ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?’ ” (*John 3:10, NKJV*). How could you, an exalted teacher, not know this? The rebuke must have been stunning.

Despite whatever questions he had regarding Jesus then, Nicodemus later took His side with the followers of Jesus (*see John 19:39*).

What does it mean to be “born again,” and why would Jesus put such emphasis on it?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” pp. 167–177, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Nicodemus “searched the Scriptures in a new way, not for the discussion of a theory, but in order to receive life for the soul. He began to see the kingdom of heaven as he submitted himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit. . . .

“Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. . . . Repentance comes from Christ as truly as does pardon.

“How, then, are we to be saved? ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,’ so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ John 1:29. The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O my God.’ Ps. 40:8.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 175, 176.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus. How successful would you judge his ministry to have been, at least from a human perspective? Also, as you think about your answer, ask this important question: How do you define “success” in spiritual things?
- 2** Later on, John the Baptist expressed some sincere doubts (*Matt. 11:2, 3; Luke 7:19*). What caused his questions, and what can we learn from them about how to be firm in our faith?
- 3** In class, discuss the idea of how someone such as Nicodemus, a leader in the true church, someone who surely had a lot of knowledge, could still be so spiritually ignorant of what really matters. What lessons can we take from his situation?

The Testimony of the Samaritans



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:1–42, John 3:26–30, Jer. 2:13, Zech. 14:8, Ezek. 36:25–27.*

Memory Text: “Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’ ” (*John 4:42, NKJV*).

Who were the Samaritans? The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. To create political stability, the Assyrians dispersed their captives throughout their empire. Likewise, captives from other nations were brought to populate the northern kingdom, and these became the Samaritans, who practiced their own form of Judaism.

Relations, however, were not good between them and the Jews. For instance, the Samaritans worked against the rebuilding of the temple at the return of the Jews from Babylon. The Samaritans, meanwhile, had built their own temple, on Mount Gerizim. But this temple was destroyed by the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus in 128 B.C.

At the time of Christ, this animosity continued. The Jews avoided Samaria as much as possible. Though commerce may have gone on, other interaction was taboo. The Jews would not borrow from Samaritans or even receive a favor from them. Within this context, John recounts the encounter between Jesus, the woman at the well, and the people of the Samaritan city of Sychar.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 2.

The Setting of the Encounter

Read John 4:1–4. What was the background issue that led Jesus through Samaria?

The Pharisees discovered that the disciples of Jesus were baptizing more people than did those of John the Baptist. This situation could create tensions between John's followers and Jesus'. The disciples of John, quite naturally, were jealous for their master's reputation and status (*compare with John 3:26–30*). John's impressive reply was that he must decrease, but Jesus must increase (*John 3:30*). Probably to avoid confrontation, Jesus departed Judea to go to Galilee. Samaria provided the most direct route between those two locations, but it was not the only route possible. Devout Jews would take the long way around, going east through Perea. But Jesus had a mission in Samaria.

Read John 4:5–9. How did Jesus use this opportunity to open a dialogue with the woman at the well?

Jacob's well was located right next to Shechem, while Sychar, where the woman was from, was about a mile away (1.5 km). Jesus sat by the well while His disciples went into the city to buy food. He had no access to the cooling water of the well. When the woman came to draw water, He asked her for a drink.

In John 3, it was surprising that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a rabbi, would lower himself to come to Jesus. He came by night to avoid discovery. But, in John 4, the woman hides in broad daylight, perhaps avoiding contact with other women who came either at the beginning or end of the day when it was cooler. After all, why did she go such a long way to fetch water, and in the middle of the day when it was hot? Whatever the reason for her being there, meeting Jesus would change her life.

What scene unfolds next? A Jewish teacher is compared to a Samaritan woman of poor reputation. What a contrast! And yet, in this exact context, a remarkable encounter unfolds.

What are some of the taboos in your own culture that could hamper your witness to others? How do we learn to transcend them? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

The Woman at the Well

Read John 4:7–15. How does Jesus use this encounter to start witnessing to this woman?

“The hatred between Jews and Samaritans prevented the woman from offering a kindness to Jesus; but the Saviour was seeking to find the key to this heart, and with the tact born of divine love, He asked, not offered, a favor. The offer of a kindness might have been rejected; but trust awakens trust.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 184.

As was the case in His encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus knows what is in the woman’s heart. In response to her surprise that a Jew would ask such a favor of a Samaritan, Jesus goes directly to the point. “ ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water’ ” (*John 4:10, NKJV*).

The woman’s response was like that of Nicodemus, who asked, “ ‘How can these things be?’ ” (*John 3:9, NKJV*) in the context of a new birth. She asked, “ ‘You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?’ ” (*John 4:11, NKJV*). In both cases, Jesus was pointing them (one, a prominent Jewish teacher; the other, a Samaritan woman of dubious character) to the transcendent spiritual truths that each one needed to hear and understand. In each case, Jesus was basically telling them both the same thing: they need a conversion experience.

What is the Old Testament background to Jesus’ statement about living water? (*Jer. 2:13, Zech. 14:8*).

Water is necessary for life; humans cannot exist without water, and so water can be a powerful and appropriate image of eternal life, as well. Hence, Jesus says, “ ‘Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life’ ” (*John 4:14, NKJV*).

Read John 7:37, 38. What is Jesus saying to us in these verses, and how do we experience what He is promising here?

“ ‘Sir, Give Me This Water’ ”

“ ‘Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them’ ” (*Ezek. 36:25–27, NKJV*).

How does Ezekiel 36:25–27 reflect the truths Jesus was seeking to give to Nicodemus and to the woman at the well?

In both cases, Jesus was seeking to reach these people with spiritual truths, even though He used illustrations from the natural world to do so.

At first, neither person understood what Jesus meant. How, asked Nicodemus, can a man be born again? That is, how can he return to his mother’s womb? Nicodemus clearly was functioning at a mundane and earthly level, even though Jesus clearly was pointing him toward spiritual truth. This woman, too, took Jesus’ words about the water in a literal sense when Jesus was clearly talking about something spiritual.

The woman’s response to Jesus’ offer of living water was, “ ‘Give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw’ ” (*John 4:15, NKJV*). She reasoned that the water Jesus offered would obviate trips to the well, thus reducing the risk of facing others. It is striking that the conversation shifted so quickly from Jesus’ asking for a drink to the woman’s asking *Him* for a drink.

Read John 4:16. How did Jesus respond to the woman’s request?

Abruptly, Jesus changes the topic of discussion, telling the woman to go call her husband and come back. Why the sudden shift in topic? The woman’s actions bespoke avoidance. Jesus could read her heart. She must face her situation to find healing. “Before this soul could receive the gift He longed to bestow, she must be brought to recognize her sin and her Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 187.

The Revelation of Jesus

Read John 4:16–24. What did Jesus do to show this woman that He knew her deepest secrets, and how did she respond?

The light was too blinding to look at directly. While recognizing Jesus as a prophet, the woman practices avoidance again. She asks Jesus a question of religious controversy between Jews and Samaritans—the proper place to worship.

In response, Jesus pointed out that the Samaritans did not know what they worshiped. Their worship was a synthesis of Judaism and paganism. The Jews worshiped the God who reveals Himself—another important admission for a Samaritan.

Worship of the true God is not tied to a place. The discussion, therefore, about a place of worship was irrelevant to the conversation. For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth. The woman accepted the plain truth conveyed by Jesus and was ready for more.

Read John 4:25, 26. How did Jesus reveal His identity to her?

In all four Gospels, this is the only passage before His trial in which Jesus plainly stated to someone that He was the Messiah. And He did it not to some large crowd or important personage but to an unnamed Samaritan woman, alone, at Jacob's well. He is interested in any lonely soul who feels separated.

And so to this woman, who not only was from a foreign culture but also was not of the highest moral character, Jesus openly reveals who He is. And, having revealed to her His knowledge of her darkest secrets, He also gave this woman a great reason to believe in Him, as well.

What should this story tell us about why the gospel needs to break down the barriers that we humans create with each other?

The Testimony of the Samaritans

Read John 4:27–29. What surprising action did the woman take?

Jesus' discussion with the woman was interrupted by the arrival of the disciples. Though surprised that He was speaking with a woman, they did not question Him. Instead, they urged Him to eat.

The woman, meanwhile, left her water pot and rushed into the city to share with others what she had just experienced with Jesus.

Read John 4:30–42. What happened following this encounter, and what does it teach about how the gospel can be spread?

It seems strange that Jesus' narrative about a harvest would interrupt the story of the conversion of many in the city. But John wants us to see how Jesus understood what was happening. Sharing the plan of salvation with a Samaritan woman was far more important to Him than eating. To lead souls to salvation was His purpose, and He used this occasion to teach His disciples the urgency of sharing the gospel with all people, even with those not like them.

There are many high points in the Gospel of John. Surely John 4:39–42 is among them. Many of the Samaritans believed because of the woman's testimony: " 'He told me all that I ever did' " (*John 4:39, NKJV*).

The Samaritans asked Jesus to stay with them. The result was that many more believed because of the Word of Jesus. "Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world' " (*John 4:42, NKJV*).

What should this story tell us about how powerful the witness of even one person can be? How powerful a witness are you to what Jesus has done in your life?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “At Jacob’s Well,” pp. 183–195, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“As soon as she had found the Saviour the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised, a whole cityful were brought to hear the Saviour. She carried the light at once to her countrymen.

“This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to Sunday’s final question. Be brutally honest about it. What are the taboos and prejudices found in your culture that could indeed hamper your own witness to others?
- 2 Why do you think Jesus got such a warm reception among the Samaritans in contrast to the reception among His own people?
- 3 Put yourself in the place of that Samaritan woman. A total stranger comes and lets her know that He is aware of her deepest secrets. How could anyone, much less a stranger, have known these things? No wonder she was impressed by Jesus. What should this story tell us about how the Lord knows everything about us, even the deepest, darkest secrets that we would not want anyone to know? And yet, what does the way He treated her say to us about how He wants to deal with us, even when He knows our secrets? What comfort can we draw from this truth?
- 4 What themes in the Gospel of John that we have studied thus far are found in Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritan woman at the well?

More Testimonies About Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 3:25–36, John 1:32–36, Dan. 7:18, John 6:51–71, John 5:36–38, John 7:37–53.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself’ ” (*John 12:32, NKJV*).

Jesus doesn't merely say astonishing things about Himself or about who He is or about who sent Him or about where He came from. He also *showed* who He is by the miracles and signs that He performed. As some openly testify of Jesus: “ ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’ ” (*John 7:31, NKJV*).

He backed up His words with actions that proved the truth of His words.

But as the drama continues, a division begins among the people. The healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda attracts the ire of some leaders. The discussion in Capernaum following the feeding of the 5,000 results in the rejection of Jesus by the multitudes. The resurrection of Lazarus creates faith in some but triggers in others a hostility that will lead to the trial and execution of Jesus.

This week's lesson looks at some of those who witnessed and testified about Jesus. In each of these incidents, some aspects of who Jesus really is are revealed, and together they create a deeper vision of Jesus, the Messiah.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 9.

Humility of Soul: John the Baptist Testifies Again

Lesson 2 described how the witness of John the Baptist brought the first disciples—Andrew and John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael—to Jesus. One would expect that the Baptist, having given his witness, would move off the scene. But he reappears several times in the Gospel of John.

Read John 3:25–36. How does John the Baptist compare himself to Jesus?

A dispute arose between John the Baptist’s disciples and an unnamed Jew about purification, likely a question over the efficacy of baptism (*compare with Mark 1:4, 5*). Interestingly, when his disciples come to John, no doubt to resolve the question, they bring up Jesus, saying, “He is baptizing, and all are going to him” (*John 3:26, ESV*). It is not hard to read between the lines: they are jealous of Jesus—jealous for *their* master and jealous for themselves, as well.

It would be all too easy for John to indulge in the jealousy, but he does not because he knows what his mission is. Instead, he reminds his disciples that he never claimed to be the Christ. On the contrary: he came to point toward Him, to prepare the way for Him, to be a witness about Him (*John 1:6–8*).

Using the illustration of a wedding, he calls himself the *friend of the bridegroom*, with Jesus as the *bridegroom*. The *bride* would be the people of God (*compare with Hos. 2:16–23 and Isa. 62:1–5*). Then, in words that show John’s true greatness, he says, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (*John 3:30*).

John 3:31–36 continues the comparison between Jesus and John, showing the superiority of the Messiah over His forerunner. With John’s testimony pointing toward Jesus, the idea of witness is again emphasized. Those who receive that testimony and believe in Jesus have eternal life. Those who do not receive Him remain under the wrath of God. That’s what the text says. God loves the world and sent His Son to redeem the world (*John 3:16, 17*). But those who refuse the gift offered them will have to pay the penalty for their own sins—eternal death.

How can we learn the lesson of humility before both God and humanity? What can we learn from the example of John here about humility of the soul?

A New Understanding of the Messiah

Read John 1:32–36. What does John the Baptist say here about Jesus that the people were not expecting about the long-awaited Messiah?

The Jews looked for a Messiah to come who would deliver them from the rule of Rome. Long under oppression, the Jews believed that the Messiah would not only overthrow Rome but would establish them as a great and powerful nation. John's words, however, calling Jesus "the Lamb of God," although directly pointing to His atoning sacrifice, were probably misunderstood by the majority of people. They might have not known what he was talking about at all.

Thus, John with his Gospel wanted to change their understanding of the Messiah so that they could recognize in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the coming King and what He would do. He was not coming as a political and military leader but to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. That was His purpose. Only after that, when all is finished, will the final kingdom come (*see Dan. 7:18*).

"When at the baptism of Jesus, John pointed to Him as the Lamb of God, a new light was shed upon the Messiah's work. The prophet's mind was directed to the words of Isaiah, 'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.' Isa. 53:7."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 136.

In John 1:31, John says " 'I did not know Him' " (*NKJV*). So, how then did John come to know Jesus as the Messiah? The answer is that the Lord who sent John had previously said to him, " 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God' " (*John 1:33, 34, NKJV*). In other words, God revealed to John that Jesus was the Messiah.

"Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God" (*1 Cor. 1:24, NKJV*). Knowledge that Jesus is the Christ comes from God Himself through the convicting power of His Spirit. This theme appears frequently in John. Salvation does not come from worldly philosophy, science, or higher learning. It comes only from God to a heart surrendered in faith and obedience to Jesus.

How would we know the truth about Jesus as our atoning sacrifice unless it were revealed to us? Why, then, is knowing the Bible and what it teaches about Jesus so crucial?

Acceptance and Rejection

Lesson 2 described the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6 but did not cover the final section of that story, which is studied here.

Read John 6:51–71. What did Jesus say that people had trouble accepting?

Having just been fed, miraculously, by Jesus, the people were ready to crown Him king (*John 6:1–15*). But in talking with them later at the Capernaum synagogue, He explains the spiritual meaning of the miracle, saying, “I am the bread of life,” (*John 6:35*). He expounds in more detail that this bread is His flesh, which He gives for the life of the world (*John 6:51*).

This saying opened the eyes of the multitude to the fact that Jesus would not be their earthly king. He did not fit the mold produced by earthly thinking. They refused conversion, which would transform the way they thought so that they could recognize and accept Jesus as the Messiah. Many of His disciples left Him at this point (*John 6:66*).

From a human sense, this must have been hard for Jesus. The approbation of the crowd is pleasing. Who doesn’t want to be liked? But seeing many people draw back and question one’s principles is naturally discouraging, as well. Seeing the multitude depart, Jesus asks his inner circle, the Twelve, if they want to leave, too.

This is when Peter makes his amazing confession, another witness as to both what Jesus has and who He is. “ ‘You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’ ” (*John 6:68, 69, ESV*).

The disciples had been with Jesus for a couple of years, traveling with Him, seeing His miracles, hearing His sermons. They knew from experience that there was no one comparable to Him. The conviction settled upon them that, however unusual some situations might be, this man was the Messiah—regardless of how much they still didn’t understand about His purpose for coming. Only after His death and resurrection did they start to understand why Jesus came.

What can we learn from this story about the fact that the majority is usually wrong? Why must we remember this, especially with the aspects of our faith that are unpopular with the majority—even the majority of Christians?

The Witness of the Father

The Gospel of John begins by talking about the *Word (logos)* as being *with God*; that is, being with God the Father (John 1:1). When the Word became flesh, the Spirit testified about Jesus by resting on Him at His baptism (*John 1:32–34*). But the Father also testifies about Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Read John 5:36–38. What does Jesus say here about the Father?

Jesus links the Father to the works and miracles that He had performed. He is very clear that the Father had sent Him and also had testified about Him.

Read Matthew 3:17, Matthew 17:5, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22 (see also *2 Pet. 1:17, 18*). **What does the Father say about Jesus?**

At the baptism of Jesus, the Father and the Spirit joined the Son in marking this important occasion: the commencement of Jesus' ministry. The Father states that Jesus is His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. But, at a crucial time in Christ's ministry, the Father speaks yet again, this time as recorded in the Gospel of John.

Things were reaching a climax in the final days of that ministry. The religious leaders, unable to stop Him (see *John 12:19*), wanted Him dead, now more than ever. The crowds were exuberant over Him, especially as more and more people, hearing the testimony of those who saw Him raise Lazarus from the dead (*John 12:17, 18*), were starting to follow Jesus. Even Greeks, there for the festival, wanted to see Jesus.

At this point, in response to Jesus' words in John 12:28, " 'Father, glorify Your name' " (*NKJV*), the Father again speaks from heaven, " 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again' " (*John 12:28, ESV*).

As we have already seen, Jesus' hour of glory is the cross. Thus, the Father's testimony about Jesus points to the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. It is the culmination of His earthly ministry. His death in our behalf paid the full penalty for all our sins, and in Him, by faith, we never have to face that penalty ourselves.

The Witness of the Crowd

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’ ” (John 7:37, 38, NKJV).

John recorded, numerous times, Jesus making bold statements about Himself, about who He was and what He came to do.

The lines quoted above from John 7:37, 38 are another example of what Jesus claimed about Himself and about what He would do to all who come to Him. These were astonishing claims, as well.

When Jesus spoke to the Jews attending the Feast of Tabernacles, what was the response of many in the crowd? (See John 7:37–53.)

Some said He was the Prophet like Moses predicted long ago (see Deut. 18:15–19). Others thought Jesus was the Christ. But this brought the argument that the Messiah would not come from Galilee, that He had to be of the Davidic line, and that He had to be born in Bethlehem—all of which were true about Jesus (compare with Matthew 1–2), though many did not seem to know this!

Even the arresting officers were stymied by Him and the eloquence of His words. The Pharisees responded to the officers with another question. “ ‘Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?’ ” (John 7:48, NKJV). This question from the Pharisees gave John the opportunity again to bring in Nicodemus, who, after having had his meeting with Jesus, was seeking to protect Jesus from their machinations. “ ‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?’ ” (John 7:51, NKJV).

Did Nicodemus ever accept Jesus as the Messiah? Though this scene does not prove that he had, between this act and what he did after Jesus died (see John 19:39, 40), the Bible gives us solid evidence that Nicodemus did in fact come to believe in Him.

And so, the answer to their question was, yes, in fact, one of the Pharisees did believe in Him, after all.

Read John 7:49. What were the leaders saying that showed their disdain for the masses who followed after Jesus? What lesson might be here for us?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” pp. 383–394; “In the Outer Court,” pp. 621–626, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“ ‘To whom shall we go?’ The teachers of Israel were slaves to formalism. The Pharisees and Sadducees were in constant contention. To leave Jesus was to fall among sticklers for rites and ceremonies, and ambitious men who sought their own glory. The disciples had found more peace and joy since they had accepted Christ than in all their previous lives. How could they go back to those who had scorned and persecuted the Friend of sinners? They had long been looking for the Messiah; now He had come, and they could not turn from His presence to those who were hunting His life, and had persecuted them for becoming His followers.

“ ‘To whom shall we go?’ Not from the teaching of Christ, His lessons of love and mercy, to the darkness of unbelief, the wickedness of the world. While the Saviour was forsaken by many who had witnessed His wonderful works, Peter expressed the faith of the disciples,—‘Thou art that Christ.’ The very thought of losing this anchor of their souls filled them with fear and pain. To be destitute of a Saviour was to be adrift on a dark and stormy sea.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 393.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In class, talk about the difficult question of why some people, when given evidence for Jesus as the Messiah and for the truth of Christianity, gladly accept it, and why others, when given that same evidence, reject it?
- ② What more important truth could there be than that Jesus Christ died for our sins? Yet, how did we ever come to know this crucial truth? By science, natural law, natural theology, logic, and reason? While these things could, in fact, lead us to believe in a Creator God, a First Cause, an Unmoved Mover, or something else, none of these disciplines, either alone or even together, could teach us the most important truth that we need to know: Christ died for our sins. What should this fact—that all these disciplines, even in principle, could not lead us to the one thing that we really need to know—teach us about how crucial it is to make the Bible our final and ultimate authority on matters of faith?
- ③ Why is it so important for someone’s own faith to recount the things God has done in his or her life?

Blessed Are Those Who Believe



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 8:54–58, Gen. 12:3, Rom. 4:1–5, John 12:1–8, John 19:4–22, John 20:19–31, Daniel 2, Daniel 7.*

Memory Text: “Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*John 20:29, NKJV*).

Throughout his Gospel, John has a diversity of people—people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences—all testifying to who Jesus was.

“ ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ ” (*John 1:36, NKJV*). “ ‘We have found the Messiah’ ” (*John 1:41, NKJV*). “ ‘We have found Him of whom Moses . . . wrote’ ” (*John 1:45, NKJV*). “ ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ ” (*John 1:49, NKJV*). “ ‘Could this be the Christ?’ ” (*John 4:29, NKJV*). “ ‘We ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’ ” (*John 4:42, NKJV*). “ ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’ ” (*John 6:68, NKJV*). “ ‘I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world’ ” (*John 11:27, NKJV*). “ ‘Though I was blind, now I see’ ” (*John 9:25, NKJV*). “ ‘Behold your King!’ ” (*John 19:14, NKJV*). “ ‘I find no fault in Him’ ” (*John 19:6, NKJV*). “ ‘My Lord and my God!’ ” (*John 20:28, NKJV*).

Who were some of these people, and why did they testify as they did to the identity of Jesus?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 16.

Harking Back to Abraham

Jesus was not shy in declaring who He was, nor in calling on witnesses to testify to who He was, even witnesses who were long gone, including Abraham. “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad’ ” (*John 8:56, NKJV*).

Why was Abraham’s witness so important that it was included in John’s gospel? (*Gen. 12:3, Gen. 18:16–18, Gen. 26:4, Matt. 1:1, Acts 3:25.*)

“Through type and promise God ‘preached before the gospel unto Abraham.’ Galatians 3:8. And the patriarch’s faith was fixed upon the Redeemer to come. Said Christ to the Jews, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced that he should see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.’ John 8:56, R.V., margin. The ram offered in place of Isaac represented the Son of God, who was to be sacrificed in our stead. When man was doomed to death by transgression of the law of God, the Father, looking upon His Son, said to the sinner, ‘Live: I have found a ransom.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. He received the promise that, through him, all nations would be blessed. This blessing came through the Messiah, born through his lineage.

Abraham was also the father of those who respond to God in faith (*Heb. 11:8, 17–19*). His willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (*Genesis 22*), the son of promise, was not only an evidence of faith but a window into the plan of salvation.

When Jesus said, “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day’ ” (*John 8:56, NKJV*), the leaders responded, “ ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ ” (*John 8:57, NKJV*).

Jesus’ answer was astounding. “ ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM’ ” (*John 8:58, NKJV*).

Jesus uses language reminiscent of what God said to Moses at the burning bush. This was a claim to be God, the self-existent One. No question, the leaders understood the implication of what He said because they then “took up stones to throw at Him” (*John 8:59, NKJV*).

Read Romans 4:1–5. How does Paul use this story of Abraham to reveal the great truth of salvation by faith alone, without the deeds of the law? How do these verses help us understand the idea of Abraham as the father of those who live by faith?

The Witness of Mary

Six days before Passover, Jesus came to visit Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised to life. Simon, who had been healed of leprosy, hosted a feast in appreciation for what Jesus had done for him. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was sitting at the table with the guests (*John 12:1–8*).

What was the significance of Mary’s actions here? How was this a witness to who Jesus really was? (See *John 12:1–3*.)

The perfume was very expensive, worth about a year’s wages for the common laborer. Mary probably brought this gift as an expression of gratitude to the Savior for the forgiveness of her sins and for the resurrection of her brother. She intended it to be used someday for the burial of Jesus. But then she heard that He would soon be anointed King. In that case, she would be the first to bring Him honor.

Mary probably did not intend for her gesture to be noticed, but John notes, “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (*John 12:3, ESV*). Judas responded with a quick rebuke, stating that the perfume should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Jesus immediately put Mary at ease by stating, “ ‘Let her alone; . . . The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always’ ” (*John 12:7, 8, NKJV*).

A recurring theme runs through the Gospel. Jesus knows what is in people (*John 2:24, 25; John 6:70, 71; John 13:11; John 16:19*). In this instance at Simon’s feast, Jesus knows what is in Judas. John is careful to point out who Judas is—a self-serving thief (*John 12:6*).

“The fragrant gift which Mary had thought to lavish upon the dead body of the Saviour she poured upon His living form. At the burial its sweetness could only have pervaded the tomb; now it gladdened His heart with the assurance of her faith and love. . . . And as He went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 560.

Jesus knew what was in the heart of Mary and the heart of Judas. He knows what’s in your heart, as well. What should this truth tell us about the need of Christ as our righteousness, transforming us and covering us, as well?

The Unwitting Witness of Pilate

Time and again, John records the attempts of the religious leaders to seize Jesus, to bring Him to trial, and to sentence Him to death. A theme in John's Gospel, stated often by Jesus, is that His time or hour had not yet come, by which He meant the time for His crucifixion (*John 2:4; John 7:6, 8, 30; John 12:7, 23, 27; John 13:1; John 17:1*).

Now the hour had come. Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, brought before Annas, then Caiaphas the high priest, then twice before Pilate.

John has called upon many witnesses from every walk of life to testify that Jesus was the Christ. Now John calls upon Pilate, the governor who tried Jesus. This was an important testimony because Pilate was a Roman, a governor, and a judge; most of the other witnesses were Jews and commoners.

How is Pilate's verdict connected to the theme of John's Gospel? *John 18:38, John 19:4–22.*

Jesus was brought to Pilate early on Friday morning (*John 18:28*). His plan was to dispatch the prisoner quickly to His fate. But Jesus' demeanor drew Pilate's attention. The governor questioned Jesus closely and heard from His lips, " 'For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice' " (*John 18:37, ESV*).

Though the governor ultimately condemned Jesus to death, he nonetheless three times proclaimed Jesus innocent (*John 18:38; John 19:4, 6*). And over the cross he wrote the words " 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' " (*John 19:19, ESV*), completing his witness to who Jesus is. And yet despite his testimony of Christ's innocence, he nevertheless condemned Jesus to death.

Pilate had the Truth Himself standing before him and yet—allowing the mob to bully him—*Pilate sentenced Jesus to death anyway!* What a tragic example of not following what your conscience and heart tell you is correct!

What can we learn from Pilate's example about the dangers of allowing popular sentiment, even pressure, to keep us from doing what we believe is right?

The Witness of Thomas

Read John 20:19–31. What can we learn from the story of Thomas about faith and doubt? What major mistake did Thomas make?

Christ appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, when they were shut up together in a room because of fear. Thomas was not with them. Later, he heard the reports of the Resurrection from the other disciples, but he despaired. It did not fit his picture of the kingdom. And, too, he surely must have wondered why Jesus would have revealed Himself to the others when he himself was not there.

Thomas said, “ ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’ ” (*John 20:25, NKJV*).

Thomas was dictating the conditions of his faith. This approach to faith in Jesus has appeared again and again in John. Nicodemus answered Jesus with, “ ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ ” (*John 3:4, NKJV*). The woman at the well asked, “ ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?’ ” (*John 4:11, NRSV*). The crowd who had been fed with the loaves and fishes asked, “ ‘What sign are you going to give us?’ ” (*John 6:30, NRSV*).

It is this “see and then believe” perspective that the Gospel of John counters. When Jesus met Thomas after the Resurrection, He invited him to come, see, and touch His risen body. But then He says, “ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*John 20:29, ESV*).

“God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

Through the Word of God, through the Creation, and through personal experience, we have been given an incredible amount of evidence for our faith in Jesus.

If someone were to ask you *Why do you believe in Jesus?* what would you say?

Our Witness of Jesus

Again and again, as John presents witnesses to Jesus, his point is to bring us to a sweeping conclusion: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (*John 20:30, 31, NKJV*).

Imagine having been there, in person, in the flesh, and having seen Jesus do many of these miracles. We’d certainly believe, wouldn’t we? We’d like to think so; but, in some ways, we have *even more* reasons to believe in Jesus than did those who actually saw the miracles.

Why?

What are some of the things that we have today that those living at the time of Jesus didn’t have that should help us believe? (See, for example, *Matt. 24:2, Matt. 24:14, Matt. 24:6–8*.)

And that’s because we have not only the powerful accounts in John’s Gospel, but also the great advantage of seeing so much of what Jesus and other Bible writers predicted would come true, such as the destruction of the temple (*Matt. 24:2*), the spread of the gospel around the world (*Matt. 24:14*), the great falling away (*2 Thess. 2:3*), and the world continuing to be a fallen and evil place (*Matt. 24:6–8*). All during the life and ministry of Jesus, His following remained a small and harassed group of men and women who, by all human standards, should have vanished from history a long time ago. How could they have known, as we do, that all these things would come to pass? And they have. In fact, our own faith itself exists as a fulfillment of Jesus’ own prophecy that the gospel would go to all the world.

And, today, about two thousand years later, as followers of Jesus, we also have the privilege of bearing witness to Jesus and to what He has done for us. It is not by the reasoning of Nathanael, Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, or the teachings of the Pharisees that we can know Jesus as the Messiah for ourselves. It is by the reading of the Scriptures under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that we accept Jesus as the Savior of the world.

And then, each one of us, in our way, and out of our own relationship with God, can have a story to tell. Our story may not be as dramatic as seeing the dead raised or someone blind from birth healed, but that doesn’t matter. What matters is that we know Jesus for ourselves, and in our own way bear witness to Him, as did those in John’s Gospel.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 723–740, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Thomas “cast himself at the feet of Jesus crying, ‘My Lord and my God.’ ”

“Jesus accepted his acknowledgment, but gently reproved his unbelief: ‘Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’ The faith of Thomas would have been more pleasing to Christ if he had been willing to believe upon the testimony of his brethren. Should the world now follow the example of Thomas, no one would believe unto salvation; for all who receive Christ must do so through the testimony of others.

“Many who are given to doubt excuse themselves by saying that if they had the evidence which Thomas had from his companions, they would believe. They do not realize that they have not only that evidence, but much more. Many who, like Thomas, wait for all cause of doubt to be removed, will never realize their desire. They gradually become confirmed in unbelief. Those who educate themselves to look on the dark side, and murmur and complain, know not what they do. They are sowing the seeds of doubt, and they will have a harvest of doubt to reap. At a time when faith and confidence are most essential, many will thus find themselves powerless to hope and believe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 807, 808.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What was the essential difference in the expressions of faith by Abraham and by Thomas? What can we learn from their stories?
- 2** In class, let those who are willing bear witness to Jesus, as we have seen done in the Gospel of John. Though the accounts differ, what do people say, and how do they all bear witness to the same Lord?
- 3** Pilate asked a very philosophical question: “What is truth?” Give your answer to that question in light of all we have studied in John.
- 4** Look at the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7. Though those in the time of Jesus had these two chapters, what great advantage do we have today that they didn’t have back then, in terms of seeing those prophecies fulfilled and thus having even more reasons to believe?

Fulfilling Old Testament Prophecies



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 5:17, 20, 36–40, 46, 47; John 13:18; John 17:12; Jer. 2:13; Zech. 9:9; John 8:12–30.*

Memory Text: “ ‘But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me’ ” (*John 5:36, NKJV*).

We can see again and again in the book of John all the things that Jesus said and did which revealed that, yes, the Messiah (*hammashiach*), the Christ, had come to Israel. And He had come, in fact, as one of them, a Jew born in Bethlehem, just as the Scriptures had predicted.

Yet, as John wrote, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (*John 1:10, NKJV*).

He was in the world, the world was made through Him, *and yet the world did not know Him?* That’s an amazing statement. And, as we can see in John and in the other Gospels, many people didn’t know Him even though they should have, especially because of all the things that Jesus did and said. And, even more so, because the Old Testament scriptures pointed to Him.

This week we will look at more ways John revealed Jesus as the Messiah, and also, we will look at why some people still continued to reject Him—despite all the powerful reasons affirming Him as the Christ.

What can we learn from their mistakes?

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 23.*

Signs, Works, and Wonders

In addition to the specific miracles that John used to point to Jesus as the Messiah, he also recorded the broader discussion about the signs, works, and wonders that Jesus did.

The signs and wonders, in and of themselves, were not proof of His Messiahship because many prophets, sometimes false ones, also performed miracles. John did not record the signs because they pointed to a great miracle worker only. The signs that John wrote about had the unique character of pointing to Jesus as the Messiah and to show that He, indeed, came from God the Father Himself.

Read John 5:17, 20, 36–38. How do these verses describe the relationship between Jesus and God the Father, especially in the context of the signs?

Jesus used the signs to show His close working relationship with the Father. The two were one. The works showed that “ ‘the Father is in Me, and I in Him’ ” (*John 10:38, NKJV; see also John 14:10, 11.*)

The purpose of Jesus’ coming was to do the works of the One who sent Him, in order that these works might be made manifest to the world. That is, He came to do the work that the Father sent Him to do, and the works that He did testified, clearly, that He was from the Father.

And yet, as we have already seen, even despite the powerful signs and the testimonies from many people, people still chose not to believe.

The religious leaders asked Jesus, “ ‘How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me’ ” (*John 10:24, 25, NKJV*).

If Jesus had come right out and said He was the Messiah, the religious leaders—looking for anything they could find against Him—would have pounced on Him. Knowing this, Jesus instead pointed to the works He had done. If Jesus had said He was the Christ, they could easily seek to deny that. But how could they deny the signs, the works, and the wonders? These were powerful testimonies to who He was and where He had come from.

How can we protect ourselves from having the kind of hard hearts we see among these religious leaders? In what ways might we be fighting against the work of God in our own lives?

The Authoritative Role of Scripture

In addition to the specific signs and testimonies that John used to point to Jesus as the Messiah, John also appealed to the authority of the Old Testament and to its prophecies, which foretold the work of Christ. The Old Testament is central, not just to John's Gospel but to all the New Testament. Justification for Jesus, for who He was, where He came from, what He did, and what He will do—is based on Scripture, in this case the Old Testament.

Read the following texts: **John 5:39, 40, 46, 47**. What do they teach us about Jesus' attitude toward the authority of Scripture?

All through the Gospels, time and again, Jesus points to the authority of Scripture as a key witness to Him. For instance, Jesus often uses events from the Old Testament to help point to Himself and to what He does. The following is one case, where He takes an event from Numbers 21:5–9. “ ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up’ ” (*John 3:14, NKJV*). Here, not only does Jesus refer to the story, but by using it to point to Himself, He basically gives us the authoritative interpretation of what the story meant to convey.

And not just Jesus, but others, as well, use the Old Testament to point to Jesus. For example, early on in John, we read the words of Philip: “ ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote’ ” (*John 1:45, NKJV*).

Read the following texts: **John 13:18; John 17:12; and John 19:24, 28, 36**. What do they teach about the authority of Scripture as understood by Jesus and John? What should this tell us about the crucial role all Scripture must have for our faith, as well?

What are the forces today that either subtly or openly work to undermine our faith in the authority of the Bible? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus: Part I

In a discussion with the religious leaders about His identity, Jesus affirmed the authority of Scripture. At first glance, it would seem unnecessary for Him to do that because the religious leaders believed in Scripture. Nevertheless, even with them, Jesus would emphasize the authority of the Scriptures, and He did so in order to show them who He was—no matter how hard their hearts were, and no matter how much they tried to fight conviction.

Meanwhile, John records many direct quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament that point to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of a Messiah.

How are the following New Testament and Old Testament passages linked? That is, how does the New Testament use these texts to bear witness to Jesus?

John 1:23, Isa. 40:3 _____

John 2:16, 17; Ps. 69:9 _____

John 7:38, Jer. 2:13 _____

John 19:36, Num. 9:12 _____

Not just John, but Peter, Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and all the New Testament writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, time and again stress how Jesus of Nazareth's life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of God are all fulfillments of the Old Testament prophecies.

And although Jesus was continually pointing the disciples to the Scriptures, which foretold His ministry—when did the disciples finally understand that the Scriptures pointed to His death and resurrection? It was only after He died and was resurrected and appeared to them that they, finally, got it. “Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said” (*John 2:22, NKJV; see also John 20:9*).

Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus: Part II

Jesus said to the religious leaders: “ ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (*John 5:39, NKJV*). What an incredible claim to make about Himself!

Estimates vary, but some scholars argue that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. Whatever the amount, the odds against one man’s fulfilling even a few of them, much less them all, are staggering. Every now and then someone will use an image like this: imagine filling an area the size of Texas with coins two feet high and painting one coin pink and then mixing them all up. Then give a blindfolded person one chance to pick the pink coin. What are the odds that, with one pick, he or she would get the pink one?

No question—Christ’s birth, life, and death were predicted by the Old Testament, stunning evidence of His identity as the expected Messiah. John points to these Old Testament texts again and again to make that very point about who Jesus was, and also, why we should believe in Him and accept the salvation He offers.

What do each of the following passages from John’s Gospel reveal about Jesus as a fulfillment of Messianic prophecy?

John 12:13, Ps. 118:26 _____

John 12:14, 15; Zech. 9:9 _____

John 13:18, Ps. 41:9 _____

John 19:37, Zech. 12:10, Zech. 13:6 _____

How firmly grounded are you in what you believe? If someone were to challenge you on why you believe in Jesus as the Messiah, what answers could you give? Where would you go, and why, to help defend that faith?

From Beneath

In our study of John so far, we've seen that John shows how Jesus, indeed, is the promised Messiah, the great hope that the Jewish people had been longing for.

And yet, many of the religious leaders, the spiritual guides of the people, were His biggest enemies instead.

Why?

Read John 8:12–30. What is the dynamic here between Jesus and these religious leaders? Which texts best explain why many rejected Him?

Jesus says that they know neither Him nor the Father (*John 8:19*). They should have known both, but these men were self-deceived. They were so caught up in their own traditions and philosophies that even with Jesus right before them, doing all the things that He did and saying the things that He said—all powerful revelations of the Father—they still rejected Him.

Second, Jesus says to them, “ ‘You are from beneath’ ” (*John 8:23, NKJV*). In other words, however religious they might be, these were not spiritual, godly men. They had a “form of godliness” (*2 Tim. 3:5*), but that was all. They had outward piety but inward disbelief.

This was nothing new: “ ‘Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men’ ” (*Isa. 29:13, NKJV*). This very concept is echoed by Jesus centuries later, when He said, “ ‘And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’ ” (*Mark 7:7, NKJV*). Their human teachings, their human commandments, were “of this world” (*John 8:23*) and, as Jesus then said, “I am not of this world” (*John 8:23*). It was bad enough that these men had been deceiving themselves; the tragedy was made worse because they also led others astray, even though, interestingly enough, John wrote that as a result of the exchange depicted in these verses, “many believed in Him” (*John 8:30, NKJV*).

Thus, even despite bad leadership, many Jews were able to get beyond it and see, for themselves, who Jesus was.

What lessons do you draw from Jesus' exchange with the religious leaders? How can we be “from above” and not “from beneath”—and how can we know the difference?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“As a golden treasure, truth had been intrusted to the Hebrew people. The Jewish economy, bearing the signature of Heaven, had been instituted by Christ Himself. In types and symbols the great truths of redemption were veiled. Yet when Christ came, the Jews did not recognize Him to whom all these symbols pointed. They had the word of God in their hands; but the traditions which had been handed down from generation to generation, and the human interpretation of the Scriptures, hid from them the truth as it is in Jesus. The spiritual import of the sacred writings was lost. The treasure house of all knowledge was open to them, but they knew it not.

“God does not conceal His truth from men. By their own course of action they make it obscure to themselves. Christ gave the Jewish people abundant evidence that He was the Messiah; but His teaching called for a decided change in their lives. They saw that if they received Christ, they must give up their cherished maxims and traditions, their selfish, ungodly practices. It required a sacrifice to receive changeless, eternal truth. Therefore they would not admit the most conclusive evidence that God could give to establish faith in Christ. They professed to believe the Old Testament Scriptures, yet they refused to accept the testimony contained therein concerning Christ’s life and character. They were afraid of being convinced lest they should be converted and be compelled to give up their preconceived opinions. The treasure of the gospel, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, was among them, but they rejected the greatest gift that Heaven could bestow.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do the prophecies fulfilled in Jesus’ life build faith?
- 2 What are the three or four major obstacles that stood in the way of the religious leaders’ believing in Jesus? How are these same principles manifested today?
- 3 Take a personal inventory of where your confidence resides today. What steps do you think can strengthen your faith?
- 4 What should your answer to the question at the end of Monday’s study teach us about the authority of Scripture, and why must we reject anything that casts doubt on the final and ultimate authority of the Scriptures?

The Source of Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:4; John 10:10; John 1:12, 13; John 6:61–68; Num.13:23–33; Matt. 4:1–4.*

Memory Text: “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (*John 14:6, NKJV*).

In the Gospel of John, when asked who He was, Jesus answered with the term that designates deity. “I AM” was an unmistakable reference to the Lord Himself, who had appeared to Moses in the burning bush. “‘I AM WHO I AM,’ ” He said to Moses (*Exod. 3:14*). And this same God, the “I AM,” then “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NKJV*).

The theme “I AM” threads throughout John. This week’s memory verse reflects that theme: “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ ” (*John 14:6, NKJV*). The “I AM” is the Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Gate or the Door of the sheep, the Good Shepherd, and the True Vine.

This week continues with the revelation of God as given us in John. We will also more fully explore the flip side of things, in which, despite the powerful evidence for Jesus as the Messiah, some rejected Him. We will study this idea for two reasons: to avoid the same mistake, but also to consider how we might be able to reach out to those in danger of making that mistake, as well.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 30.

In Him Was Life

In John 1:1, the apostle clearly states that Jesus is God, the divine Son. Consequently, in John 1:4—“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (NKJV)—the reference to life here has to be divine life, underived eternal self-existence. Because He has life within Himself, He can lay down His life and take it again (*John 10:17*). And, because He has life within, He can give life to whom He will (*John 5:21; compare with John 14:19*).

This term *life* (*zoē*) appears 36 times in the Gospel of John, about 25 percent of the uses in the New Testament. In John 1:4, 5, besides referring to the Source of life on our planet, the word is also linked to salvation. Throughout the rest of John, this idea of life (*zoē*) is most often expressed as everlasting life, the promise of salvation (*see John 3:15, 16, 36; John 4:14, 36; John 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; and John 10:27, 28*). Thus, the One who gave life at Creation is the same One who brings salvation, eternal life, to a lost world.

Why did Jesus come to this earth? *John 1:29, John 3:16, John 6:40, John 10:10, John 12:27.*

“ ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

Just as the bronze serpent took the place of the Israelites who had been bitten by serpents, so Jesus took our place, we who have been struck down by sin. He took the penalty that was ours so that we might have the life that was His.

Christ also desires that we have life and have it more abundantly (*John 10:10*). Thus, for “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (*John 1:12, 13, NKJV*).

Christ came to reveal the Father to us. For, “no one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (*John 1:18, NKJV*). By seeing the character of Jesus, we can see the character of the Father.

What can we learn from the life of Jesus about the character of the Father? Why is this revelation such good news?

The Words of Eternal Life

Read John 6:61–68. When Jesus asked the disciples if they would leave Him, what was the meaning of Peter’s answer?

Peter’s words about “eternal life” tap into a theme that runs throughout the Gospel of John. A concentration of phraseology about eternal life appears in John 6, in the context of the feeding of the 5,000 (*John 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68*). Jesus says that He is the Bread of Life (*John 6:35*), meaning that His life, His death, and His resurrection are the source of eternal salvation.

The phrase *everlasting life* or its equivalent occurs at least 17 times in the Gospel of John. This term does not refer to a spirit existence, or to becoming part of an eternal being, or to some other ethereal concept. Rather, it refers to that life-giving power that brings salvation and meaning to our existence now and to life without end when our Lord returns. Just as Jesus became flesh, so the resurrection that Jesus talks about takes place in time and space and in a physical body. It is a resurrection from the dead, a renewal of the life that we once had in Eden.

How do we receive eternal life? *John 3:15, 16; John 5:24; John 6:40, 47; John 8:31; John 12:46; John 20:31.*

By faith alone we believe that Jesus Christ came to live and to die on our behalf. This faith comes to us as a gift, but we must consciously choose to surrender ourselves to Jesus, to repent, and to claim His blood for the forgiveness and cleansing of sin.

When Jesus asked Peter if he, too, was going to leave, Peter’s answer, “‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’ ” (*John 6:68, NKJV*), encapsulates the essence of salvation and how we attain it. It doesn’t come from philosophy, history, or science—all human disciplines. It comes from Jesus, who—possessing in Himself eternal life—offers it freely to all who, responding to the Holy Spirit, will accept it.

How does the promise of having eternal life impact how we view our temporal life here? How should it impact how we view it?

Believing and New Birth

Read John 1:12, 13. What are the steps described here about becoming a Christian?

John wrote his Gospel so that we would believe in Jesus and that by believing we may have eternal life in His name (*John 20:31*). In John 1:12, 13, this process is described in two steps. First, we receive Him, that is, believe in Him. Second, He gives us authority or power to become God's children, described in verse 13 as being begotten by God. Thus, there is a human and divine aspect of becoming a Christian. We must act in belief, receive Him, and be open to the light, but He is the one who regenerates the heart.

In fact, faith itself is a gift of God that comes by hearing His Word (*Rom. 10:17*). "In order to have true, abiding faith in Christ, we must know Him as He is represented in the word."—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 433. "The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 940.

Those who believe or accept the Son as the Messiah receive everlasting life. John also emphasizes accepting or believing the Word that Jesus spoke (*John 5:24, 38, 47*). It is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction (*John 16:7, 8; compare with Rom. 8:16*).

Read Romans 8:16. What principle about salvation in Jesus is found here?

Faith, biblical faith, based on the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, is the foundation of our faith. "Faith is . . . the great blessing—the eye that sees, the ear that hears."—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 104. The humanistic approach to faith states that we must find a foundation, the criteria for faith, and then believe. In contrast, the biblical approach states that faith is the foundation, a gift from God (*Eph. 2:8, 1 Cor. 1:17–24, 1 Cor. 2:1–6*). We start with the foundation of faith, and then from there we grow in understanding and grace.

If someone were to ask you what your faith is based on, how would you respond?

Rejecting the Source of Life

Some of the saddest accounts in all of Scripture occur in the Gospel of John. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. . . . [The Light] was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (*John 1:5, 10, 11, NKJV*). The “I AM” was rejected by many of His own people.

No wonder Paul later warns, “Do not cast away your confidence” (*Heb. 10:35, NKJV*). As we have seen again and again, Christ was rejected because people did not accept His Word.

“The contemporary humanistic way of thinking begins with doubt. People question everything in order to determine what is truth. That which survives the fire of cross-examination they accept as rock-solid knowledge, something on which to place one’s faith. Some apply the same method to the Bible, calling everything into question from a scientific, historical, psychological, philosophical, archaeological, or geological perspective in order to determine what is truth in the Bible. The very method itself starts with and builds upon doubt in the veracity of Scripture. Christ asked, ‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’ (*Luke 18:8*).”—E. Edward Zinke and Roland Hegstad, *The Certainty of the Second Coming* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), p. 96.

Read Numbers 13:23–33. What made the difference between the two reports the spies brought back about Canaan?

The sin of the Hebrews when they were at Kadesh Barnea was to doubt the Word of God. God had asked them to go up and take the land. Twelve spies were sent to Canaan to spy out the land. They came back with two reports. The majority gave a negative report. There are giants in the land, walled cities, weapons we have never seen before, and well-trained armies. By contrast, we have been slaves in the land of Egypt with little military experience. Ten spies voted no, based upon the overwhelming evidence from a human standpoint. Two spies voted yes based upon their faith in the overwhelming power of the Word of God.

How do we avoid making the same kind of mistake made here? And yet, how do we also avoid presumption, doing something foolish but believing that we are doing God’s will and, therefore, cannot fail?

Condemnation

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because [he has] not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. . . . Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that [his] deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light” (*John 3:18–21, NIV; compare with John 1:10*).

Why do people come into judgment? *John 3:18, 36; John 5:24, 38; John 8:24; John 12:47.*

The rejection of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, leaves us open to doubt and to the temptations of the devil. It is to turn from light to darkness.

Eve was given light on how to relate to the tree in the center of the garden. Satan tempted her to bring the light into question. She tested God’s word by reasoning that a God of love would not destroy the creatures whom He created. She also relied upon the data of her senses. The serpent has eaten of the fruit and now has the power to speak. Perhaps the serpent is right. *If I partake of the fruit, I may become like God!* Deceived, she turned away from the light. And her husband chose the same path.

Read Matthew 4:1–4. What principles did Christ use in the wilderness of temptation to combat the deceptions of Satan?

Christ had at His disposal the same humanistic tool of thought used by Adam and Eve, the antediluvians, and Israel at Kadesh Barnea. He could have asked why a God of love would leave His Son in the wilderness for 40 days and nights without food and protection. He also could have determined to prove His Sonship by turning stones into bread! Instead, He answered with the Word of God. He operated on the level of heavenly things rather than on earthly patterns of thought. How easily He could have rationalized His way to a wrong decision, which so many people, even people of faith, often do.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘God With Us,’ ” pp. 19–26; “Controversy,” pp. 601–609, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In stooping to take upon Himself humanity, Christ revealed a character the opposite of the character of Satan. But He stepped still lower in the path of humiliation. ‘Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’ Phil. 2:8. As the high priest laid aside his gorgeous pontifical robes, and officiated in the white linen dress of the common priest, so Christ took the form of a servant, and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim. ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.’ Isa. 53:5.

“Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Jesus gave so much to save the world. What do you consider the best ways to help others see this amazing truth and come to Him in faith?
- ② What are the key differences in making decisions on a human, worldly level versus making decisions on the basis of divine revelation?
- ③ How do such things as logic and reason fit with understanding the Word of God? What logical and rational reasons do we have for coming to faith? How do such things as the fulfillment of prophecy or the astonishing beauty and complexity of the created world point us logically and rationally to the existence of God and to the truth of the plan of salvation?
- ④ In class, talk about your answer to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study. What is your faith based on? If someone were to ask you why you believe in Jesus and the claims of the gospel, how would you respond?

The Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 13:1–20; John 14:1–3; Dan. 7:27; John 14:5–11; John 1:14; Col. 1:16, 17; John 5:38–40.*

Memory Text: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (*John 1:18, NKJV*).

The Gospel of John is divided into four main sections: The Prologue (*John 1:1–18*), the Book of Signs (*John 1:19–12:50*), the Book of Glory (*John 13:1–20:31*), and the Epilogue (*John 21:1–25*). Our study so far has focused mainly on the Prologue and the Book of Signs, laying out who Jesus is via His miracles (signs), dialogues, and teachings. The lessons now shift particularly to the third section of John, the Book of Glory.

Interestingly, the famous seven “I AM” statements form a bridge across the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory. These are “the bread of life” (*John 6:35, 41, 48, 51*), “the light of the world” (*John 8:12, John 9:5*), “the door” (*John 10:7, 9*), “the good shepherd” (*John 10:11, 14*), “the resurrection and the life” (*John 11:25*), “the way, the truth and the life” (*John 14:6*), and “the true vine” (*John 15:1, 5*).

This week's lesson will begin with the purpose of the farewell discourse and its introduction with the significant episode of Jesus' washing His disciples' feet. Then it will turn to the “I AM” statement in chapter 14 (“I am the way, the truth, and the life”).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 7.

I Have Given You an Example

The farewell discourse (*John 13–17*) provides instruction for Jesus' disciples concerning the future. Its literary pattern is similar to Moses' farewell in Deuteronomy or Jacob's blessing his children (*Genesis 47–49*) or David's instructing Solomon (*1 Chronicles 28, 29*). Jesus consoles His disciples regarding His departure. He promises a surrogate to represent Him (the Holy Spirit; *John 14–16*). He predicts grief to come (*John 15, 16*), and He exhorts the disciples to stay faithful (*John 15*).

Read John 13:1–20. What happened here, and why is this story so important? What lessons did Jesus seek to teach?

In that part of the world in Jesus' day, people wore sandals or went barefoot. The feet would become dusty and dirty. It was a custom for a servant or slave to wash the feet of those coming to a meal. But no servant was present for this function on the night Jesus ate His last meal with His disciples before His arrest.

To everyone's surprise, Jesus Himself arose from the supper and washed all of their feet. John 13:4, 5 tells Jesus' actions step by step. It is told in such detail to emphasize the Master's doing this unbelievable act of humility.

By telling about Peter's response, John 13:8–11 deepens the sense of dismay and incomprehension of the disciples at Jesus' actions. How could Jesus, the Master, the Messiah, be doing such a lowly task? Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet, only to be told by Jesus that if he did not cooperate, he would have no part with Jesus. Then Peter asked for more, expressing his desire to be connected with Jesus all the way.

The significance of Jesus' action is tied to who He is. He states in John 13:13 that He is the Teacher and the Lord. That is what they called Him, and He indicates that it is so. These titles express authority and power.

Yet, Jesus teaches that power and authority are to be used for service, not for self-aggrandizement. The Adventist Church has embraced this sense of Jesus' example, taking what is rightly called the Ordinance of Humility as a preparatory service for the Lord's Supper.

What does the Ordinance of Humility teach you about following in the footsteps of Jesus and how to humbly serve others?

I Will Certainly Come Again

Read John 14:1–3. In what context did Jesus say these words?

At the end of John 13, Jesus says that He is going away (*John 13:33*). This elicits from Peter a query about where He is going (*John 13:36*). The disciples do not understand that Jesus is talking about His death, resurrection, and ascension. Peter says he is ready to lay down his life for Him (*John 13:37*). This is when Jesus predicts Peter's denial (*John 13:38*).

It is in this context that Jesus tells His disciples not to let their hearts be troubled (*John 14:1*). The verb *troubled* is translated in Greek as *tarassō*, which means *to stir up, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion*. It is not surprising that the disciples would be thrown into confusion at Jesus' words.

But, countering their fears, He talks about His Father's house, where there are many rooms (not mansions but rooms as in an inn). He is going there to prepare a place for them. His words look beyond the coming storm of the cross to the time when He will return to redeem His people. He is looking to the time when this whole tragedy with sin is finished once and for all (*see Dan. 7:27*).

Jesus says, “ ‘If I go . . . , I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also’ ” (*John 14:3, NKJV*). It is clearly a promise of His second coming.

What is the basis for confidence in that promise? Many would say the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and that is certainly true. But in John 14:3, the basis is stated differently. In this verse, *I will come* is actually in the present tense in Greek (*I am coming*). This is a use of the present tense in Greek called the *futuristic present*. It is a future event spoken of with such certainty that it is described as though already happening. Thus, it is fair to translate the phrase as, *I will certainly come again*.

The basis of our hope in the return of our Lord is not simply the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. It is also, and more certainly, based on our confidence in the Man who made the promise. He said He will certainly return for His people. We can place our confidence in that promise because of Who made it.

What does the Cross teach us about the certainty of Christ's second coming? Without the Second Coming, what good did Jesus' death do us at the first coming?

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Read John 14:5, 6. What query did Thomas make about where Jesus was going? How did Jesus respond?

Thomas's query seems logical enough. If you do not know where someone is going, how can you know the way to follow that person? Jesus upends the query by indicating that He Himself is the way. The way to what? The way to the Father. In the Prologue (*John 1:1–18*), the intimate connection between the Word (*logos*), Jesus Christ, and the Father is emphasized.

John 1:18 says that the only begotten (better translated here as *unique*) God is the One who has made the Father known. *To make known* in this text is the Greek verb *exēgeomai*, meaning *to explain, interpret, exposit*. We get the word *exegesis* from this. It means to bring out the meaning. Thus, Jesus Christ is the link to the Father, the One who explains or interprets the Father to a fallen world. Consequently, He is the way or path to the Father. Without Him, we are limited in our understanding.

Read John 14:7–11. How did Jesus clear up Philip's misunderstanding?

Philip asked to see the Father, something no sinful human can do and live (*compare with Exod. 33:17–34:9, John 1:18*). Jesus reproves the lack of understanding and points out that if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father (*John 14:9*). Consequently, it is clear that Jesus is the pathway to God. Without Him, the pathway grows dark and uncertain. He is the light that illuminates the way to God.

Jesus ties together three terms: *way*, *truth*, and *life*. The term *way* is used only in John 1:23 regarding John the Baptist's preparing the way for Jesus, and it is used here in John 14:6. But *truth* and *life* are major themes in the Gospel. Our study on Wednesday and Thursday will emphasize the concept of *truth*, a crucial topic, especially in a world where the very idea of "truth" is called into question.

Why is it so comforting to realize that Jesus is the best revelation we will have here of what God the Father is like?

I AM the Truth

Read John 1:14, 17; John 8:32; John 14:6; and John 15:26. How does John tie the concept of truth directly to Jesus?

Again and again in John's Gospel, truth is connected to Jesus, to His Father, and to the Holy Spirit. Truth is connected with Jesus, the Word (*logos*), and with light—in contrast to darkness (*John 1:1–14, John 3:19–21*). And, too, falsehood is connected with the devil and sin (*John 8:44–46*). Consequently, truth in John is not simply a matter of facts and figures. It does involve such things, but more than this, the idea of truth contains a moral aspect of faithfulness to God and to His will.

“There are many who are crying out for the living God, longing for the divine presence. Philosophical theories or literary essays, however brilliant, cannot satisfy the heart. The assertions and inventions of men are of no value. Let the word of God speak to the people. Let those who have heard only traditions and human theories and maxims hear the voice of Him whose word can renew the soul unto everlasting life.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 40.

Think about what it means for Jesus to be the Truth. Jesus is the *logos*, the Word who was with God from the beginning and who was the Creator of all things created (*John 1:1–4*). One with the Father from eternity to eternity, Jesus has the characteristics of the Father, and thus is also the “I AM.” His being is not subject to anyone or anything else. Nothing that exists, including knowledge, exists apart from Him. And everything that does exist, that was created, was created only by Jesus and exists only in Him, as well. “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (*Col. 1:16, 17, NKJV*).

Jesus is not simply the embodiment of the truth; He is the Truth. Truth is not a concept or a construct. It is a Person!

The Truth, Jesus Christ, can be likened to the sun that lights up the world (*John 8:12*). It is parallel to what C. S. Lewis stated about Christianity: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”—“Is Theology Poetry?” (n. p.: Samizdat University Press, 2014), p. 15, originally presented in 1944.

It is by Jesus, the Truth, that we are able to interpret the world around us rightly.

The Scriptures and the Truth

Throughout the Gospel, Scripture plays an important role in telling us about the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. All through the Gospels, as all through the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, the Scriptures play a key role in revealing truth. This is especially true when it comes to teaching us about who Jesus is and what He came to do.

Read John 5:38–40. What is Jesus saying here about the Scriptures?

Jesus and His disciples pointed to Scripture again and again to validate Him as the Messiah. Christ said, “ ‘If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?’ ” (*John 5:46, 47, NKJV*).

Read Luke 24:27. Why is it important that Jesus first pointed to the Scriptures in order to reveal the significance of His ministry?

In another place, while quoting from the book of Exodus, Christ said, “ ‘Have you not read what was spoken to you by God . . . ?’ ” (*Matt. 22:31, NKJV*). Zacharias referred to the promises of God that “He [God] spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began” (*Luke 1:70, NKJV*). In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, “ ‘This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David’ ” (*Acts 1:16, NKJV*).

The Bible is not a textbook on science. It does not explain how to split the atom or perform brain surgery. But it does something even more significant. It provides the context within which our universe has meaning. It is the key that opens the door, the light that makes it possible to see. Without it, we would be in the dark about the existence of God, His role in the universe, our own origin, the meaning of life, and the future.

What are some truths taught in the Bible that science, even in theory, can never teach us?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘The Light of Life,’ ” pp. 463–475, in *The Desire of Ages*; E. Edward Zinke, “The Authority of the Bible and the Certainty of the Second Coming,” *The Certainty of the Second Coming* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), pp. 23–36.

When Jesus said, “I am the light of the world,” He “was in the court of the temple specially connected with the services of the Feast of Tabernacles. In the center of this court rose two lofty standards, supporting lampstands of great size. After the evening sacrifice, all the lamps were kindled, shedding their light over Jerusalem. This ceremony was in commemoration of the pillar of light that guided Israel in the desert, and was also regarded as pointing to the coming of the Messiah. At evening when the lamps were lighted, the court was a scene of great rejoicing. . . .

“In the illumination of Jerusalem, the people expressed their hope of the Messiah’s coming to shed His light upon Israel. But to Jesus the scene had a wider meaning. As the radiant lamps of the temple lighted up all about them, so Christ, the source of spiritual light, illumines the darkness of the world. Yet the symbol was imperfect. That great light which His own hand had set in the heavens was a truer representation of the glory of His mission.

“It was morning; the sun had just risen above the Mount of Olives, and its rays fell with dazzling brightness on the marble palaces, and lighted up the gold of the temple walls, when Jesus, pointing to it, said, ‘I am the light of the world.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 463, 464.

Discussion Questions:

① In class, talk about your answer to Thursday’s final question. What crucial truths taught by the Bible could we never, even in principle, learn from science? For example, the Cross? Or the Resurrection? Or the Second Coming? What other important biblical truths must be revealed to us—otherwise, we would never know them?

② Think about the fall of Lucifer, a perfect being with so much intellectual knowledge of God and of what God is like. And yet, even with all that, he rebelled against Him. What does this tell us about the reality of free will, the same free will that we have—and why, moment by moment, we need to choose to surrender that will to God?

The Father, *the* Son, and *the* Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:10, 24; Gen. 3:7–9; John 16:27, 28; John 16:7–11; John 17:1–26.*

Memory Text: “ ‘The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you’ ” (*John 14:26, NKJV*).

The Gospel of John is a mosaic of themes. John calls upon signs (miracles) to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised by the prophets. John uses an array of witnesses to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. He also uses the “I AM” statements to point to His divinity.

All three members of the Godhead are mentioned in John 1 (*John 1:1–4, 14, 18, 32–34*). For centuries humans have tried fully to understand the nature of the Godhead, but because we can't, many reject the idea. How foolish, though, to reject something just because we can't fully understand it or because it doesn't fit within the narrow limits of human reasoning.

John says that if you want to understand God, you must look at Jesus and what has been revealed in the Word. This approach opens to us a whole new world of relationships—among the Three Members of the Godhead, between the Members of the Godhead and humans, and among humans themselves. This week's lesson looks at how the Gospel of John presents the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but now within the context of the farewell discourse (*John 13–17*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 14.

The Heavenly Father

The Gospel of John is written from the standpoint of the overall biblical narrative, beginning with our origins. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*). Or: In the beginning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the heavens and the earth. They are the Source of all that exists. They created the universe, including the beings who inhabit it. On our planet there was a special creation of life, and the most special of that creation was humanity. And God’s purpose for creating humanity was that we should live in loving harmony with Him and with one another.

Unfortunately, Lucifer brought sin into this world. Sin is, among other things, a disruption of our relationship with God. It misrepresents who God is. Thus, Jesus took upon Himself our human nature in order to restore knowledge of God and to bring salvation to humanity.

While here, Jesus submitted His life to the Father, living according to His guidance. He said, “ ‘I and My Father are one’ ” (*John 10:30, NKJV*). “ ‘The Father is in Me, and I in Him’ ” (*John 10:38, NKJV*). “ ‘If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me’ ” (*John 10:37, NKJV*).

What were some of the roles of the Father, as described in the following passages?

John 3:16, 17; John 6:57 _____

John 5:22, 30 _____

John 6:32; John 14:10, 24 _____

John 6:45 _____

John 15:16, John 16:23 _____

These verses present the Father in close connection with Jesus Christ, His Son. The Father has intimate contact with our world and a deep investment in our salvation. What does this truth teach us about God’s love for us?

Jesus and the Father

We were created by the Godhead for a personal relationship with Them (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). Yet, because of sin, that relationship was radically disrupted. We can see the immediate impact of this disruption in the Garden of Eden story.

Read Genesis 3:7–9. How does this reveal the breach that sin caused, and what does it mean that it was God seeking them out, not vice versa?

The intention of the Godhead was to offer healing to all humanity for that breach caused by sin, even if all humanity would not accept what They offered.

To accomplish the restoration of this relationship, one Member of the Godhead became human. Thus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, manifesting the glory of God (*John 1:14–18*). As a result, humanity has received His fullness and grace. This is what Jesus came to share, to declare the glory of God so that the relationship broken by sin might be restored, at least to all who were willing to accept by faith what has been offered them in Christ Jesus.

What wonderful hope is seen for us in these texts? *John 1:1, 2; John 5:16–18; John 6:69; John 10:10, 30; John 20:28.*

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530. Yet, as the incarnate Son who had “emptied himself” (*Phil. 2:7, RSV*) of the exercise of His prerogatives, Christ, speaking of His existence on earth as a man among men, could refer to His possession of life as a gift from God. “The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

God was not recognized by humanity (*John 17:25*). Thus, He sent His only Son (*John 9:4, John 16:5*) in order that He, the Father, might be known.

In the context of the cosmos, an atheist wrote, “In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.” What does the Bible teach, which shows just how wrong this man is?

Knowing the Son Is Knowing the Father

Throughout the Gospel of John, the apostle describes how Jesus, the Son, does activities that point to the Father. Jesus explains who the Father is and shows what His relationship to our world is. This is all in keeping with John 1:18, which says that He makes the Father known (Greek *exēgeomai*: to explain, interpret, exposit). Again and again Jesus does this. The word Father (*patēr*) appears 136 times in John and 18 times in 1–3 John, more than one-third of the entire uses in the New Testament. The farewell discourse is one of the prime locations in the Gospel where Jesus makes the Father known.

Jesus was the Father’s representative on earth, and He came to live out, in human flesh, the Father’s will. In fact, Jesus said that in all things He sought to do the Father’s will, and not His own (*John 5:30*). This may seem at first a startling statement, but it shows how totally surrendered Jesus, as a human being, was to the Father.

Jesus said, too, that He had been sent by the Father to finish His work—the salvation of humanity—and that the Father Himself bore witness to His work (*John 5:36–38*).

Jesus proclaimed that the Father sent Him to serve as the only one through whom humanity may come to the Father (*John 6:40, 44*). The Father wants people to have the eternal life found in Jesus, who promises to raise them up in the resurrection.

What do the following texts teach us about the relationship between Jesus and the Father? *John 7:16; John 8:38; John 14:10, 23; John 15:1, 9, 10; John 16:27, 28; John 17:3.*

Jesus’ claims about His relationship to the Father are astonishing. He asserts that all of His teachings are the teachings of the Father; that all He says He had personally heard from the Father; that belief in Him is the same as belief in the Father; that both His very words and His works are all of the Father; and that He and the Father are united in loving and working for the salvation of humanity. What a powerful testimony to the closeness of Jesus to His Father in heaven!

How would your life be changed if your thoughts and actions were fully an expression of God’s will for your life? That is, how can we better live out what we know from Jesus is God’s will for our lives?

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not as prominent in the Gospel of John as the Father and the Son are. Yet, His role is crucial to the success of Jesus' mission.

Read John 1:10–13. What does this text teach us about the importance of the Holy Spirit for conversion?

In the first chapter of John, we can see just how central the role of the Holy Spirit is. John tells us that as many as received the Word (that is, as many as believed in Him) became children of God, those “who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (*John 1:13, NKJV*). This comes only from the work of the Holy Spirit.

What do the following passages tell of the activities of the Holy Spirit? *John 3:5–8, John 6:63, John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:7–11.*

“In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

What a blessing, then, to receive the Holy Spirit, who certifies that God is true (*John 3:33*). It is the Spirit that convicts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (*John 16:8–11*). Hence, the key for us to know what is right, what is true, and what is good is our submission of our reason and life experiences to the Word of God through the convicting and convincing power of the Holy Spirit.

The Prayer of Jesus

John 17 is sometimes called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It concludes the farewell discourse. Jesus came to this earth so that humanity might be restored, ultimately, to its original personal relationship with God. He faithfully performed the signs that God gave Him to do. In words and acts, He communicated God to the people.

Jesus would soon be leaving this earth. He desired to share once again His love for His disciples. He wanted them to understand the close relationship between Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. And He wanted to bring them into the same personal relationship with God the Father and the Spirit that He Himself had.

Read John 17:1–26. What words or phrases in this chapter express the desire of Jesus for a close relationship of love between Himself, the Father, and His disciples?

Many read John 17 to mean that the only thing that matters is unity and love. No question, God's purpose is to restore us to a personal relationship with Him and with all people. But a more careful reading suggests a much more vital connection between love and truth.

“ ‘This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*), not God, whoever we think He is. “ ‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me, . . . and they have kept your word . . . and know in truth that I came from you’ ” (*John 17:6, 8, NRSV*). “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*).

Christ came to reveal the Father. This revelation was important because of the many misconceptions about God. The Gospel of John shows how seriously Jesus took this mission. He rightly represented God's Word and actions. If truth did not matter, why go to such lengths?

Jesus lived a life of great difficulty ultimately to be rejected by the religious authorities. He suffered indifference from the people and even, at times, from His own disciples. One of His disciples betrayed Him, and another denied Him three times. He went through an unremitting trial and died on a cross at the hands of the very ones He came to save.

How can you better reflect the love of God, such as exists between Jesus and the Father, in your own life?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Additional Note on [John] Chapter 1,” *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 911–919.

In assessing who Jesus is, His opponents judged by human standards “ ‘according to the flesh’ ” (*John 8:15, NKJV*). This is probably even worse than judging “by mere appearances” (*John 7:24, NIV*). Here they resorted to the criteria of the flesh, of fallen humanity in a fallen world, without the compelling control of the Spirit (*see John 3:3–7*). They saw His “flesh,” as it were, but never contemplated the possibility that He could be the Word made flesh (*John 1:14*). To regard Christ by such limited criteria is to weigh Him from a worldly point of view (*2 Cor. 5:16*).

“The Comforter is called ‘the Spirit of truth.’ His work is to define and maintain the truth. He first dwells in the heart as the Spirit of truth, and thus He becomes the Comforter. There is comfort and peace in the truth, but no real peace or comfort can be found in falsehood. It is through false theories and traditions that Satan gains his power over the mind. By directing men to false standards, he misshapes the character. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Eternal life is to know God (*John 17:3*). What does it mean to know God, as opposed to merely knowing certain facts about Him, that is, that He is mighty or loving or a God of justice? If someone were to ask you, “Do you know God?” what would you say? How does Jesus fit in with your answer?
- ② In practical, everyday terms, what is implied by Jesus’ words “Thy word is truth” (*John 17:17*)?
- ③ Jesus prayed, “ ‘I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one’ ” (*John 17:15, NKJV*). How do our own choices impact how well this prayer can be answered in our own lives?

The Hour of Glory: The Cross and Resurrection



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 18:33–19:5; John 19:17–22; John 19:25–27; Luke 2:34, 35; John 20:1–18; 1 Cor. 15:12–20.*

Memory Text: “Then Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice’ ” (*John 18:37, ESV*).

Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are the climax of John. The first ten chapters cover roughly three and a half years; chapters 11–20, in contrast, cover about one to two weeks.

The four Gospels present the death of Jesus in different ways. Though their accounts are compatible, each author emphasizes key points that especially resonate with the themes of his Gospel. Matthew emphasizes the fulfillment of Scripture; Mark emphasizes the parallel between the baptism of Jesus and the Cross; and Luke focuses on the Cross as healing and salvation (the story of the thief on the cross).

But John presents the Cross as the enthronement of Jesus, particularly tied to the idea of *the hour*, which is referred to numerous times throughout the book (*John 7:30, John 8:20, John 12:27*). This idea of enthronement is an ironic picture since crucifixion was the most ignominious and shameful way to die that the Romans used. This contrast points to the deeply ironic depiction that John presents: Jesus is dying in shame, but it is, at the same time, His glorious enthronement as the Savior.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 21.

What Is Truth?

In John 18:28–32, the trial of Jesus is not described in detail. The focus is on Jesus brought before Pontius Pilate.

Read John 18:33–38. What did Pilate and Jesus talk about?

The governor asks Jesus if He is the king of the Jews (*John 18:33*). It is the first reference to this title but will not be the last. Jesus asks Pilate if he is asking this on his own or did others say that He was. His question turns the tables on the governor, querying if he understands to whom he is speaking. The reader already knows that Jesus is the King. Will the governor?

Pilate responds with his own query: “ ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’ ” (*John 18:35, NKJV*). It was an evasion, rooted in irritation at the close application of Jesus’ question. It was the governor’s first step away from the truth, letting prejudice block his perception.

Jesus responds that His kingdom is not of this world (*John 18:36*). Pilate then perceptively deduces that Jesus does claim to be a king (*John 18:37*). This leads to Jesus’ important explanation that He was born to bear witness to the truth and that every person who is “ ‘of the truth’ ” hears His voice (*John 18:37*).

Pilate then asks, “ ‘What is truth?’ ” (*John 18:38, NKJV*). But he doesn’t wait for the answer. Instead, he goes outside to try to save Jesus from the crowd.

Truth is a theme in John’s Gospel. As the eternal Word (*logos, John 1:1–5*), Jesus is the Light and the Truth. All this is in contrast to darkness and error. He is full of grace and truth (*John 1:14*). Grace and truth came through Him (*John 1:17*). John the Baptist bore witness to the truth (*John 5:33*). Jesus affirmed that His Father is “true” (*John 7:28*). Jesus Himself heard the truth from His Father (*John 8:40*). Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*). The Word of God is “truth” (*John 17:17*). Despite his question, Pilate missed his opportunity to know the truth because of his prejudice, his earlier decisions, and the pressures upon him.

How do you understand the idea of Jesus as the Truth?

Behold the Man!

Read John 18:38–19:5. How did Pilate try to persuade the people to ask for Jesus' release?

Pilate did not wait for an answer from Jesus concerning truth. Instead, he went back out to try to persuade the people. By dialoguing with them instead of just letting Jesus go free, Pilate placed himself at a disadvantage. The religious leaders recognized that they could manipulate the governor through the crowd.

Pilate refers to a custom of letting a prisoner go free at the time of Passover and asks if the people want him to release “the King of the Jews.” Surprisingly, and quite ironically, the people ask for the release of a brigand named Barabbas rather than the innocent Jesus.

Now begins the mockery and shaming of Jesus. The Roman soldiers plait a crown of thorns, put a purple robe on Him, and keep coming up and mockingly hailing Him as King of the Jews. This type of greeting by soldiers would be similar to the way they greeted the emperor, but here it was done in mockery.

By playing on the pity of the people, Pilate seems to be seeking some way to release Jesus. He brings Jesus out wearing the crown of thorns and purple robe. The scene, uncommented on by John, displays Jesus in mock kingly garb, with the governor calling on the people to “ ‘Behold the man!’ ” (*John 19:5, ESV*). This reminds the reader of John the Baptist's words in John 1:29, ESV, “ ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” It is ironic that the pagan governor presents the Messiah in this kingly attire before Israel.

However, as John 19:6–16 shows, the mob calls for Jesus' crucifixion, based on His claim to be the Son of God. This frightens Pilate, who seeks all the more to arrange Jesus' release. But the leaders seal Jesus' fate by claiming that to release Him is to oppose Caesar. They know that Pilate's loyalty to Caesar would mean he could not release someone claiming the same role. The leaders say they have no king but Caesar. Thus, their deep hatred of Jesus was greater than their national aspirations. To rid themselves of this Jesus, they were willing to sacrifice claims to national autonomy.

How scary—a pagan ruler wants to release Jesus while the spiritual leaders of the nation, who should have recognized Him, wanted Him crucified instead! What lessons can we take from this for ourselves?

“ ‘It Is Finished’ ”

As John 19:17–22 shows, Pilate wrote an inscription in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew that said, “ ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’ ” (*John 19:19, ESV*). The religious leaders wanted it changed. Pilate would have none of it, and the inscription remained, a mute witness to the truth about Jesus and one of the markers that Jesus is enthroned on the cross as the King. Here was Jesus, truly their King, the King of the Jews, hanging on a cross like a common criminal.

“A higher power than Pilate or the Jews had directed the placing of that inscription above the head of Jesus. In the providence of God it was to awaken thought, and investigation of the Scriptures.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 745.

Read John 19:25–27. What touching scene regarding Jesus’ mother happened at the cross?

Among those standing at the foot of the cross that day were John, the beloved disciple, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and others. Many years before, Simeon had predicted this very experience when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple to dedicate Him (*compare with Luke 2:34, 35*). Now in His dying moments, Jesus speaks to His mother: “ ‘Woman, behold your son!’ ” To John He says, “ ‘Behold your mother!’ ” (*John 19:26, 27, NKJV*).

Read John 19:28–30. What is the significance of Jesus’ dying words, “It is finished”?

The Greek verb *teleō* (to finish, complete, carry out) in John 19:28 (“all was now finished,” *ESV*) is the same verb as used in verse 30 (“It is finished”). Furthermore, a related word, *teleioō* (to finish, make perfect) also appears in verse 28 in reference to the fulfillment of the Scripture (“to fulfill the Scripture,” *ESV*). However horrific the scene, everything was being fulfilled, accomplished, and completed.

When Jesus says, “It is finished!” He is completing, fulfilling, the work that the Father gave Him to do.

When Jesus said, “It is finished,” what does that mean for each of us? What was finished, and how does that apply to our lives?

The Empty Tomb

Read John 20:1–7. What is the importance to us about what is depicted in these verses?

Jesus died late on a Friday afternoon and rose early on Sunday. Because the Sabbath was near when He was buried (*John 19:42*), the burial process was done hastily and not completely. However much they loved Jesus, His followers kept the Sabbath day and did not go to the tomb (*compare with Mark 16:1, Luke 23:56*). After the Sabbath, a number of women bought spices to the tomb on Sunday morning. To their shock, the stone was rolled away, and the tomb was empty.

Mary Magdalene was one of those who came early to the tomb. She ran to tell Peter and John what she saw. The two men ran there. John outran Peter and arrived first. Stooping down, he looked inside and saw the linen cloths with which Jesus had been wrapped. But he did not go in.

Peter, however, went inside and saw the linen cloths lying there. He saw, too, the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head, but it was not with the rest of the cloths. It was folded up and sitting apart.

Read John 20:8–10. What was the meaning of the folded face cloth?

After Peter entered the tomb, John also entered. John 20:8 says that he went in, saw, and believed. Why would seeing the grave cloths lying there and the face cloth lying separately, folded up, lead John to believe Jesus had risen from the dead?

To answer this question, it is necessary to ponder why the tomb would be empty in the first place. The most typical answer would be grave robbers. But this explanation fails for three reasons. First, Matthew tells us that the tomb was guarded (*Matt. 27:62–66*), making grave robbery unlikely. Second, grave robbers typically steal valuables, not rotting bodies. Third, grave robbers are in a hurry and do not fold up grave cloths. No wonder, then, that when John saw the face cloth folded, he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Jesus and Mary

Read John 20:11–13. What happened here that shows why Mary Magdalene still did not understand the meaning of the empty tomb?

The last reference to Mary in the text before this one is her telling Peter and John about the empty tomb (*John 20:2*). They ran to the tomb, and she came back there a little later. After Peter and John inspected the tomb, they left it. But Mary returned and, weeping, lingered there. No doubt she had done a great deal of crying during the last few days. And now—this as well? Stooping over, she looked inside.

To her surprise, two angels in white were in the tomb, sitting where Jesus' body had lain. They asked her, “ ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ ” (*John 20:13, NKJV*). Her pained reply was that they had taken away her Lord, and she did not know where they had laid Him.

Read John 20:14–18. What changed everything for Mary?

Through tear-dimmed eyes, Mary turned and saw someone standing behind her. In words similar to those of the angels, the Stranger asks, “ ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ ” (*John 20:15, NKJV*). She thinks she is talking to the gardener and asks for his help in finding the body of Jesus.

The Stranger says one word, “Mary.” It was a one-word revelation that changed the world. Suddenly, the surprised Mary recognizes that the risen Jesus is talking to her and acknowledges Him. Jesus insists that she not detain Him, as He must ascend to His Father. But her task is to go and tell the disciples that He is ascending “ ‘to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’ ” (*John 20:17, NKJV*). Mary fulfilled her mission. She told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and also told all the other details He had shared with her (*John 20:18*).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–20. According to Paul, what good is our Christian faith if Christ had not been raised from the dead?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘It Is Finished,’ ” pp. 758–764; “ ‘The Lord Is Risen,’ ” pp. 779–787; and “ ‘Why Weepest Thou?’ ” pp. 788–794, in *The Desire of Ages*. See also, Clifford Goldstein, *Risen: Finding Hope in the Empty Tomb* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2020).

“Pilate longed to deliver Jesus. But he saw that he could not do this, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. How many, to escape loss or suffering, in like manner sacrifice principle. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another. The current sets strongly in the wrong direction, and he who compromises with evil is swept away into the thick darkness of guilt.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 738.

“Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, ‘It is finished.’ John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights. Was there not joy among the angels? All heaven triumphed in the Saviour’s victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.

“To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, ‘It is finished,’ had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ’s victory.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What decision-making processes can help you avoid making the kind of mistake that Pilate made?
- ② Why did Jesus have to die in our place? Why did He have to be our Substitute? Why was His death necessary if we were to have salvation? What Scripture passages support your answer?
- ③ What is the relationship between Scriptural evidence and historical evidence when it comes to belief in Jesus’ resurrection? That is, what is the historical evidence that powerfully confirms Jesus’ resurrection?
- ④ Think about 1 Corinthians 15:12–20. How does one make sense of the idea that, without Christ’s resurrection, “those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:18, NKJV*), if those who have “fallen asleep in Christ” immediately go to heaven? How do Paul’s words here confirm the truth that the dead sleep until the resurrection at Christ’s return?

Epilogue: Knowing Jesus *and* His Word



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 21; John 11:9, 10; John 8:42–44; John 4:46–54; 2 Tim. 3:16; John 15:1–11.*

Memory Text: “ ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (*John 5:39, NKJV*).

John's Gospel, like Mark's, ends with a meeting in Galilee. This final lesson on John deals with that meeting but integrates it with the theme of how we know Jesus and the Word of God—a concept that runs through the fourth Gospel.

Though they were with Jesus more than three years, the disciples were still greatly unprepared for the Crucifixion and Resurrection, even though Jesus had told them again and again what would happen.

Unfortunately, they didn't take Him at His word.

We today can be in danger of doing the same thing: hearing or even reading the Word of God but not listening to it, not abiding in it, and not obeying it. That is, not accepting it as the light that should guide our thoughts and actions. This, unfortunately, is where, perhaps unwittingly, too many Christians are.

In this, our last week in John, we will look at some of this Gospel's key points, which can help us move beyond the mere head knowledge of Jesus to, instead, knowing Him better and more closely abiding in Him and in His Word.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 28.

Meeting in Galilee

Read John 21:1–19. What crucial truths are revealed here, especially about God’s grace—and human humility?

John 20 ends with the purpose of the book, which would be the logical place to conclude, but there is one more chapter. Chapter 21 begins with some of the disciples back in Galilee, with Peter suggesting a night on the lake. It looks as though old times have returned, and the disciples are back to their old trade, fishing. But they catch nothing that night.

In the morning, a mysterious stranger on the shore tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. They then catch so many fish that they cannot pull in the net. It was like the beginning of their ministry with Jesus (*see Luke 5:1–11*). John immediately recognizes Jesus and tells Peter, who immediately jumps in the water and swims ashore.

Jesus asks Peter three questions, all concerning love for his Master. Before the Crucifixion, Peter insisted that he would lay down his life for Jesus (*John 13:37*). That is when Jesus predicted his threefold denial (*John 13:38*). At this meeting in Galilee, Peter does not make himself the reference point but rather makes it Jesus: “ ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you’ ” (*John 21:17, ESV*).

Some note that Jesus uses the verb *agapaō*, which means to love, in questioning Peter (except for the last time), and that Peter always responds with *phileō*, which means to love, but just as a friend. The implication is that Peter has not achieved the higher kind of love.

Actually, Peter’s response is focused on humility. With Peter’s failure ever before him, it is more likely that he humbly uses a “lower term,” daring not to claim too much for himself. And it is this humility that Jesus affirms, and which becomes crucial in restoring Peter to ministry. No question, humility is one of the greatest qualifications for ministry because the focus then becomes Jesus Christ and not self.

Peter’s restoration and role as leader in the early church is one of the strongest evidences that Jesus rose from the dead. It would be hard to explain Peter’s prominence if Jesus had not, in the presence of the other disciples, restored him to ministry.

Why is humility so key in anyone seeking to know the Lord? In light of the Cross, what do any of us have to be proud of?

Keeping Your Eyes on Jesus

Read John 21:20–22. What question led Peter down a wrong path? How did Jesus straighten the path?

Jesus had just restored Peter to ministry and told him, “Follow me” (*John 21:19*). It was probably an actual physical following of Jesus down the beach. And that is because Peter turns and sees John following Jesus as well, and he inquires about John. “ ‘But Lord, what about this man?’ ” (*John 21:21, NKJV*).

In restoring Peter to ministry, Jesus had predicted Peter’s manner of death (*John 21:18*). It seems Peter was curious about John’s death, as well. Jesus redirects Peter’s attention instead to the issue of following Him, not worrying about what will happen to another disciple.

Read John 21:23–25. How was Jesus’ statement misunderstood? How did the apostle John correct that misunderstanding?

People misunderstood what Jesus meant when He said, “ ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!’ ” (*John 21:22, ESV*). They thought it meant that Jesus would come back before John died. As time passed and John grew old, it would become a crisis if he were to die (which, of course, he did) and Jesus had not returned. John corrects this misconception by indicating that it was a matter of Jesus’ will, not a prophecy of what *would* happen.

The idea of focusing on Jesus, instead of on other people, is a powerful lead into the rest of the week’s lesson. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is our Savior. People will inevitably disappoint you, perhaps even hurt you, as well.

The truths covered for Tuesday through Thursday will pick up on the theme of understanding the Word of God, with the aim of knowing and following Jesus, who alone should be our Master and Guide—regardless of the help, counsel, and guidance that others might give us.

How often have others, whom you might have looked up to, disappointed you? What lessons, however hard, did you learn from that experience?

Light and Darkness

Read John 1:4–10; John 3:19–21; John 5:35; John 8:12; John 9:5; John 11:9, 10; and John 12:35. What great contrast is present here, and why is this contrast so foundational to understanding truth?

The world is in darkness; it shuns the light and cannot, on its own, find its way to the true God, the personal God of Creation, revelation, and Redemption.

“Never can humanity, of itself, attain to a knowledge of the divine. ‘It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?’ Job 11:8. Only the spirit of adoption can reveal to us the deep things of God, which ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.’ ‘God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 412.

Only Jesus Christ “has declared Him,” the Father (*John 1:18, NKJV*). The Greek verb is *exēgeomai*, which means “to interpret,” “explain,” or “exposit.” John presents Jesus as the heavenly Messenger, the One who explains what it means to know God. Only through Jesus can we truly know God.

Read John 8:42–44. How does Jesus describe the false foundation on which the religious leaders of Israel had based their faith?

Those who do not stand in the truth speak from their own resources. They “see” the meaning of a text only from a human perspective. By contrast, we must accept that Christ is the light of the world and follow Him in our interpretation of His Word. In contrast, the devil speaks from “his own resources” (*John 8:44, NKJV*). If we are not careful and are not surrendered in faith and obedience to God, we are in danger of doing the same thing: reading the text based only on our own desires, wants, and perspectives, which is much easier to do than we might realize.

How do you respond to truths that “step on your toes,” as opposed to how you *should* respond to those truths?

Theology From “Above” or From “Below”

Read John 4:46–54. What problem brought the official to Jesus, and what was the real underlying issue here?

This man came to Jesus, the Light of the world, but he had made up his mind to believe only if Jesus healed his child. We could say this man’s theology was a “theology from below.” Theology from below sets rules and standards for God and His Word. Human ideas, as flawed and as limited and as subjective as they are, become the final authority on how people interpret the Word of God. What a dangerous trap to fall into!

Theology “from above,” in contrast, responds by faith, with belief in God and His Word first (*John 4:48; John 6:14, 15; 2 Tim. 3:16*). When the Bible is accepted by faith, it becomes its own interpreter. The worldview of Scripture, rather than the philosophy of the age, is the guide to understanding and interpreting Scripture. Human views must be subjected and subservient to the Word of God, and not the other way around.

We must believe the words of Scripture if we are to believe the words of Jesus (*John 5:46, 47*). “ ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’ ” (*John 8:31, NKJV*). If we doubt God’s Word, His Word cannot abide in us (*John 5:38*). “ ‘He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak’ ” (*John 12:48, 49, NKJV*).

To hear God’s Word is more than a passive intake of information. It means also to do God’s will. And this is the active response to hearing the Word. “ ‘If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority’ ” (*John 7:17, NKJV*).

And this hearing, and doing, of God’s Word is an expression of love for Him. “ ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him’ ” (*John 14:23, NKJV*).

What is the relationship between our love for Jesus and obedience? Why is any kind of “obedience” not based on love in danger of being legalism?

Abiding in Jesus

Read John 12:32. In what ways does this striking statement describe the authority of Jesus Christ?

As we have seen throughout this quarter's lessons, the Gospel of John draws us to Jesus, but only if we are willing to know God and to do His will. Throughout John's Gospel, people who encounter Jesus either accept the light and grow or reject the light and become blind. Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the royal official, the man at the pool of Bethesda, the 5,000 fed loaves and fishes, Jesus' brothers, the religious leaders, the man born blind, Mary and Martha, Pilate—all encountered Jesus and made choices about the truth and light He brought.

Theology from below begins with human argumentation to determine and examine the existence and nature of God. The human perspective—flawed, fallen, and prejudiced—takes precedence over the Divine, holy, perfect, and omniscient. Theology from below is guaranteed to lead people astray, as it has done in the past and will do in the future (*see Rev. 14:1–12*), when human wisdom, seeking to supersede the Divine, will attempt to force false worship upon the world.

Read John 15:1–11. What is the secret of spiritual growth and health?

The secret is to stay connected to Jesus. He is the Word of God, the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, the Door of the sheep, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the True Vine.

The Members of the Godhead and Their Word, the Bible, are like magnets. If not resisted, they will draw us to them. “The voice of God is speaking to us through his word, and there are many voices that we will hear; but Christ has said we should beware of them who will say, Here is Christ or there is Christ. Then how shall we know that they have not the truth, unless we bring everything to the Scriptures?”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 3, 1888. And then, we must surrender our own views to those presented in the Word of God.

Further Thought: God’s perspective is vastly different from that of humans. God shares His perspective with us through His Word, the Bible, under the power of the Holy Spirit. It is our choice whether we wish to walk in darkness or accept the light coming from Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word.

Integral to this choice is our own personal surrender to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Redeemer of humanity. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father has revealed to us—in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the depth of His love. And we know about Jesus because His life, death, and resurrection have been recorded in the Word of God.

“The angels of God are ever passing from earth to heaven, and from heaven to earth. The miracles of Christ for the afflicted and suffering were wrought by the power of God through the ministration of the angels. And it is through Christ, by the ministration of His heavenly messengers, that every blessing comes from God to us. In taking upon Himself humanity, our Saviour unites His interests with those of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam, while through His divinity He grasps the throne of God. And thus Christ is the medium of communication of men with God, and of God with men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 143.

Discussion Question:

- ① Of all the stories in the book of John, which one speaks the loudest to you about the love and character of God? Share with your class why you find that story so compelling.
- ② In practical terms, how should one go about the search for truth?
- ③ Why is it usually difficult to lay aside self as the arbiter of truth? Can we ever fully do it, or will our humanity, to some degree, still impact how we view the Scriptures? Why must we recognize this fact, and how does humility come in to help us surrender our prejudices to the Word of God?
- ④ The history of Western Christianity is filled with horrific examples of what happens when the Word of God is made subject to the politics and prejudices of humans. What are some of those examples, and what lesson can we learn from them today about just how dangerous it is when human perspectives become the dominant filter to “interpret” the Bible?
- ⑤ Summarize in your own words the big picture of the Gospel of John. What is its central message for us today?

The entire Bible testifies to the fact that God is love (*1 John 4:8, 16*). Love is at the core of who God is, at the core of everything that we believe, and should be at the core of everything we do. And how we understand God's love has massive implications for our faith and practice.

God's love is far greater than we might think. God's love as depicted in Scripture is far superior to the ideas that pass for "love" in much of our world today. In this quarter's study, entitled *God's Love and Justice*, by John Peckham, we will look more closely at some of the most prominent and beautiful aspects of God's love, which are revealed in the Bible.

And, as we continue on, we will see how divine love and justice are inextricably connected. The God of the Bible loves justice (*see, for example, Isa. 61:8*). And, as the Bible portrays them, divine love and justice go together such that you cannot have one without the other.

The God of the Bible, who is love, is often portrayed throughout Scripture as brokenhearted and grieved by love rejected and love lost. The entire story of Scripture is about what God has done and is doing to restore love to every corner and crevice of the universe. This and much more is the topic of this quarter's lessons.

Lesson 1—God Loves Freely

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Beyond Reasonable Expectations** (*Exod. 33:19*)

MONDAY: **Unrequited Love** (*Hos. 14:1–4*)

TUESDAY: **Love Freely Given** (*John 17:24*)

WEDNESDAY: **Many Are Called but Few Are Chosen** (*Matt. 22:1–14*)

THURSDAY: **Crucified for Us** (*John 10:17, 18*)

Memory Text—*Hosea 14:4, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The ultimate question that God poses to each one of us in our time and place is, Do you love Me? Everything depends on our answer to that question.

Lesson 2—Covenantal Love

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Everlasting Love of God** (*Ps. 33:5, Ps. 145:9*)

MONDAY: **Covenantal Love** (*Deut. 7:6–9*)

TUESDAY: **Conditional Relationship** (*John 14:21, NKJV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Mercy Forfeited** (*Matt. 18:23–35*)

THURSDAY: **You Have Freely Received; Freely Give** (*John 15:12*)

Memory Text—*John 14:23, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: God's love is not unilateral but deeply relational, in that it makes a profound difference to God whether or not humans reflect His love back to Him and to others.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind and individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.