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Themes in the Gospel of John



Sitting in a shop in Tehran, Iran, the Persian rug depicted an ancient forest. Beautifully done, it re-created a scene in Switzerland: mountains, a waterfall, a turquoise lake, forested hillsides, and an expansive blue sky dotted with clouds.

Anyone in that shop could have spent their time noting the details: the number of knots per square inch, the fabric of the carpet, the types of dye used—all the minutiae that resulted in the rug.

Or the person could have focused, instead, on the arresting techniques and themes that gave the carpet its unique beauty: the sky reflected in the lake, the snow that capped the mountains, the verdant forest complemented by the deep green moss. The themes of the carpet combined with one another in a deftly coordinated display of beauty to manifest the splendor of that serene spot in the Alps.

This quarter we will be studying another finely crafted masterpiece. This work is not the result of a brush on canvas, or a precisely framed photograph, or a skillfully woven carpet. Rather, it is the Word of God, as artfully expressed in the Gospel of John.

Words have meaning within their contexts. For anyone to understand what Scripture intends to say, it must be studied in context—the immediate sentences, chapters, and sections, and the overall message of the Bible itself. Finally, because the entire Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each part should be studied in the context of the whole.

The intention this quarter will be to understand the message of John's Gospel. It is unique among the four Gospels, often focusing attention on personal interviews between Jesus and just one or two people—such as Nathanael, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, the man born blind, Lazarus and his sisters, Pilate, Peter, or Thomas. Many of these stories appear only in John.

The Gospel of John is the Word of God conveyed to us through the apostle. As with the entire Bible, the Gospel came by the will of God, rather than by the will of humanity. John was merely the willing instrument that the Holy Spirit used to convey many crucial themes: the Word (*logos*), light, bread, water, the Holy Spirit, oneness, signs, testimony, and prophecy. These themes mutually enhance and illuminate one another throughout the Gospel.

*May the Gospel of John
carry us back to the life
and ministry of Jesus
Christ, whom to know
is life eternal.*

Bible study often concentrates on the meaning of a word or a small passage of Scripture. We check the meaning of the word in a Bible dictionary. We examine the grammar, the immediate context, the historical context, and, using our analogy of the carpet, we get caught up in the examination of the number of knots per square inch, the fabric, the dyes, and the backing. All of this detail is important.

But let us not miss the big picture while examining the details. Indeed, just as the Persian carpet could transport someone to that beautiful Alpine scene, so may the Gospel of John carry us back to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. The details have a role, which is to point us toward the big picture, and in John that big picture is a divinely inspired revelation of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

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?

Heaviness in a Camp Cabin

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

An eerie heaviness rested on the red wooden cabin as eight Alaska Native girls prepared for bed on their first night at Camp Polaris, a Seventh-day Adventist summer camp in southwestern Alaska. All the girls felt it. The cabin's two counselors felt it. It was an intense feeling of evil and harm.

One counselor, 21-year-old Rachel, was physically exhausted but couldn't sleep. She sensed evil angels were more prevalent than usual. She thought about the eight teens in her cabin. Many of them had been abused, practiced self-harm, and struggled with drugs. One girl's uncle was a shaman.

Rachel got up and stoked the fire in a small black furnace. Even in August, the Alaskan summer nights were chilly. She began to sing about Jesus. Naturally shy, she didn't like to sing, especially by herself. But the song sprang from her lips. As she sang, Rachel visited each bunk bed and prayed with each girl. Finally, the girls fell asleep.

After that, Rachel sang every night and prayed with the girls.

One night, as she made the rounds, she asked a girl if she had any prayer requests. "Yes, I want to pray to be safe and protected," the girl said.

"Safe from what?" Rachel asked.

The girl said that in the darkness of the previous night, someone grabbed her by the neck. As she struggled to breathe, a bright light appeared, and the unseen being released his grip. In the bright light was an angel, and he said, "Do not be afraid." Peace immediately swept over the girl. She fell asleep and hadn't mentioned the incident to anyone until she spoke to Rachel.

After Rachel prayed with her, the girl became more interested in Jesus for the remainder of her time at camp. She was a quiet girl who didn't say much. But clearly a seed was planted in her heart.

Rachel was delighted when the girl returned to camp to train to become a staff member a few years later.

Rachel Carle, who now teaches at an Adventist school in Sitka, Alaska, still volunteers at Camp Polaris, the place where she witnessed the reality of the great controversy between good and evil as a young counselor.

"Working in Polaris has shown me that there are people in the United States who do not know Jesus," she said. "Working at this camp was why I decided to become a teacher in Alaska."



Thank you for your 2016 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped repair and expand Camp Polaris so more children could attend. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a center of influence at the Adventist church in Bethel, Alaska. The Bethel Church sends local children to Camp Polaris every year.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 2:1–11, John 5:1–9, John 5:10–16*

As we embark this quarter on our study, *Themes in the Gospel of John*, let us keep in mind a few biographical facts that set John apart from the other three Gospel writers. John was the youngest of the three writers, lived the longest, and wrote his account later than the other authors wrote theirs. John introduces himself modestly and indirectly as “this disciple” (*John 21:23, NKJV*). He was known among his fellow disciples as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (*John 21:20*). This reference may be rendered as “the disciple whom Jesus kept on loving,” which is even stronger than the past tense “loved.”

With this background before us, we would also do well to consider the significance of John’s name. John literally and fittingly means “the Lord is gracious.” To be gracious may also mean “to be loving.” John, the apostle of love, wrote much about this virtue in both his Gospel and his epistles, referring to himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (*John 13:23*). Does this verse, and others like it from John’s Gospel, suggest that Jesus was partial toward John, loving him more than the other disciples? Not at all! Divine love is abundant and available to everyone. It wasn’t that Jesus loved John the most but rather that John’s heart was more open and receptive to Jesus and His love.

John desired for all others to open their hearts wide to Christ and to believe in Him as the true Messiah and the divine Son of God. So, right after his introductory comments, John starts with the first miracle, in which Jesus changes water into wine at Cana. Have you ever witnessed an authentic miracle (notwithstanding the so-called miracles that are portrayed in religious media)? Why was it so important for Jesus to perform miracles? Is He as willing to perform such mighty miracles through the ministry of His followers today? This week, we will seek answers to these last two questions.

Part II: Commentary

John shows that Christ, by means of performing many signs and miracles, possessed divine power. These miracles point the way to the only Way that leads to eternal life. John alludes to only a few of these miracles—ideally, enough to convince his audience to accept the true assurance of salvation and live according to it. One cannot help but wonder what kinds of countless miracles John had witnessed but did not record. John testifies to the truth that “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*).

One may do well to ask, What is a “sign”? And what is the difference between a sign and a “miracle”? The word “miracle” comes from the Latin *miraculum*, which literally means something “divine in origin,” “to marvel about,” or “to be astonished at.”

There are two Greek terms in the New Testament that are used to describe what we refer to as miracles. *Dunamis* is the first term, which is literally interpreted to mean “power,” from which we get the words *dynamite*, *dynamic*, and *dynamism*—all referring to something powerful. Essentially, *dunamis* characterizes a miracle as a demonstration of Christ’s divine power in this world. Truly Christ possesses the power to utter His Word, and it is accomplished.

On the other hand, the second word, *semeion*, or a sign, refers to Christ’s authority. This term helps us to understand the miraculous work of Christ as a display of His divine authority in the world, particularly in subduing the powers of evil forces. Indeed, Christ has the authority to command demons to depart, and they do.

Why did Jesus perform so many miracles? First of all, they were done to fulfill certain human needs, which always included a spiritual dimension of forgiveness and restoration. Second, unlike a great deal of so-called miracles today, Jesus never performed miracles to satisfy human curiosity but to help those in need. “Neither here [when tempted by Satan] nor at any subsequent time in His earthly life did He work a miracle in His own behalf. His wonderful works were all for the good of others.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 119.

Third, Christ’s miracles served to give clear evidence of the veracity of His divine message and mission to lost humanity. When Jesus raised the widow’s son from the dead, the people proclaimed that “God has visited His people” (*Luke 7:16, NKJV*). That was explicit evidence of His true Messiahship. Fourth, His miracles served as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, corresponding to what God’s patriarchs and prophets had foretold about Him.

The Miracle at Cana (*John 2:1–11*)

It is interesting to note that the first miracle of Jesus (*John 2:1–11*) was performed in the context of marriage, which He first ordained in the Garden of Eden. Why do you think Jesus’ first miracle was about marriage? Marriage impacts all aspects of our existence. The devil knows how crucial marriage is, so he endeavors to bring about dysfunction and confusion to our homes, churches, schools, and society at large. Marriage, and how it is viewed in our society, is not always biblical or according to

God's plan. Today, on average, marriages in the United States last about six years.

Undoubtedly, through the miracle at Cana, Jesus highlighted the crucial importance of marriage and blessed it by His presence. By thus endorsing marriage, Jesus teaches us that He must be the center of every wedding in order to ensure marital success, for when we place Him first and foremost in our lives, He causes His love to overflow to our spouses and to others as well. So, this first miracle is very applicable to our postmodern culture and should encourage all to go back to the example of the One who designed it and blessed it. Let us then invite our Creator and Redeemer to order and bless all aspects of dating, courtship, and marriage to result in the utmost blessing to humanity and to bring glory to His name.

For His first miracle, Jesus could have chosen to perform a spectacular resurrection from the dead before a big crowd of Jewish leaders and dignitaries. But, instead, He chose a simple gathering in a small town and met its humble people where they were, in their everyday activities.

Jesus, our prime example, interacted with others to uplift and bless, as salt mingles with all types of food to transform it into something palatable. "He [Jesus] reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good. . . . He met them at their daily vocations, and manifested an interest in their secular affairs."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151. Moreover, "we are not to renounce social communion. We should not seclude ourselves from others. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 152.

We see Christ's method for reaching people—to uplift and bless them—evident even in the changing of water into wine. The water could be seen as representing our baptism into Christ, and the pure, unfermented grape juice His shed blood for our redemption. Moreover, Jesus replaced the fermented wine, which dulled people's senses, with the fresh and invigorating grape juice that helped bring them back to their senses.

The Miracle at the Pool of Bethesda (*John 5:1–9*)

Often physical sickness involves the violation of spiritual laws. Our human mechanism is an integrated and interrelated creation. Whatever impacts one dimension affects the other. But we must be careful not to judge or condemn others in attributing all physical ailments to the willful violation of God's law, because all human beings, at one time or another, have succumbed to sin. It is hurtful and disheartening to the sufferers of sin to be told that they deserve what is plaguing them. Like Jesus, our tender and sympathetic attitude should surmount our impulse to set everything straight before we help. Jesus demonstrates this principle in action in the

story of the miraculous healing of the crippled man by the pool at Bethesda.

How encouraging, and instructive, that Jesus does not engage in a critical analysis of the causes of the man's crippled condition. Hasn't he suffered for 38 long years with this disabling disease? Why add more to his guilt and suffering? As followers of Christ, we must focus on solutions to problems, not merely on the problems. This man seemed to be the most miserable and hopeless around the pool of Bethesda, so Jesus chose him to show that He desired to use His divine power to help the most helpless.

Notice that, on this particular occasion, Jesus did not ask the man whether he believed or not, only if he desired to be well. Then Jesus commanded the man to get up, carry his bed, and walk. The man did not doubt or wait to be made well; he immediately acted on Jesus' command. Likewise, we, too, regardless of the misfortunes of our seemingly hopeless physical and spiritual challenges, need to look up to Jesus and live. No matter how long and hard we may have looked for the answer in other places, the answer is standing right next to us in the form of our lovely Savior.

Consider, and take to heart, God's answer to all kinds of crippling ailments: "Do not wait to feel that you are made whole. Believe His word, and it will be fulfilled. . . . 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."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 203.

Hard Hearts (*John 5:10–16*)

Hard hearts, if long cherished, lead to hardened hearts. The hearts of the Pharisees were set against Jesus from the beginning, simply because He did not fit into their religious mold and adhere to the rigor and minutiae of their rituals and traditions. In so doing, they purposely ignored the bigger issues of salvation. Standing before the walking miracle of the once hopeless and helpless man who for decades could not walk and whom Jesus had just healed by the pool of Bethesda, the leaders callously overlooked the obvious cause of jubilation. Instead, their concern was with the proper keeping of the Sabbath.

The leaders who witnessed the healing of the crippled man were totally obsessed with Sabbath regulations. That is why they harshly questioned him about carrying his mattress on the Sabbath, as Jesus had instructed him to do. They were upset that the man carried his bed; yet, they did not think about the suffering or the well-being of this man, who could not move for many years and who was now carrying himself with the vigor of youth. But Jesus, the Designer and Lord of the Sabbath, intentionally performed many miracles on the Sabbath to make abundantly clear that this special day was meant to be a blessing for humanity, and not a burden or a curse on it.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. How do we balance being in the world but not of it?**

- 2. Regarding our discussion of miracles, how do we understand the difference and similarity between *dunamis* and *semeion*? What examples do we find in each of Christ's miracles? Does the miracle of casting out demons fit in the category of *semeion*? Explain.**

- 3. What are some of the dangers of becoming immovable and thus intolerant in our own opinions? How do we guard ourselves from the folly of trusting in our self-serving ideas and ignoring the spirit of the law, which is the bigger picture? How would you react to the following sayings: "My way or the highway," or "I've made up my mind; don't confuse me with facts"?**

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”?

Revival in Rural Colombia

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Pablo had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists. A leader among the Sikuani indigenous people in Colombia, he was far from home when he was invited to a Sabbath worship service.

“This Saturday, we will have a meeting,” someone said. “Come!”

Pablo went to the morning service and saw that people studied the Bible. He returned for the afternoon service and heard people asking Bible questions. He was amazed that Cristian Camilo, the 25-year-old missionary who had led the morning service, answered every question from the Bible.

When he got a chance, Pablo had his own question. “What do I need to do to become a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?” he asked.

“We can start Bible studies,” Cristian said.

He gave Pablo a set of 20 Bible lessons in Pablo’s own native Sikuani language. Pablo was pleased and asked for lessons for the rest of his family.

Cristian gave Pablo a Bible and promised to travel to his community with lessons for his family.

Cristian was responsible for a large territory, and three months passed before he was able to visit Pablo. He traveled with two Sikuani Adventists because he couldn’t find Pablo’s rural community without their help.

Pablo welcomed Cristian and announced that he had finished studying the 20 Bible lessons. He said he also had given Bible studies to his family and the rest of the community, and 15 people were ready to be baptized.

Cristian, who had arrived on a Friday, spent the rest of the day answering Bible questions and checking whether the people were ready for baptism. When the sun set, he led an evening worship program.

On Sabbath morning, Cristian led the community in a divine worship service. Afterward, one man said, “There’s a lake over there.” Another said, “We want to be baptized right now!” That Sabbath, five people were baptized: Pablo, his mother, his two brothers, and a sister-in-law.

Today, Pablo is giving Bible studies to his people.



“There are many people who are hungry for the Word of God in Pablo’s community,” Cristian said. “Like Pablo, there are many people who are waiting to be reached.”

Thank you for your prayers for missionaries who, like Cristian, face huge challenges reaching unreached people groups in Colombia and elsewhere around the world. Learn about Adventist Mission’s work to reach unreached people groups at: bit.ly/GMPioneers.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 9:1–34, John 11:1–44, John 6:14*

Consider anew the amazing fact that the divine and eternal Son of God emptied Himself and became God in the flesh. This astounding reality is abundantly substantiated in the Scriptures. Our limited human faculties are definitely challenged by trying to grasp this limitless reality. To aid us in this endeavor, God has done His utmost to help us comprehend, as much as possible, this Bible truth unto salvation.

This week, we shall consider three miracles that stand as definite proof of Christ's divinity. These miracles certainly provide added evidence that Jesus was more than a mere man. Consider, by way of example, His transfiguration on the mountain, where His inner circle of three disciples witnessed His dazzling, divine glory. Suddenly, He was "transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light" (*Matt. 17:2, NKJV*). Moreover, this miracle was plainly attested to by the resurrected Moses and translated Elijah.

Or who can deny the divinity of Jesus in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000? Such a phenomenon was unique, unprecedented in history. Some believed; yet, strangely enough, others did not, in spite of clear evidence. How tragic that stubbornness and pride led them to see darkness instead of the Light of the world, standing right there before them. The great I AM, with whom their revered prophet Moses was acquainted, dwelt among them, but they rebelled against receiving Him as their Messiah.

Temporal bread in the feeding of the 5,000 was intended to direct the attention of the people to Christ, the Bread of Life, who gives and sustains not only corporeal life but life everlasting. Reflecting further upon the "I AM" expression within the context of John's Gospel, we realize that John was especially attentive to the divine depiction of God as revealed to Moses at the burning bush: "And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" (*Exod. 3:14, NKJV*). Jesus applied this title directly to Himself, in such statements as " 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' " (*John 14:6*), and " 'I am the resurrection, and the life' " (*John 11:25*).

In John 9:1–34, Jesus' divine power also was manifested in the healing of the blind man and, particularly, as amplified in John 11, in the amazing miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. In the following commentary, we will study these two miracles more in depth.

Part II: Commentary

What a stupendous event it will be when we see Jesus' face and our mortal

flesh is transformed, fashioned after His own immortal, glorious body! We will know Him, experience His love, and spend an eternity in His presence, without ever exhausting the theme of His matchless love or fully fathoming His eternal nature.

“This Is Truly the Prophet” (John 6:14, NKJV)

When Christ fed the 5,000 from the few, simple ingredients of a boy’s lunch, those who witnessed the miracle said this about Jesus: “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14, NKJV). These words hearken back to the words of Moses, which point to a type of Jesus: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deut. 18:15, NKJV).

It is reasonable to think of Moses as a type of Jesus. Moses and Jesus are similar in their mission of delivering people from bondage, for example. Of all biblical characters, Moses comes closest to Jesus in His ministry of intercession. After Israel in the wilderness rebelled against God in worshiping the golden calf, Moses offered to die in their place, to be their substitute. In Exodus 32:32, we read the moving account of Moses’ pleading with God to spare the lives of His rebellious people. Moses speaks to God, saying: “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (NKJV).

Moses’ self-sacrificing devotedness to his wayward people and his plea to die in the place of others is admirable. But such a gracious offer cannot forgive sin and commute its penalty, death, for only the sacrifice of the divine “Prophet” Jesus can accomplish such an impossible feat. Jesus alone is the One who possesses the requisite righteousness and life to exchange for our sin and death.

The Healing of the Blind Man (John 9:1–34)

As we saw last week in the narrative of the crippled man, he was in that hopeless state for 38 years. But the blind man in John 9 was “blind from birth” (John 9:1, NKJV). Imagine never having the chance to see anything or anybody!

Moreover, adding insult to injury, this poor blind man not only suffered physically, but he also suffered spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. The public perception was that those who were sick in society were suffering because of their own sins or the sins of their parents. The blind man was made to believe that not only others looked upon him as guilty but God also looked upon him with disfavor.

This misconception was also in the disciples’ minds, hence their question, “‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born

blind?’ ” (*John 9:2, NKJV*). In their desire to assign blame, they were akin to many well-meaning but mistaken Christians of today. In a similar fashion, Job’s misguided friends attempted to place the blame on him for his terrible tragedy and sickness. Let us learn from their mistakes. Why not, instead, follow the example of Jesus in focusing on the solution and not the problem? He came to this world not to condemn but to save. (*See John 3:17.*)

Jesus’ answer expanded His disciples’ vision of His mission to a higher level. God desired to use this man’s blindness to reveal His mighty healing power. Moreover, this miracle was intended to reveal that Christ is the giver of eternal life and wisdom, inspiring people with the light of His truth and salvation. Christ linked His work with the light of day, saying, “ ‘I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world’ ” (*John 9:4, 5, NKJV*).

How telling and ironic that the religious leaders, with their physical sight intact, stubbornly refused to see the light that Christ shone all around them. Thus, they willfully shrouded themselves deeper and deeper in spiritual darkness until their blindness to the true light was irreversible. By contrast, the blind man’s openness to Christ’s light not only enabled him to see physically with his eyes but also enabled him to have the enlightened spiritual insight needed to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, who alone is worthy of worship.

Jesus could have healed this blind man immediately. But for His own wise reasons, He wanted the afflicted man to participate in his own healing process. After He used saliva to make clay, the Savior smeared the concoction upon the blind man’s eyes. The hands that made and applied the salve were hands of the Healer and Creator Himself, who fashioned the earth and the stars. The blind man, thus anointed with clay, obeyed Christ’s words and immediately proceeded to the pool of Siloam to wash. Upon washing, he was instantly healed. Compare this story with the Old Testament narrative of Naaman, general of the Syrian army. Naaman was instructed by the prophet Elijah to wash seven times in the Jordan River to be healed from leprosy. At first, Naaman strongly objected. But then he relented and washed himself and was miraculously cleansed.

The wet clay contained no magical properties; Christ alone was the true Healer. The Savior merely used this substance as a conduit for His power. Also, we may argue that Jesus used simple remedial agents to encourage their use in healing. “Christ made use of the simple agencies of nature. While He did not give countenance to drug medication, He sanctioned the use of simple and natural remedies.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 824.

Is Jesus as able and willing to heal today, instantaneously or gradually,

through direct miracles and simple remedies? How should we participate in His healing ministry as His representatives? Contemplate this inspired statement: “He [Jesus] is just as willing to heal the sick now as when He was personally on earth. Christ’s servants are His representatives, the channels for His working. He desires through them to exercise His healing power.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 823, 824.

The Resurrection of Lazarus (*John 11:1–44*)

Jesus said to Martha, “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*). Notice, again, that Jesus uses the divine “I AM” to highlight that He does not merely give life, but He is life itself. This promise guarantees its fulfillment when Jesus returns to take His loved ones home. Those who sleep in Christ will be awakened in a split second at the resurrection, as if no time has passed.

Those who rest in Jesus rest as if already raised from the dead, for they already share in Christ’s eternal life and destiny. Jesus affirmed this glorious reality by assuring His disciples, “ ‘Because I live, you will live also’ ” (*John 14:19, NKJV*). Jesus is life itself and the Life and the Life-Giver. Believing in these Bible truths, we really should have no fear of death. In his first epistle, John reiterates this truth: “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (*1 John 5:11, 12, NKJV*).

This glorious hope is what the world desperately needs, for absolutely nobody possesses life except Christ. He is the only One who is the perfect solution to humanity’s demise. This truth is the best news ever, and we must be eager to share it with a dying world! “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. . . . The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. Consider the biblical term “prophet.” Why does the Bible refer to Jesus as one? This designation may confuse some people because He was not merely a prophet. For example, Muslims believe that Jesus is a prophet. However, we believe that He is more: Jesus also is the divine Son of God and the Savior of the world.**

2. Moses served as a type of Christ in His intercession for God's rebellious people. Christ interceded for the ones who were crucifying Him. Who in the book of Acts comes closest to Jesus in interceding for his enemies? How can such a parallel instruct us in how we should view our persecutors?

3. Why is spiritual blindness incurable apart from the healing intervention of God?

4. Jesus said that the sins of the parents did not cause the suffering of the blind man. How then do you reconcile this truth with Exodus 20:5 about "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me" (NKJV)?

5. Although it is abundantly clear from John 14:19 and 1 John 5:11, 12 that we have the assurance of salvation in Christ, why, then, is it a challenge to actualize this assurance in our lives? How do we explain a believer's fear of death?

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 is it 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* (*doxa*: 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?

A Sabbath Seed

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A Native American man walked onto the construction site.

“What are you guys building here?” he asked, watching volunteers place log walls on the concrete foundation of the All Nations Center in Wapato, a town in the U.S. state of Washington. “Another church?” he said, shaking his head. “You guys don’t even know what day of the week to keep.”

A construction leader, Jeff Weijohn, struck up a conversation with the man, who had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists. The man thought that the new church would be open for worship on Sunday, but he believed that the Creator should be worshiped on Saturday.

Jeff was surprised. “It was the first time that I heard that some Native Americans have a history of Sabbath keeping,” Jeff said in an interview.

Later, Jeff sought clarification from a historian familiar with Native American history. The historian confirmed that one or two tribes on the Yakama Indian Reservation, where Wapato is located, traditionally believed that the seventh day was the Creator’s day and worshiped Him on that day.

The realization that God had planted a Sabbath seed in Native hearts energized Jeff and his wife, Terri, in mission outreach to Native Americans.

The outreach program got its start with the help of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 1990. A highlight of the program is the All Nations Center, which opened in 2001 and was designed as a multipurpose building. It has a worship corner, where people gather to worship on Sabbath mornings; a food area, where meals are served and an annual Mother’s Day brunch draws 300 to 400 people; and volleyball and basketball courts, where up to 200 children and their parents come for game nights. The center also offers day camps, Vacation Bible Schools, and after-school tutoring.

Native Americans and others can lease space. “One reason we built the facility was because the community had nowhere to meet,” Jeff said.

In a notable instance, a Native American leader chose the site over a native-owned casino to conduct health seminars, saying gambling was destroying his people.

“It was quite a testimony that he didn’t want anything to do with the casino,” Jeff said.

The center’s culturally sensitive concept has proven so successful that it has been replicated elsewhere, including in Canada, he said.



Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings that continue to make a difference. Pray that God uses them to proclaim the everlasting gospel to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 1:9–13; John 1:14, 18; John 17:1–5*

More than anywhere else in the Scriptures, the Gospel of John boldly proclaims, precisely and powerfully, the truth that Jesus is God. As God eternal, Jesus precedes Creation and eternity itself. The beloved disciple dwells on the theme of Jesus’ divinity in such depth in order to illuminate the cosmic truth that the Word became flesh.

As Moses launches the Old Testament by asserting the truth of Creation, so John makes the same proclamation in the New Testament. Thus the theme of Creation—and its Creator, the Word, who is God—unites both the Old Testament and the New Testament together. By anchoring his Gospel in Creation from the beginning, John provides a theological anchor for every other discussion to follow.

For John, the subject of Jesus as Creator was vital because Satan, the great deceiver, hated the truth of Christ’s divinity and of His equality with God. Near the end of the first Christian century, dark heresies subtly entered the church. Gnostic heretics questioned the reality of Jesus’ divinity, spreading doubt about His true incarnation in the flesh. This dangerous phenomenon occurred approximately three decades after the writing of the synoptic Gospels. Consequently, it brought discouragement among the believers and lowered their spiritual morale.

The first 18 verses of John’s Gospel constitute a prologue to the rest of his Gospel. They provide an unshakable, concise, and compact theological statement about Christ’s divinity. Christ the Word is God and has ever been. He is the Creator and the Life and Light-Giver; yet He became a human being, born of God, and demonstrated His love, grace, and glory before His creation.

Part II: Commentary

The divine *Logos* (Word) in John 1:1 is used to signify God’s expressive will and creative power. Through both Creation and revelation, God has clearly expressed His character and His acts as seen throughout the Scriptures. And now, God reveals Himself through the incarnation of His Son. No doubt should remain in our minds regarding God’s love for us because He manifested Himself in Jesus.

Remember how the Lord answered when Philip asked Him to reveal the Father? Jesus said, “ ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father?” ’ ” (*John 14:9, NKJV*).

“By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and

to angels. He was the Word of God,—God’s thought made audible.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19. This expression of God’s character existed, John tells us, from the very beginning. What does John mean by the words “In the beginning”? The Greek text lacks the definite article “the” as supplied by the King James Version and other English language translations, which render the meaning of the word “beginning” as more specific. The absence of the definite article in the Greek implies no definite time, as such, that can be pinned down or calculated, but rather an indefinable time that reaches beyond any beginning. In other words, the Word, Jesus, was forever there, pre-existent, before there was any creation.

The Word Was Made Flesh (*John 1:14, 18*)

Logos can be understood as truth, ideal existence, perfect thought, and expression. In Greek thinking, *logos* was an ethereal notion, hovering over humanity without inhabiting humanity. Christ, the Word, was not any vague philosophical concept but a real and tangible reality that could be seen and touched. He was indeed unique, one of a kind, the divine Son of God.

When Christ became flesh in our likeness (not sameness), His humanity veiled His divinity; yet, He remained fully God. Indeed, He became similar to us in order to sympathize with us; but He remained different from what we are in order to save us. What an amazing act of divine condescension for God to humble Himself and become man! We cannot fully comprehend this mystery of divine love, but we must heartily appreciate and embrace it. In many world religions, man futilely attempts to experience ascent to the so-called “gods”; but in Christianity, God actually descends to our level to meet us where we are.

In John 1:14, the precise, and only, adjective describing Jesus is the Greek word *monogenous*, translated as “only begotten,” which literally means unique. This uniqueness is so momentously important and so indispensable that our salvation depends on it. For without it, we would forever be condemned to death in our sins instead of redeemed by the righteousness and life of the only begotten Son of God.

The word “begotten” (*John 1:14, 18*) has been misapplied throughout the history of Christianity in ways that the Bible never intended—namely, that at some indefinite and distant time, before anything was created, the Son was begotten, or created, by the eternal Father. But this notion is fallacious. Christ was truly the originator and the Creator of all things, not a created being. John asserts without any hesitancy that Christ was God, and with God, from eternity: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:3, NKJV*).

Yes, the mystery of the Incarnation is hard to fathom because the infinite God endeavored to reach our finite minds to save us. And to save us, God went to the extreme extent of sacrificing His only Son. This act

was truly radical. Christ voluntarily humbled Himself, became human, and died for sinful humanity. He willingly altered His eternal nature to retain our humanity forever. Instead of remaining fully divine, now He is both fully divine and fully human. What a tangible demonstration of self-sacrificing love for the entire universe to behold!

The incarnate Son of God “dwelt” among us (*John 1:14*). “Dwelt” is the translation of the Greek word *skenoō*, which literally means He “tented” with us. This notion hearkens back to Exodus 25:8, in which God says to Moses: “ ‘And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them’ ” (*NKJV*). The idea that God desires to be with us continuously is one of the major themes of the entire Bible. God does not want to be a temporary resident but a permanent one. That is why the heaven-given name of God incarnate is “Immanuel,” God with us.

What is so fascinating about this reality is the honor that God affords us in dwelling among us. One tangible sign that someone desires to be with us is that this person loves us. You see, *agape* love always seeks togetherness, and that is why it makes so much sense when Jesus promised His disciples: “ ‘And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also’ ” (*John 14:3, NKJV*). This beautiful reality should fill us with holy joy and confidence to experience His presence here, so that we may dwell with Him in perfection forever in heaven.

Hearing, or Not Hearing, the Word (*John 1:9–13*)

Our subheading here also may be reframed as “seeing, or not seeing, the Word.” It seems foolish to deny the light that illuminates us; likewise, it is irrational to have ears to hear and to stop them from hearing. The voice of truth is loud and clear, but people choose to turn a deaf ear; thus, the glorious light of the gospel is shed all around, but people embrace darkness. In a very real sense, this phenomenon is part of the mystery of iniquity.

Such rebellion reminds us of God’s astonishment at His people for wrong choices that make no sense. “ ‘But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. . . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live’ ” (*Deut. 30:14, 19, NKJV*). Rebellion against God’s light and life, in choosing darkness and death, is but following Lucifer’s tragic example.

Reappearing Themes—Belief/Unbelief

God has given all His creatures the freedom of choice so that they may love Him freely. However, they often abuse and misuse such freedom to their own detriment. Some go so far as to say that either choice, wrong or right, is fine, so long as we choose. After all, they claim that Christ’s death on the cross grants them freedom of choice and immunity to its consequences.

But such thinking is perilous, for it encourages people to be careless about their choices. The reason that Jesus died on the cross was to save us from our sins and to give us life. Freedom of choice was granted to humanity prior to the Cross and hearkens back to the Garden of Eden. So, while the freedom to choose is always available to humanity, we must encourage those in the valley of decision to choose what is right in God's eyes. Some say that the outcome does not matter so much because all prodigals eventually return to God. However, many do not, even though God is always willing to forgive and restore the wayward ones to Himself as they choose to believe in Him.

Reappearing Themes—Glory (*John 17:1–5*)

Knowing that His hour had come, Jesus was ready to face the cross. But He also anticipated the joy and glory that awaited Him. The joint mission of salvation that Father and Son agreed on from the foundation of the world was about to be successfully carried out. The devil was soon to be defeated decisively at the cross.

Christ, in His heroic work to save those who believe in Him, descended to the lowest pit, only to be raised up in glory. Paul attests to this fact when he says that Christ “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (*Phil. 2:8, 9, NKJV*). Do you see how Paul contrasts the joy and the shame in Christ's salvific act? Thus, we may say that Christ's anticipation of salvation for the world was a glorious experience, in spite of the shame He endured on the cross. Jesus “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Heb. 12:2, NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. Regarding the Word: How did the words of Christ (the Word) represent Him when He was here in this world?**

- 2. Are you ever assailed by doubts about the character of God the Father? Why, or why not? Reflect carefully on Jesus' words to**

Philip, reminding him that seeing Him is the same as seeing the Father. How can these words assuage your doubts?

3. How do the meanings of “unique” and “begotten” relate to the one-of-a-kind salvation offered to us in Christ?

4. Christ will retain His human nature for eternity. He indeed altered His eternal nature forever by becoming totally human and totally divine. How does this reality impact your life now and your hope for the future?

5. If we believed that, instead of saving us from our sins, Jesus died to give us freedom of choice, what would be the effect of this thinking on making crucial decisions in matters of obedience and disobedience? Some think that God is neutral when it comes to our decision-making. If such were the case, how do you reconcile this notion with God’s urging us to make the right decisions?

6. Regarding shame and glory: How do you reconcile the two concepts in the life and ministry of Christ? Have you ever experienced being shamed for Christ’s sake? How can this experience lead to being honored before 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?

Power of Prayer in Uzbekistan

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

An ambulance rushed 36-year-old Nigora to the hospital in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She could barely talk. Her arms were numb. She was struggling to swallow. The doctor couldn't diagnose her condition.

Nigora grew worse over the next month in the hospital. She couldn't sleep for more than 15 minutes a day. X-rays showed activity in her brain.

Then a second doctor said Nigora had a terminal illness. He saw no hope.

Nigora didn't believe in Jesus, but she had Seventh-day Adventist neighbors who did. They visited her in intensive care and asked for permission to invite their church pastor to come and pray with her. "No, no," Nigora said. "I'm not well. I look terrible. Tell him to come when I feel better."

But the neighbors insisted. "Let him come and pray for you," they said.

Reluctantly, Nigora agreed. A day later, the pastor and his wife came to Nigora's bed. The pastor read Psalm 23, anointed Nigora's forehead with oil, and prayed, "Lord, give health to our sister. Give her healing so she can make a full recovery." Nigora didn't feel any different after the prayer.

The next day, the pastor and his wife returned. Again he read from the Bible, anointed her, and prayed. Again Nigora didn't feel any different. But that night, she was able to sleep for several hours, not for 15 minutes.

The third day, the pastor and his wife returned. Again he read from the Bible, anointed her, and prayed. Again she didn't feel any different. But that night, she slept the whole night. After that, she slept well every night.

The pastor and his wife continued to visit. Slowly, Nigora's speech improved. Her arms and legs began to function. Hospital X-rays showed that her brain activity had returned to normal. The doctor was astonished.

"It's impossible that you have recovered, and so quickly," he said.

Four months after the pastor began praying, Nigora was driving her car and back at work.

The woman who hadn't believed in God credited Him for her recovery.

"This is a miracle of God," she said.

She is glad to have neighbors who cared for her. "I'm very grateful to God that He gave me these kind of friends, who are like family," she said, speak-



ing slowly but clearly in an interview with Adventist Mission.

Although Nigora believes in God, she has not given her heart to Him. A discouraging factor may be that many people in Uzbekistan view Seventh-day Adventists as members of a sect. Please pray for Nigora and others like her who have witnessed God's power in their lives but have yet to make a decision for Him. Nigora is a pseudonym.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 1:35–39, John 1:43–46*

Jesus, the Source of all truth, illuminated the world with the light of truth. In this way, He increased the measure of light given to everyone born into this world. Despite the abundance of convincing evidence, some in Christ’s day chose to shroud themselves in darkness. In their prejudice and pride, they determined to hear no truth and to see no light. God is saddened when this happens, but, in His love, He allows us to make our choices, even the wrong ones.

This lesson will highlight the testimony of a few eyewitnesses of Jesus, such as John the Baptist and his two disciples—namely, Andrew and John. We will also consider the eyewitness of Philip and Nathanael, and the witness of Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a distinguished member of the Sanhedrin, who opened his heart to the light of God’s truth. His testimony promises to be strong and convincing because he risked much in going against his powerful peers. In his night talk with Jesus, the lips of Christ uttered the most beautiful promise of the Bible: “ ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’ ” (*John 3:16, NKJV*).

Returning to the eyewitness of John, we must ask: Why would John the Baptist, well respected and admired by the people, give to the world anything other than a true testimony concerning Jesus? John encapsulated the entire gospel in his confirmation that Jesus was indeed the prophesied “ ‘Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*), a prophecy now indeed fulfilled before the people’s eyes. Confronted with the testimonies of such eyewitnesses, should we not be fully persuaded that Christ is our living Savior and Lord?

Part II: Commentary

The Testimony of John the Baptist

The Jews in the time of Christ had their own ideas about the coming Messiah, and they were adamant that everything fit into their neatly packaged schemes. They suspected that John the Baptist was perhaps a Messiah type, but he testified that he was only a forerunner of the true Messiah, sent prophetically by God to prepare the way for Him. Soon after, John pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God.” But Jesus and His sacrifice for our sins did not align with the Jewish leaders’ expectation of a royal earthly Messiah, who would defeat their oppressors and rule over them and, eventually, the world.

Today, some skeptics do not have much regard for the biblical concept of sacrifice either. They point to Christ's sacrifice to justify their indifference. These skeptics say that Jesus did not need to shed His blood to save sinful humanity, for He could have saved us simply through a demonstration of His love and by the performance of miracles. But life, as the Bible tells us, is in the blood, and lost humanity needed the life that is in the Son. Angels could not have accomplished this feat on behalf of humanity because they borrow life from the Possessor of life. Why else would God have commanded countless sacrifices of innocent animals if not to point to the necessity of Christ's innocent blood for the remission of sin and the giving of eternal life?

For this reason, John unmistakably said that " 'I am not the Christ' " (*John 1:20*) or the Light, but merely a witness in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Twice John affirmed that Jesus was indeed the Lamb of God, the fulfillment and culmination of the sacrificial system. He spoke this truth to the crowd the moment he glimpsed Jesus, and he also affirmed this same truth to two of his own disciples (*see John 1:29, 36*).

John the Baptist, an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' baptism, heard the voice of the Father announce that Jesus was His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. Also, the Holy Spirit descended and remained on Jesus as God impressed John of the Savior's divinity. Therefore, John said: " 'I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God' " (*John 1:34, NKJV*). In the face of this proclamation, one can't help but wonder how much more evidence a skeptic requires to believe. Unfortunately, if someone chooses always to doubt, he then encloses himself in a shroud of darkness.

The Two Disciples of John (*John 1:35–39*)

The two disciples of John the Baptist—namely Andrew and John, the Gospel writer—had already heard John's preaching regarding the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Christ. So when their teacher directed their attention to Jesus, the great Teacher standing before them, they believed and desired to follow Him. Andrew and John could have been critical and judgmental, like the Pharisees, about every word and move of Jesus, but they chose to believe in the conviction of the Spirit. They also must have trusted in the earnestness and veracity of John the Baptist's incontrovertible biblical testimony.

The question may be asked: How do we know that the second disciple referred to was John the Beloved? Andrew is mentioned specifically by name, but John, possibly being modest or reticent about referring to himself by name, is indeed that second disciple. Andrew was the one who introduced his brother Peter to Jesus. Andrew, Peter, and John were the first three men who formed the nucleus of the original 12 disciples. "Leaving John [the Baptist], they went to seek Jesus. One of the two was Andrew, the brother of Simon; the other was John the evangelist. These

were Christ's first disciples."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 138.

Apparently these two disciples, Andrew and John, were keenly interested in the Messiahship of Jesus and the amazing truth that He would offer them. Notice their telling response to Jesus' inquiry as they started to follow Him. " 'What do you seek?' " He asked. Contrary to our expectation, they inquired about His residence.

" 'Where are you staying?' " (*John 1:38, NKJV*). They were not just interested in following Jesus; they desired to stay with Him to learn more of His mission. And they stayed with Him the rest of the day, learning amazing things about Him. How about us today? Do we desire merely to believe on Jesus but not to linger in His presence? Do we enjoy His company? Indeed, the only way for our lives to be transformed is to behold Him, as John had instructed his disciples.

Philip and Nathanael (*John 1:43–46*)

From Andrew, John, and Peter, we now turn our attention to Philip and Nathanael. Philip, sensing that his friend Nathanael was a bit prejudiced and certainly not gullible, tried to present more convincing evidence about the Messiah from Moses and the prophets. When Nathanael hesitated to believe upon hearing that Jesus was from Nazareth, Philip neither debated nor argued with him but simply invited him to " 'come and see' " (*John 1:46*). Notice that Jesus used this same approach with Andrew and John when He invited them to come and see for themselves.

There is something powerful and transformational about spending time with Christ. We may debate and argue theology and philosophy in favor of the truth with others, but, in the end, our witness is most effective when we kindly and earnestly invite them to discover Jesus for themselves. In our witness, we must focus on the priority of helping others to know Jesus personally, and then many objections or doubts may fade away. Teaching doctrines is certainly important, but we must start with Jesus as the heart of all knowledge.

It is important to note the contrast between how Nathanael viewed Jesus and how Jesus viewed him. Nathanael categorized Jesus as no good simply because He hailed from Nazareth. Unfortunately, we, too, sometimes do the same thing to others. We put them in certain cubbyholes based on nationality, race, culture, or other differences that we see. Contrary to Nathanael's initial assessment, Jesus was affirming toward this soon-to-be disciple. When Jesus saw him, He said, " 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' " (*John 1:47, NKJV*), a truly encouraging comment that led him to inquire more about this Nazarene. When Nathanael witnessed Jesus' prophetic ability, he promptly believed. " 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' " (*John 1:49, NKJV*).

The Witness of Nicodemus (*John 3:1–21*)

John, in his account of Jesus, distinguishes himself as the Gospel writer who dwells on the personal encounters that Jesus had with certain individuals, such as Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. In Jesus' encounters, He did not show partiality for one type of person over another. Rather, Jesus sought to engage meaningfully with all who were receptive to the truth, be it a highly regarded Jewish leader such as Nicodemus, or a despised Samaritan woman.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and an important member of the Sanhedrin, which served as the highest judicial system in Judaism, closest to home rule. The word "Sanhedrin" comes from the Greek word *sunedrion*, which literally means "a council." It was composed of 71 members, comprised of three divisions, according to Matthew 27:41, as follows:

1. Chief priests (the ruling high priest, retired high priests, and high priestly family members). This block was mostly Sadducees.
2. Scribes (predominately Pharisees).
3. Elders, who were representatives of chief aristocratic families.

The office of the chief high priest had become corrupt and was often bought and sold by Rome to the highest bidder.

Nicodemus's Greek name literally means "victor over the people." Known for his wealth, Nicodemus was also a distinguished teacher. He felt strongly convicted to meet with Jesus because of all the unusual things he had heard about Him. But he had to be careful. He could not do anything that would give offense to his fellow leaders and cause irreparable damage to his relations with them; yet, Nicodemus could not ignore the strong evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. That is why he met Jesus at night, where he enjoyed some privacy conversing with Him one-on-one. Jesus meets us where we are in our spiritual journey. He does not really mind how we come to Him, as long as we come with a sincere heart.

Nicodemus had opportunity to test the spiritual mettle of Jesus' unsullied character and integrity. As a consequence, Nicodemus later defended Jesus against the Sanhedrin, which wanted to condemn Him without hearing Him out, as we learn in John 7:51. Notice the progression of Nicodemus's experience with Jesus: he met privately with Him, learning about true conversion; he defended Him before the Sanhedrin; and then, at the end, he was courageous enough to help take His body off the cross for burial.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

1. **Consider God the Father's affirmation of His Son at His baptism. Is it ever possible that God may look at you and say the same thing that He**

said about His Son, that you are His beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased? Discuss. Be sure to read the encouraging answer on page 113 of *The Desire of Ages*, first paragraph, as you formulate your response. How do you apply the assurance found in this paragraph to your daily life, and what difference will that make?

2. Consider John's words about Jesus: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (*John 1:29, NKJV*). What difference would it make if we focused first on getting rid of our sins, then beholding Jesus, thus reversing the two ideas in this text? Explain.

3. How does Nicodemus's encounter with Jesus help you to witness effectively to influential people in society?

4. Compare and contrast Christ's effective witness to Nicodemus with that of His witness to Nathanael. What can you learn from both examples?

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?

Unsolicited Book in the Mail

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

For most of his life, Rob Schetky, a retired U.S. Navy officer, had struggled with the Bible and its meaning.

Once an agnostic, Rob was seeking God's will, but the Sabbath posed a problem. He fumed when people skipped church and engaged in everyday activities on Sunday. He asked, "Why are you playing golf on Sunday?" But inside he wondered, *Where in the Bible did God change the Sabbath?*

Rob stopped going to church. He was looking for a new church in Fairbanks, in the U.S. state of Alaska, when an unsolicited book arrived in his post office mailbox. "That's an interesting name," he thought, examining the book. "I wonder what *The Great Controversy* is."

Leaving the post office, he passed a stack of *Great Controversy* books that other people had discarded on a counter. It had been a mass mailing.

At home, Rob became engrossed in the book. He grew excited as he read how humans, not God, had changed the Sabbath day of worship. *Wow!* he thought. *Someone is telling the history of the church in a very logical way.*

Contacting a friend, he said, "I've found a great history of Christianity. It's called *The Great Controversy*." Later, the friend called back. "You've got to get away," he said. "That's the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They're a cult!"

Rob was surprised. He hadn't noticed the name of the book's author, Ellen White, and didn't know that she had cofounded the Adventist Church. "No, they are not a cult," he said. "They just believe in the Word of God."

After the conversation, Rob wondered if Adventists worshiped in Fairbanks. Looking online, he found a church located only a 10-minute drive away. On Sabbath, he grabbed his Bible and *The Great Controversy* and went to church. He had been reading the book for less than a month.

The first person to greet him at church was a Sabbath School teacher, Helen. She expressed surprise when she learned that he had come because of *The Great Controversy*. "You just destroyed my complaints," she said.

She had been worried that the small size of the book's text made it impossible to read. Yet Rob had already read three-fourths of the book—and he had come to church to learn more.



Today, seven years later, Rob is 70 and a church deacon. He still reads the Bible and the writings of Ellen White daily. "When I found the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I found a home, and I found truth," he said.

Join the Adventist world church in 2024 in the mass promotion and distribution of *The Great Controversy*. Ask your pastor or visit greatcontroversyproject.com for more details .

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 4:1–15, John 4:16–26, and John 4:27–42*

The Samaritans were despised by their Jewish neighbors. The Jews despised the Samaritans even more than they despised their Roman oppressors. The Samaritans were viewed as corrupt, insincere, and to be avoided at any cost. That is why travelers from the regions of Galilee avoided the shorter route to Jerusalem via Samaria and instead detoured through Perea, taking the longer route to the city.

The Samaritan problem started when Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.) took most of the population of Israel as captives to Assyria to settle there. These Israelites comprised what are known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. To complete this work of depopulation, the new Assyrian emperor, Sargon II (722–705 B.C.), exiled even more of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom.

To unify the Assyrian empire, people from Assyria and the Mesopotamian regions were brought into Israel to repopulate it. Thus, these newcomers mixed with the remnant of Israel, both religiously and racially. The outline here is but a brief overview of the events that transpired. Other negative incidents that occurred later on, such as the Samaritan attempt to sabotage the rebuilding efforts of the Jewish exiles when they returned to their country, only served to compound the problem and intensify racial tensions between the Samaritans and Jews.

Part II: Commentary

The Woman at the Well (*John 4:1–15*)

In His encounter with this Samaritan woman, Jesus went against accepted protocol and the strictly practiced traditions of the Jews, all in order to reach her for His kingdom. For example, Jesus permitted her a private audience even though she was a woman from Samaria. He asked her for a favor, which was not socially acceptable, for the Jews had no dealings with such despised and so-called “impure” people, particularly a woman.

In the culture of that time, asking for and receiving a favor from someone opened the door to friendship and obligated the receiver to return the favor. The woman seemed shocked that Jesus, a Jew, asked her, a despised Samaritan woman, to do something for Him, thus initiating a relationship. Let us consider her response: “ ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ ” (*John 4:9, NKJV*).

It is interesting to note that the tasks that she intended to accomplish were left undone. She was supposed to take a jar of water to her village of Sychar, but in her excitement about her amazing discovery of the Water of Life, she left the filled water jar behind. She meant to give Jesus the drink of water to alleviate His thirst, but she failed because she left in such a hurry. When Jesus' disciples came back with food to alleviate His hunger, they were utterly surprised that He was not hungry anymore.

“Leaving her waterpot spoke unmistakably as to the effect of His words. It was the earnest desire of her soul to obtain the living water; and she forgot her errand to the well, she forgot the Saviour's thirst, which she had purposed to supply.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 191. Jesus was deeply moved that such a despised woman opened her heart to Him as the long-awaited Messiah—a much better response than from many of His own people, who closed their minds to Him. So moved was Jesus in doing His Father's work in reclaiming lost souls for the kingdom of heaven that He lost His bodily thirst and hunger, sated as He was in His soul by heavenly water and nourishment.

Sometimes witnessing to others is done out of duty and viewed as drudgery. But witnessing should be a delight if Christ's spirit flows out of the heart. Then it is heart work rather than hard work. For those who experience this Christ-centered outreach, it is truly an overflow of the Spirit that pours forth from the human heart spontaneously. That is why Jesus said to His surprised disciples: “ ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’ ” (*John 4:34, NKJV*).

The Revelation of Jesus (*John 4:16–26*)

We can see a similarity between the Samaritan woman's response and Nicodemus's upon hearing the profound truth that proceeded from Christ's mouth. This illustrious member of the Sanhedrin tried to sidestep the crucial subject of his desperate need for spiritual conversion. Instead, Nicodemus feigned ignorance of the meaning of Christ's words and tried to equate the new-birth experience with going again, literally, into a mother's womb. Similarly, the despised woman of Sychar changed the subject in an attempt to stifle her conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. She diverted the conversation with Jesus to a current debate as to the proper place of worship.

Jesus kindly but pointedly brought her back to the crucial issue of recognizing that He was the Messiah standing before her. He also tactfully reminded her that her amalgamated religion of heathenism and Judaism did not lead to the true worship of God, for He is the Spirit and the fountain of truth. Christ said to her that “ ‘God is Spirit, and

those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth' ” (*John 4:24, NKJV*). In other words, true worship that leads to salvation is not so much about a place; rather, it is about the Person of Christ.

This simple woman, a sinner with a dubious character, was entrusted with the weighty truth that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. The Savior gradually led the Samaritan woman to the truth, culminating in His honoring her—more than anyone else before His resurrection—with the specific truth about His Messiahship. “ ‘I who speak to you am He’ ” (*John 4:26, NKJV*). Likewise, we must not show favoritism in reaching people, be they wealthy or poor, of “higher” or “lower” social status. Such distinction should not matter to us because it did not matter to Christ. All with whom we come in contact have one common denominator: their need of forgiveness and redemption.

The Testimony of the Samaritans (*John 4:27–42*)

In the culture of the Jews in Jesus’ day, there was an obligation to reciprocate hospitality, which was acceptable when the reciprocator was a fellow Jew but not when he or she was a Samaritan. Receiving a favor and reciprocating it tended to draw people closer to one another. For this reason, the Jews were totally against this practice with foreigners. But Jesus transcended the national prejudice of the Jews, for He came to minister and to save the high and the low, both within and without Jewish society. Furthermore, why would such a societal obligation bother Him when His mission was to go to the extreme extent of dying for humanity?

Jesus practiced reciprocity in His ministry, for He was willing to give and receive help. Such an approach is an effective way to validate others and help them to feel worthwhile and needed. Contemplate how effective this approach proved to be with the Samaritan woman. Jesus asked her for a simple drink of water, which she could provide, and He reciprocated with the gift of the Water of Life, which He alone could give. Then the woman, in turn, shared this good news with her people, and the entire town came to meet Jesus and to believe in Him.

Similarly, our witness should spread from one person to many in ever-widening spheres of influence. Also, Jesus opened Himself to others and permitted Himself to be vulnerable with them as well. Jesus invited intimacy and yearned for people to be caring and compassionate toward Him. Ellen G. White tells us that “at the home of Lazarus, Jesus had often found rest. The Saviour had no home of His own; He was dependent on the hospitality of His friends and disciples. . . . He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 524.

In closing, let us consider this quote that touches on the reciprocity that Jesus experienced with the Samaritans of Sychar. Even though He was a Jewish rabbi, “He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept with them under their roofs, ate with them at their tables.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 26. We often find it a challenge to practice reciprocity in our witness to others. Perhaps because we feel so greatly blessed by the wonderful truths that God gave us, we tend to be helpers but often do not permit ourselves to be the recipients of help. However, we become more effective if we humble ourselves and practice Christ’s example of giving and receiving.

Part III: Life Application

Answer the following questions:

- 1. What hindrances to our witness do we encounter in our interpersonal contacts with others, such as neighbors, colleagues, and friends? What roles, if any, do different languages, racial backgrounds, cultural customs, and economic status have in impacting our witness? How can God help us to overcome such obstacles? How can the example of Jesus greatly help us in this regard? Remember that Jesus left a perfect existence in heaven to face every problem and sinful practice that has beset humanity.**

- 2. Consider the following situation: church members do not want to do any evangelism or witnessing because they are afraid newcomers to the church may possibly alter the worship practices to which they are accustomed. How would you react to this challenge?**

3. Think of your favorite hobby. To what extent do you become so absorbed in the sheer delight of doing it that you forget to eat? Similarly, how can Christ's example of witnessing to the Samaritan woman move us from the realm of duty to the domain of delight?

4. How do we react when the Holy Spirit convicts us of truth, righteousness, and sin, especially concerning things that we want to ignore? Are we as patient as the Samaritan woman was in listening to Jesus tell the "rest of the story" so that, consequently, we may become healed and restored to Him?

5. Recall an incident or a providential leading in which God used you to influence one individual to accept and live for Him. How did that contact impact other persons or even larger groups of people? Take time to share your experience with one or more people this week.

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A STORY TO TELL



Two options for sharing the mission story about Hariette in Sabbath School:

Option No. 1: Open the *Children's Mission* quarterly and show a photo of Hariette as you tell the story of how the 92-year-old native Alaskan grandmother joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church on St. Lawrence Island, one of the remotest spots in the United States and located in the Bering Sea just 35 miles from Russia.

Option No. 2: Make Hariette's story come alive with photos of her, her home, and St. Lawrence Island, and a mission map with Thirteenth Sabbath projects. At the end of the story, show a short video of Hariette singing praises to God in her native Siberian Yupik language.

How will you share the mission story next Sabbath?

Learn more in the *Children's Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/childrensmmission) and the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/adultmission).



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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?

“We Didn’t Send Anyone”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

For four years, Donaldo Velasquez visited a Colombian prison every Friday to preach about Jesus. But one Friday, he couldn’t go. He worked as a carpenter, and a client urgently needed his help. Moreover, Donaldo needed the money.

Only four Seventh-day Adventists—Donaldo, two other church members, and their pastor—had permission to visit the prison in Acacias, and Donaldo called them for help. “No, I’m too busy,” Ranses said. Pedro also said he couldn’t go. The pastor apologized, saying he was out of town.

Donaldo wept and prayed. When his wife, Jesusita, asked what was wrong, he explained that he didn’t want to skip the meeting with the inmates but he needed to work. “Go, do your job,” Jesusita said. “God will provide.”

The next time Donaldo visited the prison, 38 inmates came to hear him preach. He was accompanied by another church member, Pedro.

“Where is the man who came last time?” an inmate asked.

“We didn’t send anyone,” Donaldo replied.

“Yes, you did,” said another inmate. “A man preached to us.”

“No, we didn’t send anyone,” Donaldo said, and he suggested that perhaps the preacher had belonged to another denomination.

“No, no,” the inmates said. “We know everyone who has permission to visit. This man has never visited before, and he wasn’t from another church.”

Donaldo asked about the man’s sermon, hoping for a clue to his identity. The inmates said he had spoken about the seventh-day Sabbath.

Amazed, Donaldo asked, “What did he look like?”

The inmates described him as a tall, well-dressed man wearing a white shirt. They said he knew the Bible so well that he probably was a teacher.

Pedro touched Donaldo’s arm. “An angel must have come and preached to them,” he said. “That’s the only explanation.”

Donaldo, however, wasn’t convinced. He went to the prison guard who registered visitors. The guard, a friend of Donaldo’s, looked through the computer log and shook his head. “No one came that day,” he said.

Astonished, Donaldo exclaimed, “Now I have no doubt that the angel of the Lord came to teach the Bible in my place!”

Returning to the inmates, he informed them that they must have seen an angel.



Six years have passed, and nearly all 38 inmates have given their hearts to Jesus in baptism. Donaldo said he won’t ever forget that day.

“Even though it is an incredible story, I believe God sent His heavenly messenger,” he said.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped two mission projects in Colombia last quarter.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 1:32–36, John 6:1–71, John 5:36–38, and John 7:37–53*

In this lesson, we further explore the testimony of John the Baptist. John was not confused or doubtful as to the identity of Christ. At every turn, John pointed to Jesus as the Son of God and as the embodiment of fulfilled prophecy. John was by no means a timeserving politician who pandered to the crowd; rather, he was committed to the revealed truth of God’s kingdom, regardless of whether it was accepted by a majority of the people or not. John was even willing to stand, alone and unwavering, for the truth that he was sure was sent from God.

This week, we also learn that truth brings about division and determines who will receive it with open minds and humble hearts.

Part II: Commentary

The Baptist’s Humility of Soul

John the Baptist did not immediately, or completely, disappear from the scene of history after he fulfilled his crucial and prophetic role as the Messiah’s forerunner. John was truly committed to Christ’s mission; nothing except imprisonment and martyrdom could stop him from his work. His example of radical commitment to the cause of Christ should inspire us to remain tenacious in His cause, as well.

Unfailingly loyal, John knew his proper limit and role in relation to Christ. This kind of realism and humility allows for no jealousy or competition. John declared plainly, “ ‘I am not the Christ’ ” (*John 3:28, NKJV*). John pointed people away from himself and led them to focus instead on Jesus, the “Bridegroom,” the one whom he served as his friend and in whom he rejoiced.

Christ is the One who came from heaven, from the bosom of the Father, and His living words give eternal life. John, the beloved disciple, cites his former teacher, the lowly-in-heart John the Baptist, who says of himself in relation to Christ, “ ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ ” (*John 3:30, NKJV*). The increasing of Christ and the decreasing of self are listed in the right order.

We cannot truly be humble unless Jesus increases in our lives; He alone can crucify self and remove it from the throne of the heart. Of course, Satan tries to present John 3:30 in the reverse order: he encourages people

to decrease first (works) and then watch Jesus' grace increase in their lives. But such an attempt is a spiritual impossibility, for only the dominant power of Christ in the heart can subdue self. In other words, we must not put the proverbial cart before the horse.

A story is told of a young boy who enjoyed singing songs about Jesus, whom he loved with all his heart. He often prayed for Jesus to come and live in his heart, and he literally believed that Jesus would do so. But he was curious as to how the great Jesus could fit into his small body. His dad could not adequately answer his question, but this little boy answered his own question. He told his dad that Jesus was so much bigger than he was that when he invited Him into his heart, He must always stick out of him!

What a touching picture of our Christian witness! What bubbles out of us when we interact with people? Is it self or the Savior? The Savior longs to sit on the throne of our hearts, filling our lives with His saving grace like a sweet-smelling savor.

A New Understanding of the Messiah (*John 1:32–36*)

John the Baptist emphasized the agenda of Christ's spiritual kingdom: spiritual regeneration and personal surrender of an individual's heart to God. John's message was at odds with the expectations that the Jews harbored about the Messiah. Ignoring the biblical prophecies about a suffering Savior, the Jews bypassed His humiliation. Instead, they focused their ambitions on the hope for a mighty king who would liberate them from the bondage of Rome and expand His rule over the world.

When we carefully consider John 1:32–36, we notice that John endeavored again to remind the Jews of the spiritual nature of the Messiah. Consider John's emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He descended and rested upon Jesus and empowered Him to baptize those who believed. Moreover, notice how John highlights Jesus' eternal identity as the divine Son of God, as well as His being the sacrifice, the "Lamb of God," who would liberate His people from the bondage of sin.

John's announcement about the Messiah reinforces the need for us to focus on what is eternal in nature, as opposed to earthly things. Everything we see around us, even the greatest of possessions, will pass away. But spiritual realities will endure forever. We need to follow in the footsteps of our father Abraham, who "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (*Heb. 11:10, NKJV*). The reference to "foundations" was intended to remind Abraham, the father of the faithful, of the solidness and permanence of God's promise in contrast to the temporal nature of his nomadic life.

Acceptance and Rejection (*John 6:1–71*)

After the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, the multitude was suddenly

aroused to crown Jesus king over all Israel. But Jesus harbored no political aspirations, nor was He swayed, as many politicians are, by popularity or the majority public opinion. Rather, Jesus ardently desired to establish His kingdom in the hearts of the people. The people tried to coerce Jesus into fulfilling their political plans, but He withdrew to be by Himself with His Father.

The people wanted to accept Jesus on their terms, ignoring the fact that they needed to accept Him on His terms. In the end, they decided to reject Him because they chose to focus on what was immediate and temporary. They did not look beyond these things to the bigger picture of the eternal and unseen realities of God's kingdom. It is the inclination of the unconverted human heart to reject what does not fit its long-held preconceived notions. As we can see, the people were so obsessed with the physical bread that they were blinded to the offer of Jesus' spiritual bread, which they desperately needed for salvation.

Jesus offered Himself to the people as that spiritual bread came down from heaven, so that they might never hunger again. In the same way, Jesus offered Himself as the Living Water to the Samaritan woman, who drank from Him the Water of Life, never to thirst again. For many other disciples beyond the Twelve, Jesus' loving attempts to reveal the light of divine truth seemed only to harden their hearts in rejection of that truth. Instead of trying to understand and believe, the people excused themselves by stating, " 'This is a hard saying; who can understand it?' " (*John 6:60, NKJV*). Thus, regretably, they "walked with Him no more" (*John 6:66, NKJV*).

At that point, Jesus looked at His remaining twelve disciples and asked, " 'Do you also want to go away?' " (*John 6:67, NKJV*). Then Peter, who served as the group's spokesman, said something profound, which was inspired by the Spirit: " 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' " (*John 6:68, NKJV*). These are words of inspiration that we all must keep in mind! There is no place, and no one, to go to for salvation except Jesus.

The Witness of the Father (*John 5:36–38*)

John the Baptist testified several times to the reality of the true Messiah sent from heaven. But surely the Father's testimony about His Son, along with the witness of God the Holy Spirit, are the most powerful. At Jesus' baptism, all three members of the Godhead were fully engaged. The Father's voice testified that Jesus was His " 'beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' " (*Matt. 3:17, NKJV*). On that occasion, the heavens were opened "to Him [Jesus], and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him" (*Matt. 3:16, NKJV*).

There was nothing else that Jesus could have said or done to convince His opponents beyond what was said or done on the day of His baptism.

Moreover, John the Baptist, whom they revered, testified of the veracity of heaven's witness. So why did Christ's opponents not believe the audible and visual witness of the Father and the Spirit on His behalf? Why did they not believe in the divine mighty works and words?

The powerful testimony of Lazarus's resurrection from the dead should have convinced the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the true Messiah. But, in their spiritual darkness, they could not see the light of God's truth shining all around. They refused to believe, no matter what evidence was plainly set before their eyes. In fact, the Pharisees, always at odds with the Sadducees, found a convenient opportunity to unite forces to condemn Jesus to death. Shortly after, Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify thy name" (*John 12:28*). The Father's voice testified on behalf of Christ's sacrifice on the cross that He had "both glorified it and will glorify it again" (*John 12:28, NKJV*).

The Witness of the Crowd (*John 7:37–53*)

Many of the common people, including some of the Gentiles, came to believe in Jesus, having witnessed His mighty works. Jesus became very popular among the masses who were not as learned and thus not as closed-minded or prejudiced as their leaders. The murderous jealousy of the leaders reached a boiling point. They adamantly refused to believe in any evidence for Jesus, human or divine, come what may.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. Regarding the humility of John the Baptist: There is so much self-centeredness and self-aggrandizement in the world today. But John was cognizant of who he was and what his mission was all about. He never tried in the slightest way to upstage Jesus or usurp His position; He did not mind being eclipsed in order that the true Light might brightly outshine him. What should be our proper attitude when it comes to human position or recognition? What does the notion that Jesus must increase and we must decrease say about Jesus and about us?**

2. Regarding the crucial subject of salvation in Christ: How does studying and wholeheartedly believing the powerful testimonies of God, of John the Baptist, and of others that Jesus is indeed the unique and incomparable Son of God help us to be drawn to Him, knowing that we are helpless and hopeless without Him?

3. Regarding feeding on Jesus, the Bread of Life: How do you apply this pertinent inspired counsel to your daily life: “What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. . . . We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

4. How do we acquire a moral backbone to stand for the right when it comes to popularity, majority opinion, or peer pressure? We know from the Bible that the majority is not always right. How does having the support of God and His truth make us a majority, even when we are in the minority?

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?

From Pin Trader to Camper

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Jacob Pierce's whole family loved trading pins, and they fanned out to find new pins at the International Pathfinder Camporee in the United States.

Then Mother saw a man with an Alaska pin. Knowing that Jacob loved Alaskan nature, she tried to convince the man to make a trade.

"I can't trade," he said. "It is a one-of-a-kind pin for pastors in Alaska."

Mother's interest only grew. "What do you do up in Alaska?" she asked.

The man introduced himself as Tobin Dodge, director of Alaska Camps, a mission initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Alaska Conference, which sponsors camps for children ages 8 to 17 every summer.

"Could my son work there?" Mother asked.

"Yes, we take counselors-in-training at 16 and counselors at 18," he said.

Jacob jumped at the idea of spending the summer in Alaska. He joined the camp staff—and went three years in a row.

The camp experience can be challenging, he said. One year, he enjoyed spending time with an Alaska Native boy at Camp Polaris, located on Lake Aleknagik in southwestern Alaska. They shared an interest in nature and climbed Jackknife Mountain, which looms above the camp. But the boy refused to behave. He also used vulgar language and seemed more interested in promoting superstitions than hearing Bible truth. He blamed a rainy day on a boy who had killed a spider, saying, "If you kill a spider, it rains."

Jacob grew frustrated. But at the end of camp, the boy gave Jacob a hug and walked over to his father. As he watched the two, Jacob suddenly began to understand the boy's behavior. The boy was practically raising himself.

"Most of the kids don't have any Christian background at all," Jacob, 20, said in an interview at Camp Polaris. "That's what makes it really an eye-opener and, to me, an amazing mission field."

He said the spiritual battles at Camp Polaris are different from those at other summer camps sponsored by the Alaska Conference because it is comprised almost entirely of Alaska Native children, who often face struggles with trauma, superstition, and substance abuse.

"But being here is worth it," he said. "It is a calling that is stronger than any that I have seen. God really needs volunteers here. This is a mission field."



Thank you for your 2016 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped repair and expand Camp Polaris so more children could attend. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a center of influence at the Adventist church in Bethel, Alaska. The Bethel Church sends local children to Camp Polaris every year.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 18:38, John 19:4–22, John 20:19–31*

Jesus spoke with confidence and certainty about His identity. Often, He alluded to His identity as the fulfillment of the promised Messiah and asked others to attest to His Messiahship. Why was their witness on behalf of His identity so important to Jesus? He wanted to save as many as possible into His eternal kingdom, and He knew that believing in Him was the only way to be saved from sin and this fallen world.

Jesus also appealed to many of His eyewitnesses to express their sincere convictions about their tangible experiences with Him. Mary's testimony about Jesus' sacrifice was powerful and meaningful. Her heart was totally open to His eyes, as all our hearts are, for Jesus knows the depth of every heart. Thus, He also knew the caviling and conniving heart of Judas.

Jesus likewise read the heart of Pontius Pilate, a heathen Roman governor who was in some ways more truthful than many of Jesus' accusers. Jesus also received the testimony of a doubter who had to see and touch for himself the evidence of His Lord's resurrection. Jesus was patient with Thomas and showed him the clear evidence of His scarred body. This week, we also will study the most powerful witness of the Savior's Messiahship—Jesus Himself, who testifies of His Messianic mission through His words of eternal life and through His mighty deeds.

Part II: Commentary

Harking Back to Abraham

John 8:56 implies that Abraham was shown a revelation of the future Messiah. This divine disclosure of glorious hope was meant to serve as confirmation of God's universal plan of salvation. Upon beholding this magnificent revelation, Abraham "rejoiced" and was "glad." By contrast, the Jewish leaders needed no vision to see Christ's day, for they saw Him and His mighty works in person. Instead of being joyous, as their father Abraham was, they were instead angry and ready to kill Him.

Moreover, Abraham was shown a practical application of that vision, which revealed the graphic plan of human redemption. Abraham served as a type of God the Father, and Isaac as a type of Jesus, God's only Son. The wood for the sacrifice was carried on Isaac's back to the altar, just as Christ carried the wooden cross to the altar of Calvary. Both Isaac and Jesus, without any objection, were willing to be the sacrifice. It is hard to believe that a strapping young man such as Isaac, in the prime of his youth, would be so obedient, even unto death. Abraham's incredible faith,

yet painful reluctance, in sacrificing his only son—the son of promise—typified the Father’s willingness to let Jesus die for humanity.

The main difference between Jesus and Isaac was the substitute that was provided for the latter. But nothing was provided for Jesus. Christ’s sacrifice was indeed to be the Substitute for us all. In shedding His blood, Jesus gave for our redemption His life and His righteousness, which no one else possessed.

The Witness of Mary

As we turn our attention to the feast at the house of Simon the Pharisee, we must note that Jesus is the guest of honor, along with Lazarus, whom He had just raised from the dead. Mary, on the other hand, is not an honored guest. Simon and Mary are a case study in contrasts. Jesus had cleansed Simon from leprosy, but Simon had not yet permitted Jesus to heal him from the leprosy of his sinful choices. By contrast, Mary surrendered fully to Jesus and permitted Him to cleanse her from the leprosy of her sinful past. Simon felt obligated, in accordance with Jewish custom, to honor Jesus for healing him, and thus he invited Jesus out of a sense of duty. But Mary was completely committed and devoted to Jesus, spreading the fragrance of His love throughout the house. At the feast, she anointed the body of Christ, the soon-to-be-slain Lamb of God who was the vicarious Sacrifice sent to save sinful humanity.

Jesus came to Mary’s defense when she became the focus of everyone’s attention. Judas orchestrated a verbal assault against her for anointing Jesus, an assault that was supported by the disciples. Jesus described Mary’s act of devotion to Jesus as a wonderful thing because she did what she could for Him. Therefore, when we do our part out of genuine love, Jesus accepts such an effort as our best offering, for He knows the inner workings of a genuine heart. When we do our best for Jesus, He considers that good enough. If it is good enough for Jesus, it should be good enough for us, as well.

The Unwitting Witness of Pilate (*John 18:38, John 19:4–22*)

It is surprising and ironic that a pagan governor would, in a sense, take the side of Jesus, and proclaim His innocence, while Jesus’ own people, whom He had come to save, rejected Him, clamoring for His death. Living and governing in a very corrupt world, Pilate desired to know the truth, but he was doubtful that it existed. Such doubts about the existence of truth are prevalent, especially today. Truth is misconstrued as lies, as nothing but power ploys, and the light is labeled darkness used to subjugate the ignorant. Deceit is becoming increasingly normalized in our society. And, like Pilate, we cry out to know the truth.

Hence, what Jesus said to Thomas is so true and indispensable for our times: “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ ” (*John 14:6*). In these last days, we need to walk with Jesus, who is the Way. As we walk with Him,

He teaches us the truth, by word and deed, which finally leads to eternal life. It is easy to become discouraged and even disillusioned as we are confronted with the happenings of our world; therefore, we must embrace Jesus, who is always the truth and in whom there is no trace of the darkness found in this life. He is constant, for He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

A final thought about Pilate: he knew in his heart that Jesus was not just innocent. He also was convicted that Jesus was extraordinary in every way. Pilate never had witnessed anyone like Him. His wife confirmed this conviction by sharing the truth about Jesus with him and warning him not to condemn Him. In fact, Pilate himself pronounced Jesus innocent—not once, but three times.

But, as many do, Pilate succumbed to the pressure of the mob. He vacillated in a moment of weakness, thus violating his conscience. Pilate tried to please both Rome and the mob, but he ended up pleasing neither. Stripped of all his honors and exiled to Gaul, in France, Pilate's heavy depression overwhelmed him, and he took his own life.

The Witness of Thomas (*John 20:19–31*)

Thomas's case is quite a lesson book in faith and trust. Like Pilate, Thomas struggled with doubt, in spite of abundant evidence. But Jesus was willing to assuage his fears and misgivings. The Savior was gentle with Thomas, inviting him to touch His scars. Jesus also wants us to “come and see,” to experience Him personally for ourselves. It seems that whatever it takes to help us believe, He is willing to provide. He meets us where we are—in our despair, discouragement, or doubt.

John often deals with the topic of doubt in his writings. When he wrote his Gospel, he was confronting discouraged church members who were challenged by Gnostic heresies about the reality of Christ. In John's day, as in ours, there were those who chose not to believe because they did not see all the evidence they desired, be it scientific or philosophical.

Many today focus on every bit of doubt raised in objection to Christ's Messiahship and, thus, ignore the massive evidence of Christ's reality and mission. These doubters insist on the entire cup of evidence being filled to the brim before they choose to believe. But in this fallen world, there is always room for doubt. We are surrounded by evidence: God's amazing creation, life itself, divine providence, our conscience, and the measure of faith with which we are born. With that kind of evidence, seeing truly is believing.

Such an experience is exactly what Elisha prayed for when He entreated the Lord to help his doubtful servant to see, as recorded in 2 Kings 6:17: “‘LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see’” (*NKJV*). The Bible tells us

what transpired in answer to Elisha's prayer: "Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (*NKJV*). So, we may conclude that real seeing is believing the bigger reality beyond our immediate circumstances.

The Witness of Jesus

Jesus is indeed the greatest witness to His own divinity and divine mission. Repeatedly and tirelessly, He endeavored to open the eyes and hearts of the intellectual and rich classes. The Savior greatly desired those who doubted to consider the obvious evidence about Himself. He ardently yearned for them to believe and be saved, though it was often to no avail. How often many of us wish to see and hear Jesus in person! But had we lived during the earthly ministry of Christ and seen all the evidence He presented, would we have believed?

We now have the advantage of many fulfilled prophecies, which we may study to learn about His mighty works and life-giving words. There is life inherent in His words, for His recorded sayings are congruent with His person. As Peter testified, Jesus possesses the words of eternal life; Jesus Himself testified that His words give life.

Let us consider the weight of the countless testimonies of changed lives that have occurred because of an encounter with Christ. Christ's power to convert the hardened and hopeless human heart is on full display for us to ponder and to fill us with wonder. Consider how Christ, through the Holy Spirit, forms Himself, the hope of glory, within us. We sometimes have the tendency to believe what we should not believe. People do not always mean what they say or say what they mean. On the other hand, the Fountain of Truth, Jesus, is the opposite. He always says what He means and means what He says. We can fully trust what He says and what He means.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. The Pharisees were privileged to see firsthand what Jesus said and did, but they resisted believing in the One who was God's inestimable Gift from heaven. Thomas doubted, as some of the Pharisees did, but eventually he believed. Compare and contrast the different attitudes toward Jesus in Thomas and the Pharisees. What was the essential difference?**

2. **Christ did not pray for His own disciples only, as recorded in John 17:9; He also prayed for all future generations who would believe the disciples' testimony, as seen in verse 20. " 'I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word' " (NKJV). Doesn't this assertion imply that we have become believers in Christ because of His prayers for us and others? What does this reality tell you about His amazing love, care, and divine power?**

3. **Think about Pilate's vacillation and divided loyalties. What are some of the adverse consequences of such defective leadership? How does trying to please all in an attempt to accommodate their diverse views bring about confusion and consternation?**

4. **Our lives exude a "fragrance," or influence, on the people around us as we interact with them in our different spheres. We cannot emit the sweet fragrance of Jesus unless we are "fragranced" by Him. As we reflect on our daily lives, does the atmosphere that surrounds us draw others to Christ or repulse them away from Him?**

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?

God's Perfect Timing in Tbilisi

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Zurab considered himself a Christian, but his relationship with God consisted solely of lighting candles in a cathedral in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. He had a Bible at home, but he only picked it up to dust it.

Then his conscience began to bother him, and he thought, *If I'm a Christian, why don't I read the Bible?* A desire filled him to read the Bible.

He picked up the Bible and read it from beginning to end. He learned for the first time about the seventh-day Sabbath. Surprised, he looked online for more information. He watched about 100 YouTube sermons and was drawn to a preacher who explained the Bible in a clear manner. The preacher identified himself as a Seventh-day Adventist and said the church was comprised of millions of members who kept the seventh-day Sabbath.

Zurab had never heard of Adventists, and he recoiled at the idea of becoming one. Many Georgians think Adventists belong to a sect. He searched the internet for another church that worshiped on the seventh day and practiced other biblical truths that he had learned, but to no avail.

So, on a Sabbath morning, he showed up at an Adventist church in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi. He stood outside, wanting to go in and not wanting to go in. Then the door swung open, and someone invited him inside.

Zurab received a warm welcome.

"Is this your first time in the Adventist Church?" someone asked.

"Yes, this is my first time," he said.

"Great!" someone else said. "Come also to our evangelistic program."

It turned out that the church planned to hold evangelistic meetings on that very evening. Zurab attended the worship service in the morning and the evangelistic meeting in the evening. After that, he returned every evening for the next two weeks. Then he was baptized.

Today, a year later, 36-year-old Zurab has a new relationship with God. He reads the Bible every day and shares it with his wife and two boys, who also go to church with him on Sabbath. Zurab is amazed at how everything came together—his desire to read the Bible, his discovery of the Sabbath and the online preacher, and his arrival at the Adventist church on the same day as its first evangelistic meeting.



He didn't go to the church because of a mission outreach initiative. But the church members' mission spirit made him feel welcome and at home. "Everything came together so well," he said.

Part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this year went to a health center in Georgia. Please pray for God to draw people to the center, just as He brought Zurab to the church, to learn more about Him. Watch a short video of Zurab at: bit.ly/Zurab-Georgia.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 8:23*

The evidence continues to mount concerning the divinity of Jesus. In his Gospel, John provides more convincing proof that Jesus is indeed who He claims to be—the Son of God, sent to rescue sinful humanity. In this Gospel, Jesus reasons with people in order to get them to look at His pristine character, His divine credentials, His mighty words, and His miraculous works.

As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus came to save this sinful world. He was one with the Father. Thus, Jesus said and did everything in accordance with the will of the Father. Christ was God’s greatest gift to humanity, and without such a gift, the world would be doomed. Yet, sadly and ironically, in spite of this truth, most of the world, which He created, did not believe in Him. Neither did His own people. John made this point abundantly clear. What a tragedy that God’s creatures, made in His image, rejected His indispensable Gift! Jesus “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 1:10, 11, NKJV*).

This week, we shall study some pertinent prophecies in the Scriptures that clearly reveal Jesus as the promised Messiah. Moreover, we will examine the specific details of how these prophecies were precisely fulfilled. For example, we will look at the fulfillment of the prophecy about how Jesus would enter Jerusalem, riding on a donkey (*Ps. 118:26, Zech. 9:9*). We also will look at the prophecy of the disciple who would betray Him (*Ps. 41:9*). Moreover, we will study the dynamic of why some leaders decided to reject Him while, surprisingly, others chose to believe in Him. Ultimately, in this process, we will consider the question: What does it mean to have the mindset of reasoning “from beneath,” according to John 8:23, versus a mindset of reasoning from above?

Part II: Commentary

Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus

The precise fulfillment of the many Messianic prophecies in the life and ministry of Jesus is simply awe-inspiring. These Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled with incredible accuracy. The most hardened skeptic and doubter is rendered defenseless against the avalanche of evidence. Though Jesus knew how hardened the Jewish leaders were, He never gave up on

them. He always tried from every possible angle to convict their stubborn hearts. Though many were not responsive to Him, He continued to reach out to them so that, at the very least, they might know that there was a declarer of truth among them.

It is easy to be critical of the Jewish leaders and to be baffled by their lack of faith in their own Scriptures regarding the Messiah. But how would we have reacted if we were in the same position, if our utmost priority was to anticipate a Jewish (not divine) military conqueror in the tradition of Moses or David, one who could vanquish the Roman presence from Israel and break its yoke? Remember, even Christ's disciples, those closest to Him, were slow to believe in His spiritual kingdom. Indeed, it was only after His resurrection that they truly believed. (*See John 2:22.*)

The problem with the religious leaders is that they knew the letter of the law but not its spirit. Indeed, they knew the Written Word but, alas, not the Living Word. Jesus testified to this failing when He said to them: “ ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life’ ” (*John 5:39, 40, NKJV*). Ancient Jewish traditions taught that merely knowing the Scriptures guaranteed eternal life. This notion is evident in what Hillel, a renowned rabbi of the first century B.C., reportedly taught about this subject. Hillel is quoted as saying, “One who has acquired unto himself words of Torah, has acquired for himself the life of the world to come.”—Mishnah Aboth 2. 7, Soncino ed. of the Talmud, p. 17 (quoted in the *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 955).

Thus, the Jewish leaders were so obsessed with the words of Scripture that they neglected the heart of it—Jesus. The leaders substituted a superficial intellectual assent for the regeneration of the heart. Searching the Scriptures, as they did, was not a bad thing in and of itself, but it prevented them from seeing the deeper meaning of Christ's mission and His offer of salvation.

The apostle Paul resonates with Christ's words to the leaders when he writes that the “letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (*2 Cor. 3:6, NKJV*). Focusing on the letter, devoid of the Spirit, leads to legalism and hypocrisy, which in turn results in comparing oneself to others instead of looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The Jewish leaders claimed to believe in Moses, their most revered prophet, but they did not believe in the divine “Prophet” whom Moses prophesied was to come. Upon his departure, Moses promised the people, “ ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear’ ” (*Deut. 18:15, NKJV*). Jesus reminded the Jewish leaders that Moses, whom they greatly admired, believed in Him and His future mission. Yet, now

that this promise was being fulfilled before their eyes, they refused to believe. Jesus remonstrated with them: “ ‘For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me’ ” (*John 5:46, NKJV*).

Fulfilled Messianic prophecies, which very often deal with human relationship dynamics, reveal much regarding Christ’s character. Let us consider two such examples. The first prophecy is found in Psalm 41:9, which predicts, “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (*NKJV*). Jesus applied the prophecy to Himself, as the one betrayed by a friend: “ ‘I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me’ ” (*John 13:18, NKJV*).

In Mideast culture to this day, sharing food with someone is a special act of bonding that brings emotional and spiritual closeness to a relationship. Thus, duplicity by one toward another with whom food has been shared is a sign of betrayal. Jesus spent three and a half years not only eating with Judas but forgiving and encouraging him. During this time, Jesus sought to protect the reputation of Judas. Though Jesus had ample justification for doing so, He did not seek to expose Judas as a thief publicly. In return, Judas sold Jesus for 30 shekels, the price of a common slave. Then, on the night of the Savior’s arrest, Judas approached Jesus and kissed Him. Despite this treacherous betrayal, Jesus actually called Judas “friend.” Jesus said to him, “ ‘Friend, why have you come?’ ” (*Matt. 26:50, NKJV*).

For the second example of fulfilled prophecy that reveals Christ’s character, let us consider Zechariah 13:6. This verse talks about the wounds that Jesus received by means of His crucifixion. His side was pierced, and His hands were wounded. Zechariah foretold in this verse that Jesus would receive these wounds in the house of His friends. By implication, Jesus refers to His arch betrayer as His friend and to His cruel crucifiers among the Jewish leaders as His friends! Thus, the pure and innocent shed blood of Christ does not cry out in vengeance against those who spilled it. His wounded hands are not clenched in wrath; they are stretched forth to embrace all in love and reconciliation.

From Beneath (*John 8:23*)

John spends most of chapter 8 referring to Jesus as the sublime and divine Son of God, sent by His heavenly Father to help hopeless earthlings. Everything Jesus talked about was heavenly. He was the heavenly light that illuminated a world darkened by sin. The Father bore witness that He sent His Son from on high to be a true Witness of the truth. All the gifts that Heaven bestowed on us in the person of Jesus were contrasted with earthly things when the Savior said to the Jewish leaders, “ ‘You are from

beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world' ” (John 8:23, NKJV).

“From beneath” implies that the leaders were so earthly-minded that being heavenly-minded was an impossibility. They were so glued to their traditions and blinded by their own narrow and self-centered philosophies that they chose this world and death, refusing heaven and certain life in Jesus. Paul aptly described such a class of professed followers as having a “form of godliness” devoid of any godly substance. They substitute outward piety for inward purity. (See 2 Tim. 3:5.)

Unexpectedly, John tells us that “many believed in Him” (John 8:30, NKJV). This assertion contains a great lesson for us when things seem hopeless and many are faithless: light prevails even in a time of darkness. Jesus preached the truth regardless of people’s acceptance or rejection. We must do the same, in spite of discouraging circumstances.

The religious leaders’ disregard for the truth led them deliberately to close their eyes and blind their own hearts against it so that they would not see the light sent from heaven. Had they opened their minds to Jesus, they would have believed. But such an act would have threatened their preconceived notions. May we always be willing to open our hearts and minds to the truth, because as Jesus said, “ ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ ” (John 8:32, NKJV).

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. Consider how Jesus’ life was a perfect reflection of His Father. Jesus often talked about His Father and the intimate relationship they had together. At one point, Philip asked his Master to reveal the Father to the disciples. Jesus responded, “ ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ ” (John 14:9, NKJV). In everyday life, how does seeing the Father in Jesus impact your existence, and what difference does that understanding make?**

2. Shouldn't it be concerning, even alarming, when we, like the religious leaders, are confronted with the plain truth from the Bible and then deliberately turn away from it? What part does pride play in our violating our conscience and turning us away from the truth? How can the Holy Spirit help us to put our prideful opinions aside and become more teachable?

3. Whatever usurps the priority of Jesus in our lives becomes, in reality, an idol. Scary as the thought is, if we aren't careful, even our work for Him could potentially take His place in our lives. Bible study also could possibly take the place of Jesus. Contemplate this sobering statement and react to it: "As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. . . . Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.

4. What does it mean to have a "from beneath" mentality? Do we sometimes drift into that way of thinking? If so, how?

5. Many believed in Jesus (*John 8:30*), despite all the unbelief around them. How does this fact encourage us not to give up on people who seem to be resistant to the light of God's truth?

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?

“Please Stay”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

At 8 p.m., an elderly married couple knocked on the door of the parsonage beside the Seventh-day Adventist church in Savoonga, Alaska. It wasn't late. The summer sun shone brightly in the sky. It wouldn't go down until 2:30 a.m. The Siberian Yupik people living on St. Lawrence Island, located just 36 miles east of Russia in the Bering Sea, wouldn't go to bed for hours.

Eugene and Marie, who were in their mid-80s, didn't wait for anyone to open the door. Nobody waits for the door to be opened in the remote village of 835 people. Everyone knocks and walks in. The couple wanted to speak with the visitor staying in the parsonage. I was visiting the island to collect stories for Adventist Mission.

Marie spoke directly. “Are you a pastor?” she asked me.

Her eyes filled with emotion when I shook my head. “Please stay,” she said, softly. “We need someone to keep the church open and to teach us.”

The church had closed several times since it and the parsonage were built in 1972. Pastors had preached and lived there for a while, but then the Adventist presence shrunk to little to nothing for two decades. In 2010, the church had reopened when two retired nurses from North Carolina, Bill and Elouise Hawkes, arrived as Bible workers with the Alaska Conference's Arctic Mission Adventure outreach program to Alaska Natives. Bill died in 2016, and Elouise stayed. But shortly before my visit, Elouise left for health reasons.

Marie missed Elouise terribly and described how she invited villagers to her home for meals and prepared food packages. “We need her,” she said.

I never met Elouise. She was enthusiastic and helpful as we exchanged emails for my trip. My respect grew as I heard about her love for villagers.

As our conversation wrapped up at 9 p.m., Marie looked at me again.

“Please,” she said. “Stay. We need someone to teach us about God.”

With her pleading gaze, I caught a sense of the compassion that Jesus must have felt during His earthly ministry. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (*Matt. 9:36, NKJV*). I didn't want to leave. My heart ached for the precious people of Savoonga and the other more than 200

native communities in Alaska. Only 11 of those communities have an Adventist presence.

When Jesus' heart ached, “He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’ ” (*Matt. 9:37, 38, NKJV*).



Pray for Savoonga. Pray for Alaska. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter that will help open a center of influence to share God's love with Alaska Natives in Bethel, Alaska.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 3:18–21*

Christ is the only Source of life. If we desire life, we must cling to Him alone and to no other creature. Even angels, holy or fallen, cannot give us life, for their life is derived from God. Not only can they not give life, the greatest of the fallen angels, Satan, is the direct opposite of the Giver of life. Satan is the wily merchant of death, whose obsession is to rob us of the life that Jesus provides. Jesus exposes Satan’s destructive agenda in contrast to His own salvific mission when He declares, “ ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*John 10:10, NKJV*).

The devil, the archdeceiver, entices humanity to choose sin rather than righteousness in Christ; then he callously exacts his wages, which are nothing short of eternal death. Paul confirms this fact when he writes in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*NKJV*). All good gifts proceed from God, and eternal life, along with abundant life, comes from Him. It is an unfathomable part of the mystery of evil that people—whom Jesus created and for whom He died to save—choose the eternal punishment of death and reject God’s gift of life. As we shall see, the gifts of eternal life and salvation dominate John’s Gospel more than in any other book in Scripture.

More than any other Gospel writer, John distinguishes himself as the one who refers to the incarnate Son of God as the great “I AM.” This title, as we learned in an earlier lesson, is a divine reference to God. In John’s Gospel, Jesus proclaims, for example, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*). When we walk in the Way, who is Jesus, He teaches us His truth that leads to eternal life. Jesus is our only way to the eternal God. The Father will never cast out anyone who sincerely comes to Him in repentance.

Part II: Commentary

As we just said, God is the only One who possesses life. Thus, He is the only One who can give it. No angel or created being can do that—only the Source of life. This notion hearkens back to Deuteronomy 30:20, in which God, through Moses, admonishes His people: “ ‘That you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days’ ” (*NKJV*). Here

God urges us, in the strongest terms, to cling to Him for life, for outside that divine-human relationship, there is only misery and death. This idea helps us to understand another dimension to John 10:10, which we just cited above, but in this context, it bears quoting again: “ ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*NKJV*). Here we see that the only alternative to Christ’s life, abundant and eternal, is Satan’s misery and death.

Some, however, fallaciously argue that there was no real need for Christ to come to this world. But who else could have taken our sins away and clothed us with the robe of God’s righteousness? Who else could have given us life in the place of our death? No one but the all-righteous and life-giving Christ. He valiantly fought our two most deadly enemies, sin and death, and conquered both. His victory becomes ours when we truly believe in Him. Thus, we can trust Jesus when He promises, “ ‘And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day’ ” (*John 6:40, NKJV*).

The Words of Eternal Life

In the glorious miracle of feeding the 5,000, Jesus points all those who consumed the bread to Himself, the Bread of Life (*John 6:35*). He desired them to go beyond their hunger for physical bread, which gave them temporary sustenance, to their need to feed on Him for eternal life. It was well within His power to feed a multitude of hungry people, but Jesus’ divine mission was to offer eternal life and citizenship in God’s glorious kingdom to the ones who believed in Him. Our greatest goal is to seek His kingdom first, and all else that we need will be provided. (*See Matt. 6:33.*) For if we possess all things but have not Jesus, we are lost. Conversely, if we feed on Christ’s life-giving words, though we do not possess all that we desire in this life, we are true victors.

The psalmist assures us, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (*Ps. 23:1*). In other words, when we have the Lord as our priority, He provides for our needs. The Lord knows well what we truly need in life, and He is happy to do right by us. But His top priority is for us to have a saving relationship with Him.

Ellen G. White makes this profound statement about the spiritual necessity of feeding upon the Bread of Life:

“To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour. . . . What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. . . . We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the

heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

Moreover, the words of Christ have His life inherent in them. They represent His person and character. In receiving Jesus’ words today and assimilating them into the heart, we receive Jesus Himself. It is true that we cannot visibly see Jesus in the flesh on a day-to-day basis, as the disciples did, but we truly see Him through His words, bequeathed to us through Scripture. Peter’s response to Christ’s question implies not only that the Savior Himself has eternal life but that His words do also. (*See John 6:68.*) Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter sought to convey the divine truth that no person, place, or proclamation could point us to eternal life except the Source of life itself.

Believing and New Birth

Faith is not a commodity to be hoarded by a select few to the exclusion of others. It is evident that faith is a universal gift from God to everyone born into this world. Human existence begins with faith that is embedded in our hearts by our Creator, and it is to be built upon by accepting and believing in the One who gave it. This conviction is then reinforced by our asking God to take full control of our lives. John affirms this fact by saying, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (*John 1:12, NKJV*).

Simply put, faith is a pure gift from God. (*See Rom. 4:1–8.*) God’s gift of faith is the divine link that connects us to Him. This faith link reminds us that we belong to Him, and it gives meaning to our entire existence.

Even repentance is a gift from God, for it is a response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to submit to Him. Many make the mistake of waiting first to have both faith to believe and the repentance to come to God; but these twin gifts are already there, awaiting our reception and application. There is no need to wait in order to receive them. Peter and the apostles affirmed this reality in Acts 5:31: “ ‘Him [Christ] God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins’ ” (*NKJV*). So why does the sinner need to wait any longer? Come to Christ with the faith He has given you, and receive His gift of repentance to live His life today!

Rejection and Condemnation (*John 3:18–21*)

Unfortunately, light and darkness are becoming increasingly confused today. There is more ambivalence about what truth is. Why are people

more interested in darkness than in the light of truth? Jesus answers this pivotal question when he says, “ ‘And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’ ” (*John 3:19, NKJV*).

Those who decide against the light in favor of the darkness, which God’s truth dispels, are condemned by their own evil deeds. In their stubbornness and pride, they refuse to humble themselves and repent, rejecting the only light that gives them any hope. But there is no healing unless they open themselves to the light of Christ’s power to restore. Why not forsake our evil deeds while there is still ample opportunity? Why wait until it’s too late? The door of the ark is still open, and the light of the truth is still shining. So why not invite the light to dispel darkness, and without hesitation enter safety, before it is too late?

In the context of this discussion about choosing between light and darkness, let us turn our attention to John 3:16. This verse is one of the most important verses in the entire Scripture, for it is the gospel encapsulated. The focus of this verse is not only on salvation but also on the negative consequence of perishing should we fail to believe. Condemnation results from the wrong choice. Jesus continues this thought in John 3:18 when He asserts, “ ‘He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God’ ” (*NKJV*).

Our eternal destiny hangs upon our trusting Christ and His words of life. Adam and Eve doubted the truth of God’s wisdom, and we know how that worked out. There are countless other examples in Scripture of those who suffered the consequences of their disbelief. However, Jesus, the Second Adam, conquered by trusting in His Father’s words of affirmation of the Father-Son relationship. It was this very relationship that Satan challenged when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, saying, “ ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread’ ” (*Matt. 4:3, NKJV*). Jesus’ ready defense in that next verse was simply “ ‘It is written . . .’ ” (*Matt. 4:4*), thus modeling for us the trust we are likewise to show in the Word of God.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the connection between reading God’s Word and actually hearing it? Contemplate the following statement and respond: “The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible**

is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. . . . The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 393.

2. In John 14:3, Jesus says to His disciples, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also’ ” (NKJV). How does trusting His words for the future impact your life today?

3. Ellen G. White wrote, “Christ’s life becomes our life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 389. What an amazing promise! How do you personally incorporate it into your life? What are the dynamics that make this reality possible in everyday life?

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?

Gift to a Well-Dressed Woman

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A well-dressed woman drove her car into the parking garage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Upper Magdalena Conference in Bogota, Colombia. "Are you Christians?" she asked the parking attendant.

"Yes," replied 52-year-old Ruben Campos.

"Which religion are you?" she asked.

"We are Seventh-day Adventists," he said. "Can we help you?"

"Someone told me that Adventists don't like to help others," she said.

Ruben was surprised. "Let us help you," he said. "We're ready to serve."

The woman asked if she could park her car in the church parking garage. Her apartment was nearby, but it didn't have any parking, and she didn't feel safe leaving her car in the street at night.

"Yes, you can park here," Ruben said.

"How much would it cost?" she asked.

"It won't cost you anything," Ruben said. "It will be our gift to you."

"Thank you!" the woman exclaimed. "Can I give you a hug?"

That night, the woman left her car in the parking garage. She returned the next night. On the third night, she asked Ruben for a Bible.

Then the two started studying the Bible. Ruben brought her a chair, and he sat in his booth as they studied. After a month, the woman said she wanted to introduce Ruben to her husband. She called from her cell phone. "It's with him that I'm studying the Bible, and I want to be baptized," she said.

The woman's husband was a senior Colombian military officer, and he was on a temporary assignment abroad. He told Ruben that he also wanted Bible studies. "We can start when I return to Colombia," he said.

Ruben may have been the happiest parking attendant in Colombia when the woman was baptized in a Seventh-day Adventist church in Bogota. He is now waiting for her husband to return to the country for Bible studies.

Jesus engaged in mission outreach by serving others. He said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (*Matt. 20:28, NKJV*).



Ruben is seeking to follow His example.

"We can have an impact on many lives if we only serve," said Ruben, who has worked as a parking attendant for eight years. "Somebody could come to you soon. You have to be ready to serve no matter who or where that person is."

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped two mission outreach projects in Colombia last quarter.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 13:1–20; John 14:1–3; John 14:5, 6; John 1:14; John 5:38–40*

This week’s lesson tells the amazing story of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. There is no one like Jesus. He is unique. He knows the Father intimately. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus talk at length about the Father, for His name was on His lips and in His heart continually. Jesus is the only One who has seen God face-to-face, something no other human can claim. Thus, Jesus affirms His divinity when He asserts His relation to the Father. “ ‘Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father’ ” (*John 6:46, NKJV*).

One of the disciples, Philip, often heard Jesus emphasize His relation to the Father. Finally, Philip said to Jesus, “ ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us’ ” (*John 14:8, NKJV*).

Some of the most profound words about the close relationship between Jesus and His Father are found in Jesus’ response to Philip, in John 14:9: “ ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’ ” (*NKJV*). Thus, in these words, we see that Jesus was the most profound representation of God. What a privilege for us to know Jesus, for in knowing Him, we know the Father.

Besides the “I AM” references to Jesus as “the way, the truth, and the life” (*NKJV*), we will be studying some additional references to help us appreciate our tremendous gift in Jesus. In following Him, the Way, we walk with Him and learn His Truth, which leads to life abundant and life eternal.

Part II: Commentary

Christ’s Example to Emulate (*John 13:1–20*)

Jesus did not merely impart wisdom and instruction; He also illustrated His truths with living lessons that served to ingrain His teachings on the heart. As an example, let us look at the ordinance of humility. In inaugurating this ordinance, Christ did not first wait for His disciples to volunteer to wash one another’s feet. Jesus did not lecture them on humility and service. Nor did He expect a servant to be called upon to perform this menial work. Instead, Jesus Himself came forward to be that Servant, to show His followers a living example of how they should relate to one another.

Jesus’ words made plain His intended meaning in the service of footwashing

when He said, “ ‘If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you’ ” (*John 13:14, 15, NKJV*). Notwithstanding this clear command, most Christians choose not to observe it. The humility needed to perform this ordinance is not palatable to the human heart. But, in refusing to meet the conditions necessary to participate, we miss out on the lesson in humility that Christ intended to teach us.

In the biblical culture of Christ’s day, the head represented the most noble part of the body, and the feet the basest. Thus, in Christ’s lowering His noble head to wash the dirty feet of His followers, He graphically illustrated His willingness to do His utmost to help them at their worst. Judas resented that Christ, whom he hoped would become king over Israel, would lower Himself to such an extent. Yet Peter, on the other hand, was humbled to see his Master in the role of a meek and lowly servant. Therefore, Peter initially refused Christ’s offer, feeling totally undeserving. But when Jesus said to him, “ ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me’ ” (*John 13:8, NKJV*), Peter responded immediately and affirmatively. Peter did not want to jeopardize, in any way, his important relationship with Jesus. Thus, Peter quickly said to Him in John 13:9, “ ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!’ ” (*NKJV*).

I Will Certainly Come Again (*John 14:1–3*).

We live in a very troubled and unsettled world. Thus, Jesus’ reassuring words in John 14:1 are quite timely: “Let not your heart be troubled.” These encouraging words are based on trust in the truthfulness of Jesus and of His Father. Also, this verse is anchored in Jesus’ sure promise to go and prepare a place for us to fulfill His ardent desire to be with us always.

Some desire to be in heaven because of the special mansions or palaces prepared for them; others because of the streets paved in gold. But should these incentives be our real motivation for being there? In the Greek, the text does not say “mansions” but rooms, which can imply that what is really important is not the physical space that we will own or occupy but, rather, enjoying the companionship of Jesus. His love leads Him to desire to be with us, for His love always seeks togetherness.

Jesus certainly does not want us to be troubled in this troubled world. He encourages us to place our trust in both the Father and Him, who alone can provide us with hope, peace, and a secure future.

In John 14:3, the verb “come” in the Greek language is in the present continuous or futuristic present tense. Implicit in Jesus’ promise about His future glorious coming is that it is a present reality. His coming is so certain, it is as if it were happening now. The joyous anticipation of His sure coming impacts our present lives to the extent that His

kingdom of glory becomes interwoven in His kingdom of grace, giving us a foretaste of heaven.

The Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14:5, 6*)

We may observe an interesting progression in how Jesus describes Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14:6*). Consider the sequence of these three words. Jesus is the Way. As we walk, we learn the truth from Him, which eventually leads us to life abundant in this world and in the eternal world to come. Notice that this sequence was Christ's response to Thomas's question about the way to pursue, in John 14:5. We may wonder why Thomas made this query, considering Jesus' clear explanation in the previous verse: " 'And where I go you know, and the way you know' " (*John 14:4, NKJV*).

Christ is the only way to the Father. Some may object to this statement on the grounds that Jesus is being too exclusive, especially in society today in which inclusiveness is the social norm. But not all paths lead to God. Jesus is the only path to God because He is the only One who is righteous and can take away our sins. He is the only One who can replace our death with eternal life. Jesus is the only One who can give us righteousness and life, for He possesses both. No one else in this world possesses them or can bestow them.

As we saw earlier, Philip requested that Jesus reveal the Father to the disciples. Jesus' response to Philip links knowing Him with knowing His Father, for if we know the Son, we certainly know God. Jesus says: " 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father"?' " (*John 14:9, NKJV*).

How comforting and reassuring that, in Jesus, we can draw close to the Father without fear or trepidation. The Father will treat us with the same mercy and compassion that Jesus showed to the people around Him, including the outcasts and sinners. Therefore, we are without excuse to refuse to come boldly before the throne of God, to receive His mercy and forgiveness.

Also, again as stated in John 14:6, Jesus testified that He Himself is the Truth, embodied and personified. In a shifting world of corruption and deceit, Jesus remains the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. There is no variance in Him or in what He says. After all, He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (*Heb. 13:8, NKJV*). Jesus would return to heaven shortly, and soon after, the Holy Spirit would descend on the disciples during Pentecost, as Jesus promised. The Spirit of God would come as " 'the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me' " (*John 15:26, NKJV*). Moreover, Jesus always told the truth, and

His disciples would testify to this fact because they were with Him “from the beginning” (*John 15:27*).

Jesus is the Light of truth all around us. He dispels the darkness of falsehood and confusion and makes it possible for us to see everything in the right perspective. Now, as in the time of Pentecost, when the Spirit of truth descends, “‘He will guide you into all truth’” (*John 16:13, NKJV*).

In a permissive and pluralistic society, truth is a moving target, for it seems to keep shifting and evolving. What is truth today is not necessarily truth tomorrow. But Jesus, in one sentence, cuts through all of that and declares: “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (*John 14:6, NKJV*).

The Scripture and the Truth (*John 5:38–40*)

The entire Bible testifies to the truth. Scripture is a consistent and cohesive whole, for both Testaments have the same Author—the Holy Spirit. This same truth applies to the testimony of Jesus in His day. The religious leaders claimed to believe strongly in Moses, but they disbelieved his testimony about Jesus. (*See John 5:46.*) The leaders claimed to believe in the Old Testament; however, they felt that a mere assent to it guaranteed them eternal life.

But the Jewish leaders’ narrow views about Scripture drove them away from the heart of it, including from Jesus Himself. The leaders seemed to ignore the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets and prophecies about the hope of Israel and of the world. (*See John 5:39.*) It is truly astounding that, in searching for salvation, they had rejected the Lord of their hope and life. They did not seem to understand that, apart from Jesus, there was only death, and that life was possible only through Him.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. How does the reality of Jesus, our Savior, who is the perfect reflection of the Father, impact your daily life? Imagine you were Philip and heard Jesus tell you that seeing Him is seeing the Father. What does it mean to “see” the Father and His Son?**

2. What is the significance of Jesus bringing His head close to Judas's feet as He washed them? How does Jesus' act of humility and condescension apply to you personally?

3. What is your real motivation for being in heaven: the mansions and the streets of gold or something else? What is the significance of seeing Jesus there? Why must He be our first and foremost priority?

4. How does the certainty of Christ's coming impact our present everyday life?

5. What do you think of the idea that everything we believe should be anchored in Scripture and yet, at the same time, must always lead us to Christ? What does it say about our spiritual walk if we regard gaining intellectual knowledge as our primary goal?

6. How should our emphasis on Christ and the Bible impact our worldview as we see all sorts of disruption and confusion surrounding us?

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?

A Dream in Dallas

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Samuel declared that he had no interest in Bible studies. “But you marked that you were interested on a Bible-study interest card,” said the caller, a Bible worker from the Dallas First Seventh-day Adventist Church in the U.S. state of Texas. He and other Bible workers were following up on cards distributed by the church. “Well, I’m not interested,” Samuel said.

The caller placed the Bible-study interest card aside.

A week later, another Bible worker called Samuel.

“I’m not interested,” Samuel said.

The next week, the Bible worker called again.

“How much will the Bible studies cost?” Samuel asked.

“Nothing.”

At the first Bible study, Samuel said he and his wife had been looking for a church. Their son had invited them to his church, but they had been offended by a sermon about the pope and the seventh-day Sabbath. “I’ll never set foot inside a Seventh-day Adventist church again,” Samuel said.

The Bible worker prayed silently and continued the Bible study.

After several weeks, the Bible worker invited Samuel to evangelistic meetings at the Dallas First Seventh-day Adventist Church. He wondered what Samuel would say. Samuel agreed to go.

At the first meeting, Samuel looked around the church with great interest. The building had a unique architecture, with a rounded sanctuary, a rounded ceiling, and pews curved around the platform. Samuel sought out the Bible worker. “I need to talk to you,” he said. The Bible worker was helping to prepare for the meeting, and he asked Samuel if he could wait. Samuel agreed and sat down. He listened attentively to the evangelist’s sermon about Daniel 2. Afterward, he found the Bible worker and blurted out, “I want to be baptized!” The Bible worker was shocked and exclaimed, “What?”

Samuel said he had had a dream 18 years earlier. “In the dream, Jesus led me to a church and said, ‘This is My church,’ ” he said. “When I walked into the church this evening, I recognized it immediately. Finally, I’ve found the church from my dream. I want to be baptized.”

The Bible worker took Samuel to the evangelist, who was equally surprised to hear about the dream. What made the story even more remarkable was that the church had burned down and a new building had been constructed 13 years earlier. Samuel had seen the new church in his dream five years before it was constructed.



“Everything is possible when we cooperate with God in His mission,” said the evangelist, Slavik Ostapenko, now pastor of the Spokane Slavic Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington State.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 14:6–11, John 1:13, John 3:5–8, John 6:63, John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:7–11, John 17*

This week’s lesson is about the triune God and how Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead, is interconnected with its other two Members.

There are at least two places in the New Testament where the three Members of the Godhead are mentioned in one context. At Jesus’ baptism, as recorded in Matthew 3:16, 17, the Holy Spirit descended and settled upon Jesus, and the voice of the Father was heard. In John 1:1–3, 32, we learn that Jesus and the Father are one and that John the Baptist witnessed the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, settle on the Son.

Chapters 13–17 are considered John’s farewell chapters on Jesus, just before His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. In these chapters, Jesus focuses on the important subject of His relationship to His Father and to the Holy Spirit, and how we may, in Him, become close to God. Jesus desired to leave us with this most important thought so that we may always remember that He came from the Father, that He is like the Father, and that the Holy Spirit, His representative, is sent to teach, convict, and comfort us until Jesus comes.

Part II: Commentary

Genesis 1 and John 1 have something in common. The triune God was involved in creation through Jesus, and the triune God was involved in redemption through Jesus. The creative Word fashioned a perfect world that was marred with sin and disrupted the harmonious accord that existed between God and His created beings. Happily, Jesus, the redemptive Word, took upon Himself the work of restoring lost harmony, and He conquered. Moreover, He fought death and won. (*See Rom. 6:8–14 and 2 Cor. 5:21.*)

It is easy to assume that Jesus suffered all by Himself on the cross, but the Father and the Holy Spirit suffered with Him, too. In 2 Corinthians 5:19, Paul says that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (*NKJV*). It is worthy of note that God wants us to be actively engaged in the ministry of reconciliation, to have the awesome privilege of sharing in the work of Jesus as ambassadors of His kingdom.

Jesus testified that He and His Father are one, and indeed, they had been one from eternity. He Himself said, “‘I and the Father are one’ ” (*John 10:30, NASB*), and “‘The Father is in Me, and I in Him’ ” (*John 10:38, NKJV*). The Father has greatly invested in this world, and He loves it as

much as He loves His only Son. Jesus does the perfect will of His Father (*John 5:30*); the Father speaks and acts through Him (*John 14:10*); and the Father brings salvation to those who believe in His Son (*John 3:16*).

Jesus and the Father

Creation and salvation were both God's initiative. He created Adam and Eve out of love, to share fellowship with them. This fellowship was disrupted by sin, but God did not leave us to our own fate. He took the initiative to restore our broken relationship with Him. Sometimes we tend to emphasize our commitment to God, but what would our human commitment be without His great commitment to us? It is His commitment that inspires our commitment. Paul affirms this point by asking, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (*Rom. 2:4, NKJV*).

Jesus volunteered to come to our sinful world on a divine mission to rescue it from the clutches of the evil one. God in His love shared this initiative and agreed to come to this world in the Person of His Son and to die for each one. *John 3:16* plainly tells us that God loved the world to the extreme extent of sending His one and only Son to die for it, for only His death could redeem us from our death. Abraham and his promised son, Isaac, typified this promise by their agreement to fulfill God's request.

But the difference was that Isaac's sacrifice was not vicarious as Christ's was to be. This difference existed because the Son of God was the Source of life, and Isaac was not. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (*John 1:1, 2, 4, NKJV*). Ellen G. White states that "in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Knowing the Son Is Knowing the Father (*John 14:6–11*).

More than anywhere in the Bible, an abundance of references to the Father appear in John's Gospel, especially in the latter chapters. Exactly 136 times Jesus refers to the Father: what He is like and the unity that exists between the two of Them. Some literary critics may question such redundancy as useless, but Jesus wanted to make sure we knew and valued His Father. Along with that, Jesus emphasized how He lived out His Father's perfect will in all that He said and did.

Perhaps the one reference that sums up this focus is Christ's reply to Philip in *John 14:9*, in which the Savior affirms, " 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father' " (*NKJV*). This clear declaration should lead all of us to relate to God the Father as we relate to God the Son, for whatever characteristics of Jesus we see in the Gospels, we should also see as pertaining to the Father. This encouraging realization should help us to enter into a mutually loving relationship with the Father as with the Son.

The relevant question to ask ourselves here is, How would our daily lives be impacted if we followed Christ's example of not doing our will but of doing the wise will of our heavenly Father instead?

The Holy Spirit (*John 1:13, John 3:5–8, John 6:63, John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:7–11*)

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in the dynamic process of spiritual conversion, a process described by Jesus as being born again. Even at the beginning of his Gospel, John addresses this vital issue of the new birth, which is “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (*John 1:13, NKJV*). This miraculous event takes place by the agency of the Holy Spirit's stirring influence in the human heart.

It is the Holy Spirit that awakens the conscience to the urgent need for salvation and convicts the heart of the truthfulness of all that the Father and Son say and do. Besides being our Comforter, or the One who sits next to us to bring comfort, the Holy Spirit specializes in conviction. We should be thankful when we experience a beneficial dose of guilt because it is a clear sign that the Spirit is active in our lives, wooing us to make things right.

Other functions of the Holy Spirit, alluded to in John's Gospel, are found in John 16:8–15. To begin with, the Spirit convicts our consciences with guilt regarding the sin that plagues us and that must be removed from our lives. Second, He convicts us of righteousness and of the joy of doing what is right instead of what is selfish. This righteousness, both imputed and imparted, comes only from the “Sun of righteousness” through the ministry of the Spirit. Third, the Spirit convicts us of judgment, which is sure to come. This conviction should lead us to repent and be ready for Christ's soon coming. The conviction of the coming judgment should hasten our coming to the Father in true repentance and reformation. Fourth, the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth as it is in Jesus. In our witnessing to others, Jesus brings to our memory the things we need to say at the right time (*Luke 21:14, 15*). Fifth, the Spirit glorifies Jesus in honoring His words and will.

The Prayer of Jesus (*John 17*)

The prayer in John 17 is described as the intercessory prayer of Jesus, which is the longest and most profound of His prayers. In it, Jesus prays for Himself, for His disciples, and for all believers, present, and future—future, because He prays “ ‘also for those who will believe in Me through their [the disciples'] word’ ” (*John 17:20, NKJV*). Christ's prayers are not only powerful but all-encompassing. It is a fact that He prays for us personally, passionately, powerfully, and perpetually.

Jesus prayed for Peter personally in Luke 22:31, 32. He prayed passionately for His stubborn and wayward people. (*See Matt. 23:37.*)

Paul tells us in Hebrews 5:7 that He supplicated with “vehement cries and tears” (*NKJV*). He prays powerfully, even for His enemies crucifying Him: “ ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ ” (*Luke 23:34, NKJV*). Jesus’ prayers were answered in his enemies’ conversion in response to the Spirit-anointed preaching of Peter. Finally, Jesus prays perpetually, not intermittently as we do when we pray for others. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus “is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (*NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. Recall a time when you felt frustrated at not fully comprehending what was in God’s Word. In this context, how does it help you to consider the infiniteness of God in comparison with your own finiteness? The perfect knowledge of our infinite God spans the full spectrum of knowledge and wisdom, but our limited knowledge covers only a tiny slice on that spectrum. Should not this reality cause us to submit to His will and to “be still and know that [He is] God”? Discuss.**

- 2. Have you come to the realization that the Father is like the Son, and the Son is like the Father? If yes, how so? How does your realization help you to be more intimate with God the Father?**

3. How does it make you feel that, even here on earth and more so in heaven, you will share in the intimacy and closeness that Jesus has with the Father?

4. The Holy Spirit's job is to bring conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment to the human heart. If, for some reason, you are resisting the pricking of your conscience, what can you do about it?

5. Have you thought that, in order to build up your faith and strengthen your prayer life, you should unite your frail faith and prayers with Jesus' formidable faith prayers? What difference do you think this union will make in your spiritual journey to the kingdom?

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 Weepst 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?

Kingston Finds Hope

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A Bible worker invited several people to the Seventh-day Adventist church in Bethel, Alaska, to share their life stories with a visitor from Adventist Mission. Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering for fourth quarter 2024 will go to repair and expand the church so it can accommodate a center of influence for ministry in Bethel. I had flown to the town of 6,300 people to collect mission stories to promote the project.

But no one showed up at the church at the designated time. The Bible worker, Joy Anderson, waved toward a large pizza that she had picked up on her way to the church from her office, where she works as a lawyer.

“Help yourself,” said Joy, who is originally from Alabama and co-leads the church with another Bible worker. “I had hoped that pizza would encourage people to come.”

About half the pizza was gone when Kingston walked in. He expressed surprise that he was the only person present. Then he took a slice of pizza, sat down, and spoke about why he worships at the Adventist church.

The 59-year-old custodian said he struggled for years with alcohol and drugs in Hooper Bay, a Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta town of 1,400 people located 90 minutes by small plane from Bethel. “I wanted to get out of the crummy life that I was living,” he said. “I told myself, ‘If I do not learn from this lesson, if I do not learn from my mistakes, people will think that I am dumb.’”

Then Kingston moved to Bethel, following the path of many Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta residents who have left small towns in hope of better lives in Bethel, the largest community in western Alaska. Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta’s population is about 85 percent Alaska Native, who are primarily Yup’ik, Cup’ik, and Athabaskan.

One day, Steve, an Adventist and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta native, invited Kingston to the Bethel Church. “He asked me if I was troubled or down,” Kingston said. “I was curious where he was going, so I started coming.”

Kingston found strength in spending time with other churchgoers who had overcome their dependence on alcohol and drugs. “They helped me to stay away from those things,” he said. “This setting has helped me.” He said he is happy but still seeking answers. “The Good Man up above sees everything,” he said. “We all find our answers somehow.”



Please pray for Kingston, who attends church nearly every Sabbath but has yet to make a decision for baptism. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that will support the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church’s mission outreach this quarter. The names of Bethel residents have been changed to protect their privacy. The photo depicts Joy Anderson.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 18:28–38, John 18:38–19:5, John 19:30, John 17:4, John 20:1–10*

We find a clear contrast between Pilate’s worldview and that of Christ. The Roman governor’s worldview found its basis in a temporary king and kingdom, but Jesus’ worldview was founded on a spiritual and eternal kingdom. Yet, it was apparent that Pilate perceived the Man in front of him as someone different from anyone else. He certainly did not view Him as did the Jewish leaders and the mob, as one deserving a cruel execution.

In the brief but significant interaction between the two, Jesus told Pilate that He had come to this world to “ ‘bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’ ” (*John 18:37, NKJV*). The vacillating Pilate had never heard anyone talk about the truth in such a certain and authoritative manner. In response, Pilate then asked this timeless question: “ ‘What is truth?’ ” (*John 18:38*). Pilate, however, did not wait for Jesus’ answer to that crucial question. We can only imagine what Christ’s answer might have been if He had had the opportunity to answer.

Could it be that we emulate Pilate’s impatience? We ask God some good questions, but we frequently do not wait for His answers. How different our lives would be if we would listen more to what God has to say. Unfortunately, we are too often self-focused and not Christ-centered. Imagine all the helpful insights God might give us if we would simply be still and listen to Him more.

It is interesting to note that the Crucifixion, the most shameful and humiliating death, is presented by John as a most glorious event. By His death Jesus, as the Second Adam, defeated Satan, accomplishing the mission of saving sinful humanity. With Jesus’ mission of salvation accomplished, His Father accepted His sacrifice and made it possible for all who believed in His Son to be saved.

Part II: Commentary

What Is Truth? (*John 18:28–38*)

In asking his question, “What is truth?” and then turning away without waiting for the answer, Pilate missed hearing about the truth from the Truth Himself, standing in the flesh before him. His question about truth is particularly relevant today because our world is replete with truth that has been abandoned or forsaken. The darkness of untruth and its consequent confusion is rampant everywhere. Today, dodging the truth, beating around it, and doublespeak have become acceptable and normalized. This degradation of the truth occurs

so often that people are impelled to ask the same question as Pilate: “What is truth?”

When we follow in Jesus’ footsteps, He helps us to become truth-tellers. Jesus does not merely tell the truth; He Himself is the truth. After all, He testified: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*). May our witness pull others up from the darkness of evil and into the bright light of Christ’s truth. May we let others know that the truth can still be found in Christ and His followers.

Behold the Man! (*John 18:38–19:5*)

Pontius Pilate is to be pitied for his vacillation and compromise toward what he knew to be truth. He tried to please all, but, as a result, he pleased none. He was hated by both the Jews and the Roman power. The emperor exiled him to Gaul and stripped him of all his honors. Shortly after, he died in exile by taking his own life. Pilate tried to appeal to the Jewish leaders’ sense of justice and sympathy, but they were bent on seeing Jesus die on the cross. By ordering His flogging, Pilate hoped to elicit the sympathy of His people.

In a last-ditch attempt to save Jesus, Pilate then offered the religious leaders a choice between two prisoners, as was the custom. Whom should Pilate release: Christ or Barabbas? The Jews chose Barabbas, the vilest criminal, a true representative of Satan. Sad to say, when Pilate finally realized that the leaders were adamant about crucifying Jesus, he reluctantly caved to their wishes. A little compromise led him to bigger compromises until he crossed the threshold of no return. Yet, during this process, Pilate impugned himself and the injustice of the court proceedings by declaring three times that Jesus was indeed innocent and then going on to condemn Him to death.

What a tragic figure Pilate was! Yet, as a heathen, he tried to save a Jew from His people while they clamored for His death. All these things transpired at Passover.

Jesus’ mission was to be sacrificed as the Paschal Lamb, slain from the foundations of the world. He was born to die, but His death did not need to be at the hands of Pilate. Pilate’s final words to the crowd were “ ‘Behold the Man!’ ” (*John 19:5, NKJV*). Inadvertently, Pilate summed up, in these seemingly simple words, the depths and breadth of salvation and what, in essence, it was all about. By beholding Jesus, we become changed. And in the language of John the Baptist: “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*). Let us behold the Son of man and be saved. Let us look to Him and live.

“ ‘It Is Finished!’ ” (*John 19:30, John 17:4*)

In John 17:4, Jesus tells His Father: “ ‘I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do’ ” (*NKJV*). On whose behalf had Jesus finished working? The context for this declaration

was Jesus' high priestly prayer on behalf of His disciples. Jesus mentions them 40 times in the course of the prayer. He indeed glorified His Father in the training of His disciples.

Jesus equipped them to carry forth His finished work of redemption. "Christ had finished the work that was given Him to do. He had gathered out those who were to continue His work among men. And He said: 'I am glorified in them.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 24. The finishing of Christ's work in training His disciples was to be followed thereafter with the finishing of His work of salvation. In John 19:30, we read: "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (*NKJV*).

Christ's perfect sacrifice signifies that we should not add or subtract from His work but simply embrace it. Salvation is a gift of grace. We receive this gift by faith and, through faith in Christ's righteousness, we are empowered to live an obedient and victorious life.

The Empty Tomb (*John 20:1–10*)

The resurrection of Christ from the tomb very early on the first day of the week was indispensable to the faith of His followers. Christ must rise from the grave as He had said and as the Old Testament predicted. No evil power could keep Him in the ground. At His Father's mighty command to rise, the forces of evil were totally vanquished. The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:17, states, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (*NKJV*). Moreover, in 1 Corinthians 15:19, he continues, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (*NKJV*).

Why "most pitiable"? Because the glorious hope of the resurrection would not be possible, and the dead in Christ would not be raised to life, if not for the Resurrection. But the Resurrection took place on the morning of the first day of the week, and the empty tomb was witnessed by Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John. The Roman soldiers witnessed Christ's coming forth from the tomb a short time before that, and they fell to the ground as dead men at the appearance of His dazzling glory. In fact, the soldiers were so amazed at what they witnessed with their own eyes that they rushed to the religious leaders to tell them what had occurred.

But the leaders were so set against Jesus that they completely dismissed any clear evidence of His glorious resurrection. The leaders, however, knew for sure that Christ was resurrected; otherwise, why bribe the soldiers with money? Matthew describes what actually happened: "When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Tell them, "His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.'" And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure' " (*Matt. 28:12–14, NKJV*).

Therefore, it is abundantly clear that the leaders were perpetuating a definite lie opposing the evidence before them. Roman soldiers—all of them—were conveniently sleeping at one time, enabling the disciples to steal Christ’s body? Impossible! Neither robbers nor Christ’s disciples stole His body. The Savior rose gloriously from the grave. Even His facecloth was neatly folded and set aside, showing that there was no evidence of grave tampering or hurried theft.

Jesus and Mary (*John 20:11–17*)

Mary had the unique privilege, prior to any of the disciples, of seeing the empty tomb. She also was the first one to see and hear the risen Jesus. As she lingered near the empty tomb, reluctant to leave, she entered inside and unexpectedly saw two angels sitting where Christ’s risen body had been. They asked her why she was weeping.

As she turned around, she came face-to-face with a man whom she thought was the gardener, not realizing that He was the risen Lord. Seeing her weeping, Jesus asked her, “ ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ ” (*John 20:15, NKJV*). Mary’s attention was utterly focused on the missing body of Jesus, until Jesus said her name. Upon hearing Him, she suddenly realized who He was and called Him “Rabboni.”

Mary rushed to the disciples and told them the good news that she had seen the Lord. Jesus had appeared to her in His humanity, just as He later appeared to the disciples when He prepared breakfast for them and when He allowed Thomas to touch His scars. For our sake, Jesus will retain His humanity forever, linking us with Him by a bond that will never be broken.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

- 1. It is true that Jesus had to die to save sinful humanity. But why did He have to die in such a cruel way? Why was a “regular” death not enough?**

- 2. More than ever before, people ask the same question that Pilate asked Jesus: “What is truth?” Why do you think the truth is being cast aside in our day? What are some of the contributing societal factors?**

3. **React to these statements: Look up and live, look down and die. Never give up, but always look up and see light in the face of Jesus. In what practical ways can you “behold the Man”?**

4. **What is the significance of Jesus’ finishing His work of training the disciples to share the gospel, just before He finished His work of redemption on the cross? What work do you think He still has to finish in your life? Explain.**

5. **What practical lessons may we learn from Mary’s experience? She was so caught up in her grief and tears that, at first, she could not recognize the risen Jesus. In what ways are we sometimes so weighed down with our heavy burdens that we do not discern the presence of Jesus in our lives? How can we remedy this situation?**

6. **Reflect for a moment on the tragic end of Pilate’s life. What lessons can we learn from the way he conducted himself, especially in how he related to the Jews, the Roman authorities, and to Jesus?**

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 Key to an Alaskan Village

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mission pilot Jim Kincaid found it hard work to fly from remote village to remote village in the U.S. state of Alaska. Taking off and landing in the bush was the easy part. Finding Alaska Native hearts who were receptive to the gospel message was more challenging.

It looked like trouble when Jim landed his small plane at a settlement about 150 miles north of Fairbanks. He was flying literature evangelists from village to village to sell Bibles and other Christian literature. As he parked, all-terrain vehicles swarmed around the plane. The occupants were very unwelcoming.

“Who are you?” one said.

“What are you doing there?” said another.

At that moment, Jim remembered a name. A man from the village had attended one or two evangelistic meetings that Jim had led in Fairbanks sometime earlier. Jim turned to the village gatekeepers.

“Is Robert Frank in town?” he asked.

Immediately, their expressions changed. Angry looks gave way to curiosity and then hospitality.

“Oh, you know Robert Frank?” said one.

“We will take you to see him!” said another.

Jim was taken to visit Robert. It was like he had the key to the village.

Robert was eating a meal when Jim arrived, and unfortunately didn’t immediately recognize the pilot. Jim had to remind him about how and why they knew each other. But then Robert remembered, and he was very cordial. He offered Jim a piece of fresh bear meat.

And so it was that Jim and the literature evangelists gained entry into a new village that otherwise would have been out of reach. All it had taken was knowing someone’s name.

Jesus also knows people’s names. Jesus said that He, the Good Shepherd, “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (*John 10:3, NKJV*).

If Jesus knows names, might it also be a good for His followers to follow His example?



“Knowing someone in the village, even if it is just knowing the name of a person in the village, can give you rapport with an entire village,” Jim said. “It’s like in any culture. If you remember someone’s name, it goes a long way.”

Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help to open a center of influence for Alaska Natives in Bethel, Alaska. Thank you for planning a generous offering this Sabbath.

Part I: Overview

Study Focus: *John 21:1–19, John 21:18–25, John 8:40–46, John 4:46–54, John 12:32, John 15:1–11*

At the conclusion, or epilogue, of John’s Gospel, Christ sought to instill the teachings of His spiritual kingdom, His vicarious death, and His sure resurrection in His followers’ hearts as well as in their minds. His disciples, however, even to the end, did not seem to internalize the truth of what He said. No matter how many times He tried to explain this truth to them and lead them to believe, they found it quite difficult to process.

Lest we become too hard on the disciples, isn’t this the problem with many Christians today? We hear the words of Christ and study them, but do they really become an integral part of our lives? Do they stay in our heads without reaching our hearts?

It is hard to believe, but true, that Peter and the other disciples thought that, during His earthly ministry, Christ was going to restore the literal kingdom to Israel by defeating the Roman power. After the Resurrection, the hope of the two disciples was crushed as they traveled to Emmaus. And as Jesus (unrecognized by them as the Savior) joined them, He explained to them the prophecies concerning Himself. Moreover, the reality of the Resurrection, and, shortly afterward, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, helped to actualize what He had taught the Twelve all along. Finally, it became so real to the disciples that they were willing to risk their lives for the cause of the gospel.

It seems that, in those last few weeks with the resurrected Lord, the disciples finally learned and believed more about what Jesus was trying to tell them. He was long-suffering with them to the very end, and He is as willing to be patient with us today. What would we do without His patience? May this thought help to inspire us to be more faithful in our minds, in our hearts, and in our living.

Part II: Commentary

Meeting in Galilee (*John 21:1–19*)

Even after the resurrected Lord appeared three times to the disciples, at the suggestion of Peter, they went back to fishing. They labored all night but had nothing to show for their efforts. Normally, they would have caught something, however small the catch. But Jesus intended that this failure would lead them to focus on being fishers of men. Our failure in something that we do well often leads us to seek divine aid.

Early that morning, Jesus showed up on the shore, performed the miracle of the great catch of fish, and then fed His followers breakfast. This story tells us that the risen Christ was a real person, just as He was before His death. Moreover, in preparing food, Jesus showed that He cared about the needs of His tired and hungry disciples. In doing so, Jesus showed them He would ever be their friend, caring about their needs as they endeavored to advance His ministry.

It is telling that, in this last meeting, the Lord focused on Peter. Right after His resurrection, Jesus specifically mentioned Peter by name, and now He singled him out again and asked him three pertinent questions concerning a most important subject—that of loving Him. Earlier, as Jesus was telling the disciples about His impending crucifixion, Peter insisted that he would die for Him (*John 13:37*). But in spite of that promise, Peter and the other disciples fled for their lives, thinking that their cause was lost. Later, Peter denied Christ three times, just as Jesus had predicted.

In the Mideastern culture, it's shameful to deny one's friends, and Peter keenly felt that shame. Knowing the shame that Peter felt, Jesus asked him three questions that were designed to assist in his healing and restoration. Three times Jesus asked him, by name: “ ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ ” (*John 21:16, NKJV*). Jesus used the Greek verb *agapao*, which refers to God's unconditional love, and Peter answered with the verb *phileo*, which often refers to loving a friend.

It seems that Peter did not feel that his love for his Lord was as elevated as his Lord's love for him. Here, in his answer, Peter was showing humility and teachableness, traits that qualified him to “feed my sheep” (*John 21:16*). This gesture on Christ's part proved that Peter was now restored and entrusted with taking care of Christ's flock of believers. What a change! The impulsive and overconfident Peter had finally learned to be humble, distrusting self and trusting Jesus.

Keeping Your Eyes on Jesus (*John 21:18–25*)

It is justifiable to say that there seemed to be a sort of “competition” going on between two of Christ's prominent disciples: Peter and John. Both were vying for His attention. Jesus had just finished restoring Peter before his fellow disciples and committing to him the pastoral care of His sheep. Amid this work of rehabilitation, Jesus included the prediction of how Peter was going to give his life for the gospel. (*See John 21:18, 19.*) Then Jesus called on Peter to follow Him, which was the only way to remain faithful and strong through the ebb and flow of ministry and even martyrdom.

As Peter walked with Christ, John was nearby. That apparently made

Peter curious. If Peter was to suffer, was not John to suffer as well? After all, the call to follow was made specifically to him. That is why Peter asked: “ ‘But Lord, what about this man [John]?’ ” (*John 21:21, NKJV*). Knowing what was in Peter’s heart, Jesus quickly responded: “ ‘If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me’ ” (*John 21:22, NKJV*).

Simply put, what Jesus was trying to convey to Peter is that the priority of following Him does not depend on who else does or upon what circumstances may arise. Peer pressure may lead us to veer this way or that, but we must be fully committed to Jesus, regardless of people or circumstances. This mindset is desperately needed today, when people tend to follow whims or public opinion. But, as faithful followers of Jesus, we cannot do that. We must follow Him because of our own personal convictions in Him as Savior because our salvation is a matter between us and God. When Jesus comes again, it will not matter what others think of us; it will only matter what God thinks of us.

We should not leave this section without addressing a potential misunderstanding that may arise in the minds of many concerning Jesus’ words about John. Jesus’ focus was on Peter’s need to follow Him regardless, not on what was going to happen to John. Notice the conditional statement: “ ‘If I will that he remain’ ” (*John 21:22, NKJV*). It was rather easy for Peter, and easy for us, to needlessly misconstrue Jesus’ clear words and miss His main point of remaining faithful.

At times, even our closest friends may misinterpret what we say. However, our best Friend Jesus understands fully what we say and mean. Consider this inspired statement in terms of putting our full trust in the unchangeable Jesus: “In His mercy and faithfulness God often permits those in whom we place confidence to fail us, in order that we may learn the folly of trusting in man and making flesh our arm. Let us trust fully, humbly, unselfishly in God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 486.

Light and Darkness (*John 8:40–46*)

There are some people who are determined to hold on to their mistaken opinions, no matter how much evidence they see to the contrary. They also tend to gather around themselves only those who agree with them, thus serving to reinforce their own errors.

Such was the case with the religious leaders. They were so blinded by their own self-centeredness and prejudice that they hated Jesus with a passion. It is so strange that they claimed to love the Father yet hated His Son. Jesus exposed this hypocrisy in these words: “ ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me’ ” (*John 8:42, NKJV*).

Jesus Heals the Jewish Nobleman's Son (*John 4:46–54*).

In our study this week, we also consider the story of an eminent Jewish nobleman, who is an important officer in King Herod's service. The nobleman's son languished on his deathbed. All physicians had given up on him. In desperation, the father sought after the Great Physician, even though he did not really believe that He was the promised Messiah. Jesus knew that unless He healed the nobleman's son, he would not believe that He was the Christ.

Although Jesus knew the man's motives, He desired not only to heal his son but also to awaken genuine faith in the man and to bring salvation to the entire family. Jesus remarked to the nobleman, " 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe' " (*John 4:48, NKJV*). These words pricked the father's conscience and led him to question his selfish motives, setting him on a path of believing in Jesus for His own sake.

Abiding in Jesus (*John 12:32, John 15:1–11*)

When Jesus was "lifted up from the earth" (*John 12:32*), He drew many unto Himself, and He still draws many today. But being drawn to Christ is just the initial step in our saving relationship with Him, for we must continue to walk with Him and abide in Him, which requires determination and steadiness in our spiritual journey.

To highlight the importance of abiding in Him, Jesus mentions it seven times in only four verses, found in *John 15:4–7*. Without abiding in Christ, we "can do nothing" (*John 15:5*). The meaning of this verse becomes quite clear when we consider the real-life example of grafting a cutting into a vine. If the graft doesn't adhere to the parent stock, it will dry up. Thus, without the parent stock, the graft can do absolutely nothing.

The quality of abiding conveys the idea of intimacy and permanency. The fruitful branch has a living connection with the vine. "Fiber by fiber and vein by vein, [the graft will] become knit with the Vine, and partake of its life. . . . As the graft receives life when united to the vine, so the sinner partakes of the divine nature when connected with Christ. Finite man is united with the infinite God. When thus united, the words of Christ *abide* in us, and we are not actuated by a spasmodic feeling, but a living, abiding principle."—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 291.

Part III: Life Application

Think about and answer the following questions:

1. Consider what happens when we place too much trust in people, even in our best friends, instead of in Jesus. In such situations, God, in His great love and mercy for us, allows such friends to disappoint us so that we may finally learn to place our ultimate trust in Jesus. To what extent, then, should we trust our best friends?

2. When we know and believe that God has forgiven us, is it all right to believe fully in that forgiveness but not fully forgive ourselves, knowing that we don't deserve that forgiveness? Why, or why not?

3. Knowing that someday we may face the time of trouble alone, how dependent should we be on other Christians around us? Do we still need others to prop us up, or have we learned to draw strength from our companionship with Jesus? Explain.

4. What does it really mean to you, in everyday life, that without Jesus you can do nothing? Specifically, what does that "nothing" refer to?

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.