

# The Gospel of John

## Session 1

### John 1:1-2:12

#### I. John 1:1-18

1. The Prologue to John's gospel introduces its basic themes and provides the key to interpreting what follows correctly. It states John's basic Christology: Jesus is the incarnation of God's preexistent Word. It is through him that God the Father is revealed, the gift of the Law is perfected, divine adoption effected, and True Life bestowed. All of this has to be spelled out in greater detail and this is the purpose of the gospel's narrative. The Prologue provides the key to interpreting the gospel properly because it enables us to read the narrative as a narrative of the actions of God. Because of the incarnation, the human actions of Jesus are simultaneously the actions of God.
2. **1:1-5:** John deliberately begins his gospel in exactly the same way as the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) text of Genesis 1:1. This alerts us to the fact that John's starting point is before creation. Here, we learn three essential things about the Word. (1) The Word existed before creation. The Bible divides all of reality between Creator and creation and John makes it clear that the Word is on the Creator side of this dividing line. (2) The Word was "with God" (1:1). The Word was dynamically related to God before creation existed. (3) God and the Word share the same nature ("divinity") but they are distinct; the Word is not simply another name for God. To avoid this confusion (the heresy of modalism), 1:14 will employ the terminology of "Father" for "God" and "Son" for "Word". The Word played a crucial role in creation in that "all things" (1:3) were made through him. In Proverbs 8:22-36, Wisdom (personified) plays this role in creation. The Word is the source of creation's fundamental order and structure. All things in the universe have a relationship to the Word who makes each thing what it is. The Word is the source of both Life and Light (and both these words need to be capitalized). Through the Word (incarnate), the Father communicates Life (eternal life) and revelation (Light). 1:5 is a reference to the incarnation. This Light has pierced the darkness in the past (in Christ) and, despite the persistence of sin and evil, the darkness remains pierced. (This is an important theme.)
3. **1:6-14:** With this section we make an abrupt shift from "before creation" to "within history". This shift makes an important point. The narrative we are about to read (or listen to!) is like the Old Testament in that it is a fundamentally historical narrative; it speaks of God's action within history. The Old Testament teaches us to expect this and John will meet this expectation but in a radicalized way (as indicated in 1:14). At this point, John the Baptist enters the picture by way of introduction. In 1:6 he is identified as "a man sent from God". Since Jesus is the only other person in this gospel identified in this way, John is clearly significant. John's role is identified in 1:7. He is a "witness" and his role is to "bear witness" to the Word. Testimony, both human and divine, is important to John. John's role is not to call attention to himself (3:30!). It is made clear that John is not the Light but that he was sent from God to bear witness to the Light (perhaps along the lines suggested by Luke 1:76-79). 1:9 is another reference to the incarnation. Even as John is being sent as a witness, the Light is coming into the world. In 1:10-11 we see the reality of sin. When the Word comes to the world that was made through him, he is unrecognizable to the creatures made in his image. And, more specifically, when he comes to "his own" (Israel) he is not received. John points to the deep effects of sin. Corrupted by it, human beings do not recognize their Creator. Israel, God's covenant people, fails to receive the Word of God. 1:12 indicates that the proper way to receive the Word is to believe. The nature of belief will be spelled out in the narrative. The Word enables human beings to be adopted as God's children. This "birth" is unlike the natural process of birth in that no human will or resources can bring it about. With regard to this

supernatural birth, the human will counts for nothing because it must be “of God”. Only God can bring it about. 1:14 picks up at the point where 1:5 left off. The Word, which preexisted creation and through whom creation was brought about, entered into creation and dwelt among human beings. This recalls two famous acts of dwelling from the Old Testament. There is the dwelling of Wisdom with Israel in Sirach 24:8. Here, a tent is pitched for Wisdom so that she can dwell among Israel. There is the dwelling of God in the tabernacle tent in Exodus 40:35. Now, the dwelling of God takes place in the humanity of Christ and he is the true Temple (2:13-22). Note that this means that eternity and time, God and creation, and God and human beings are not opposites. The Word, who preexisted creation with the Father, now enters into creation by “tabernacling” within it. In this capacity, he reveals God within the human situation and asserts God’s claim over the whole of creation. The Word reveals God’s glory through his incarnation. This is significant since only God can reveal his glory for this is a uniquely divine property. The Son shared in the glory of the Father before time (17:5) and reveals this glory through his incarnation (to the extent that it can be known by human beings). This may be a reference to Exodus 34:6 in which God reveals his graciousness. The Son reveals the graciousness of God which is the Truth about God. (We have to read the whole Gospel to see how this unfolds.)

4. **1:15-18:** 1:15 refers back to John the Baptist’s witness. While John’s appearance comes before Christ’s chronologically, he makes it clear that in an absolute sense Christ precedes him (in the sense indicated by 1:1). If one does not grasp the priority of Christ, one will fail to understand him. 1:16 makes an important claim: in Christ we receive a gift which perfects all of God’s other gifts. As Exodus 34:6 indicates, the Son does not mark the first appearance of grace within the relationship between God and creation (for creation is itself a work of grace). What appears in the Son (Truth) perfects all that came before him. For this reason, 1:17 should not be read as a derogatory remark about Moses/Law. John is not contrasting “grace upon grace” with “Moses” but, rather, saying that Jesus Christ perfects the gift of the Law. (Again, we have to read the whole Gospel to discover how this is so.) What is revealed in the Son should not be defined in opposition to the Law. 1:18 is a definitive statement. Since no human being has ever seen God (not even Moses in Exodus 34!), on the Son can make God known and has made him known.
5. **Summary:** The Prologue sets forth the major themes which the Gospel will develop. The first theme is the preexistence of the Word and his role in creation. Because this is the case, the Word can bestow Life and Light since he, along with the Father and the Spirit, is the Source of both. This means that thinking of Jesus Christ as the Messiah is completely inadequate (and it will be presented as such). The Word will bring to perfection the gift of the Law and we are not to understand Law and grace as being in tension. The Son will bring about a new kind of obedience/faithfulness to God. Just as God’s glory was revealed on Mt. Sinai in a definitive way, so the divine glory will be revealed in the Word in a way that will be final.
6. **For Reflection: John 1:14:** St. Augustine offers a profound reflection on this verse. He notes that in the Person of the Word, God was born of a human being (Mary) that we might be born of God. Through the Word, we are reborn or refashioned as children of grace. The Word become flesh, Augustine says, so that we might come to see his majesty through his humility. In becoming incarnate, the Word humbled himself to our weakness, made himself available to our weakened spiritual sight. He works to heal our spiritual sight so that we might come to see his glory. To the degree that we are impaired by sin, we cannot see his glory; only when our sight is healed may we see him truly. “The Son of God by nature became the Son of man by mercy for the sake of human children...Surely, then, how much easier is it to believe that human children by nature can become children of God by grace, and dwell in God? For it is in him alone and thanks to him alone that they can be happy, by sharing his immortality...” (*On the Trinity*, 13.12).

## II. John 1:19-51

1. This section is divided up into four days and then 2:1 reports about what happened "on the third day". This may seem odd at first, as if John failed to realize that the fourth day (1:45-51) should be followed by a fifth day. We need to realize that the "third day" is the day of the revelation of the divine glory on Mt. Sinai in Exodus. God tells Moses that "on the third day" he will descend upon Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:11). Significantly, Jesus' glory is revealed "on the third day" (2:1) as well (note 2:11). We are being told that what happens in 2:1-11 is Mt. Sinai moment with Christ himself being Sinai. In Jesus' day, four days of preparation for the Feast of Pentecost were added to the biblical three days. John is letting us know that 1:19-51 is preparation for a new Pentecost, the revelation of the divine glory in Jesus.
2. **Day 1 (1:19-28):** This day develops 1:6-8 and emphasizes the testimony or witness of John the Baptist. In this Gospel, "the Jews" (1:19) refers to official Judaism (the priests, Levites and their representatives). They ask the central question of the Gospel: "Who are you?" John bears witness to Christ by confessing that he is not the Christ (1:20). He is then asked if he is one of the figures thought to precede the Messiah (Elijah or the Prophet) and vigorously denies even having this status. If John the Baptist is neither the Messiah nor the precursor of the Messiah, then who is he? (1:22). To answer this question, John cites Isaiah 40:3 and this points us in the right direction. He is preparing the way for "the Lord". The origins of baptism are obscure. It does not seem to have been connected with messianic expectation. It may be connected with the Qumran community. Those questioning John want to keep matters within the horizons of their expectations, but he points out that "among you stands one you do not know" (1:26). Those who demand that Christ conform to their criteria will be prevented from knowing him.
3. **Day 2 (1:29-34):** Here John offers testimony (to an unidentified audience) to Christ. He is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world, who preexisted John in both time and rank and the one upon whom the Spirit descended and remained. Note that Jesus' baptism is not described but only indirectly mentioned. John baptized as a witness to Christ so that he might be revealed to Israel (1:31). Apparently, at Jesus' baptism the Father identified the Son to him by sending the Holy Spirit. This is probably a reference to Isaiah 11:2. Once again, we see that all messianic expectations are transcended. The Son comes from the Father and the Spirit remains upon him such that he will play a role in imparting the Spirit to human beings. The Son is also the Lamb of God who removes the sin of the world and, thus, makes reconciliation with the Father possible.
4. **Day 3 (1:35-42):** John repeats his testimony that Christ is the Lamb of God and we now see a movement of two of John's disciples from to Christ. Christ asks them the key question in 1:38: "What are you seeking?" Their reply indicates that they do not sufficiently understand Christ yet (they refer to him as "Teacher"). They assume that Jesus is a rabbi who gathers his students in a particular place, and they want to know where this is (1:38-39). In 1:40 one of these disciples is identified as Andrew, Peter's brother. Andrew then finds Peter and announces that "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). Strictly speaking, this is not a true statement for John identified Jesus to Andrew and he is not simply the Messiah. In 1:42 Christ gives Peter the name Cephas and this seems to imply that Andrew and Peter will have to learn that their messianic expectations are not simply being fulfilled.
5. **Day 4 (1:43-51):** Here Jesus calls Philip to discipleship and then Philip finds Nathanael, telling him that Jesus of Nazareth is the one spoken of by Moses and the prophets (1:45). This confession is inadequate as the Prologue has made clear. Nathanael's response that as long as one thinks only of Jesus' physical origin, one will fail to understand him and his confession in 1:49 is inadequate. 1:51 refers to Genesis 28:12, 16-17. Jesus now identifies himself as the gate of heaven, the "place" where heaven and earth intersect. This prepares us for what happens in 2:1-12.
6. **For Reflection: John 1:29:** Cyril of Alexandria identifies the Lamb of God with the lamb of Isaiah 53:7. This lamb, through whom God's people are cleansed, prefigures Christ. Christ takes away the sin of the world by dying for all and, in so doing, he abolishes death. This means that Christ is the "second Adam" (1

Corinthians 15:47). The first Adam was from the earth (Genesis 2:7) but the “last Adam” is from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:46-47). In him, human nature is begun anew. As the Lamb of God, Christ has “died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:15) that all might live in him. Because of the Lamb of God, it is now possible to taunt death: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death, as it existed for Adam no longer exists for those who are in Christ. (*Commentary on John*)

### III. John 2:1-12

1. **2:1-2:** 2:1 signals that a moment of revelation is approaching. This is the “third day” of Exodus 19:16 when God descends upon Mt. Sinai. The fact that we are told that a wedding is about to take place is also significant. Marriage feasts suggest the arrival of the messianic time (Isaiah 25:6-8). Already, two important Old Testament “markers” indicate that something of great importance is about to happen.
2. **2:3-5:** Mary, identified as “the mother of Jesus” (2:1) initiates the action when the wine for the wedding feast runs out (a major disaster). She tells her son “They have no wine” (2:3), apparently inviting him to take action. Jesus’ response is something of a rebuke; at the very least he puts some distance between her and himself by referring to her as “woman”. Jesus’ declaration that his “hour” has not yet come signals that he is moving toward an “hour” but that it has not yet arrived. This is one of the major themes of the Gospel. At this point, of course, we do not know what this “hour” is. Mary’s response to this distancing is surprising. She instructs the servants to do “whatever he tells you” (2:5). Without knowing what he will say, she tells them to do whatever Jesus will command. Thus far, we have seen inadequate confessions of faith. Now, we have an adequate one. Mary embodies the correct response to Jesus, that of complete trust. Genuine faith has the quality of complete trust.
3. **2:6-12:** The focus now shifts to six large stone jars which normally contain water for the Jewish rites of purification. (It is important to note that these rites had nothing to do with hygiene but with purity before God.) Jesus has the servants fill these jars with water. (Note that Mary’s instruction to them have been followed.) Jesus instructs them to draw some of the water out and to take it to the steward of the feast. Notice that no description of the wine being transformed into water is supplied; this fact is simply reported (2:9). The steward then calls the bridegroom (cf. 3:29) and remarks that the good wine has been held in reserve until now. 2:11 then identifies this action as a “sign” which manifests Jesus’ “glory”. Some may think that the “good wine” was Moses and that anyone coming after him must be of an inferior quality. John signals (cf. 1:17) that God has saved the best for last and that this is what appears in the Son. While the Son appears temporally after Moses, he actually preceded him in the order of creation and, therefore, in the order of glory. If we understand Isaiah 62:1-5 as a promise that Israel will finally be truly married to God, we may understand this sign to point to the fact that this is what the Son has come to bring about. The fact that Jesus’ action results in a super-abundance of wine should not be overlooked. The Word has entered into the world and this transformation is a sign of things to come.
4. **For Reflection: John 2:9:** Jesus’ signs can be understood at various different levels. Reflecting on this verse, St. Augustine notes that wine is latent in water. In transforming water for the rites of purification into wine, Jesus helps us to see that Christ is latent in the Old Testament. Apart from Christ, however, the Old Testament is “water”. When we see Christ in it, however, it not only tastes good, it “inebriates” (Augustine refers to 2 Corinthians 3:14-16). Christ could have directly produced wine from nothing due to his omnipotence but did not do this. In changing water into wine “he showed us that the ancient Scripture was also from him; for the jars were filled at his command. Indeed, although the ancient Scripture is also from the Lord, it has not taste if Christ is not discerned in it.” (*Tractate on John*)

# The Gospel of John

## Session 2

### John 2:13—3:36

#### I. John 2:13-22

1. There is an account of this event in all four Gospels. One of the things which sets John's account apart from the other three is that he places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than at the end. John also uniquely draws a connection between
2. Jesus now departs from Galilee (from Capernaum) and goes "up to Jerusalem" (2:13). The reason for his journey is significant: Passover. Passover not only celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt but it also anticipated Israel's final deliverance. Passover add another symbolic layer to the rich symbolism of the wedding feast.
3. In the temple, Jesus finds vendors selling animals for sacrifice (oxen, sheep and pigeons) and money changers who exchange Roman coins (with the idolatrous image of the emperor) for Tyrian coins to enable Jewish men to pay the required Temple tax. While not particularly edifying, there was nothing immoral about either of these things. Jesus engages in three abrupt actions which express his opposition to these activities. Note the verbs in 2:15. Jesus "drove them all out...he poured out the coins of the money-changers...overturned their tables". One clue to the significance of Jesus' actions can be found in the contrast between "the temple" (2:14) and "my Father's house" (2:16). This suggests that we have two rival views of the meaning of the Temple here. On one hand, there is that of "the Jews" (2:13), the view of official Judaism, and, on the other hand, there is Jesus'. For "the Jews," the Temple is a place of worship, a place which they control, and so the selling of animals and the changing of money can be thought of as necessary. For Jesus, the Temple is his Father's "house" and not a "house of trade" (2:16).
4. Jesus' disciples accept this and connect what Jesus says to Psalm 69:9: "Zeal for your house will consume me" (2:17). In doing this, they identify Jesus as a person whose zeal for God and his house puts his life at risk. We are already being given hints about Jesus' death.
5. "The Jews" demand a miraculous sign from Jesus as proof of his authorization for doing "these things". The sign Jesus offers is that "this temple" will be destroyed and then he will raise it up in three days. Significantly, the word Jesus uses for "temple" in 2:19 is not the word used in 2:14. He is speaking of another "temple". "The Jews" understand Jesus to be speaking of another "temple" and so misunderstand him. Misunderstanding Jesus, they reject his proposed sign.
6. In 2:21-22 the narrator inserts what might be thought of as a parenthetical remark. The "temple" of which Jesus speaks is not the temple in Jerusalem but the "temple of his body" (2:21). The Presence of God which was to be found in the Father's house has been perfected by the Presence of God in Jesus who is himself the true Temple. This will not be known until Jesus' resurrection (2:22). By the time that we get to Joh's account of Jesus' death, we will learn that his death and resurrection brings the Passover to its fulfillment. The disciples will come to believe the word Jesus has spoken (2:22) and in doing this they will follow Mary (2:5).
7. **For Reflection: John 2:19, 21:** Origen of Alexandria notes the connection which John makes between temple and Christ's body such that Christ's body is the New Temple. He makes a further connection, noting that 1 Peter 2:5 describes the Church as being built of "living stones" into a "spiritual house" (of God) and that Ephesians 2:20 refers to the Church as being built on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone," Origen concludes that the "resurrected temple"

refers simultaneously to Christ himself and to his body, the Church. He concludes that “the resurrection of Christ from the passion of the cross contains the mystery of the resurrection of whole body of Christ”. Christ’s “body” and “temple” have multiple meanings and can refer to Christ (resurrected body) and the Church (ecclesiastical body). (*Commentary on John*)

## II. John 2:23-25

1. 2:23 takes us back to 2:13 and brings 2:12-22 to a conclusion. Although English translations do not reflect it, the same Greek verb is used in 1:23 and 2:24. In 2:23 this verb designates the faulty belief in Jesus based upon signs. In 2:24 we are told that Jesus did not place his faith in such people.
2. Those who require signs in order to believe (and especially those who demand them) do not enter into a relationship of trust with Jesus. In the words of 1:12-13, they do not really receive Jesus (like Mary has done).
3. 2:25 makes it clear that “sign faith” is inadequate and that Jesus regards it as such. Sign faith is an insufficient response to God’s Presence in Jesus. Jesus does not need to be told about the obstacles to belief for he knows humankind (because it was created through him). Signs, when not demanded, can evoke faith when they serve to direct our attention to the person of Jesus. When demanded and when held to be the basis for faith, they actually prevent it.

## III. John 3:1-21

1. 3:1-15 is a dialogue with Nicodemus while 3:16-21 is a discourse. The setting of the dialogue seems to be Jerusalem around the time of Passover. For John, Jesus’ death and resurrection are the true Passover. For Jews, such as Nicodemus, coming to faith will involve this realization.
2. Nicodemus is a Pharisee who steps out of the darkness of the night to meet Jesus the “true light” (1:9). He represents those who have come to a “sign faith” (3:2) and reflects its inadequacies. John considers everything Nicodemus says to be inadequate. Jesus is not a “teacher sent from God” and genuine faith is not something one arrives at on one’s own as a kind of conclusion. Nicodemus has begun a pilgrimage to faith, but he has not arrived at the destination. He wants Jesus to confirm what he has concluded.
3. Instead of confirming Nicodemus’ conclusion, Jesus challenges him to go further. Faith means moving beyond the boundaries of what Nicodemus now conceives. 3:3 is both a challenge and an invitation: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [*anōthen*] he cannot see the kingdom of God”. Jesus deliberately plays on the double meaning of *anōthen* as “from above” or “again”. One cannot see God’s kingdom apart from being born again/from above.
4. Nicodemus does not comprehend either of these meanings. One does not see God’s kingdom by drawing one’s own conclusions from signs and then arriving at a religious hypothesis that one finds fitting. Something more radical is required. Jesus then expands on what he has said in 3:5. Seeing the kingdom of God requires the human experience of water and the divine gift of the Spirit. In other words, being born again/from above involves both a horizontal and a vertical experience. There are good reasons for thinking that baptism is in view here. We have already been told that John baptizes “with water” (1:33) and that the One to come will baptize “with the Holy Spirit” (1:33). Birth again/from above involves John’s baptism by water perfected by the gift of the Holy Spirit. While John does not use the word, baptism is a sacrament in that it involves both a physical sign and the work of the Holy Spirit. “Seeing” the kingdom of God involves living into it as a new order of life and this cannot be the result of a human decision (cf. 1:12-13).
5. To be born of the flesh (3:6) is to be content with what one can see and control just as living “in the flesh” involves making judgments only on the basis of the senses (cf. 7:24). In 3:8 Jesus offers the wind

as a metaphor for the Spirit: Just as one cannot control the wind, one cannot control the Spirit. Being born again/from above places one in the realm of God where human calculations and explanations falter.

6. Nicodemus' response to this in 3:9 is not to reject what Jesus has said but to express complete befuddlement. What Jesus has said is far beyond his categories and he does not know what to make of it. Jesus chides Nicodemus, reminding him that he is a "teacher of Israel" (3:10) and as such he should surely know about the promise that God's Spirit would be poured out on his people (cf. Joel 2:28-32).
7. 3:11-14 is addressed to Nicodemus, but it applies to all those who are in his position (those who merely have a "sign faith"). Jesus has spoken of what he knows (3:11) and what he knows comes from his communion with the Father (1:14, 18) but Nicodemus has not received it. Genuine faith is faith in the word of Jesus. Nicodemus must move from "earthly things" (Israel's traditions) to "heavenly things" (the revelation in Christ) and such a move is not something that one "figures out". No Old Testament figure, Jesus says, ever ascended into heaven such that the full reality of God was made known to him. Instead of being even a person who ascended into heaven and beheld God, *Jesus came from God in order to reveal him on earth* (3:13). Remember 1:18!
8. But how does this revelation take place? Referring to Numbers 21:8-9, Jesus says that the revelation of God will take place through his being "lifted up" (1:14). Just as the people of Israel were healed by looking at the serpent which Moses "lifted up" in the wilderness, humankind will be healed by Jesus as he is "lifted up" on the cross. Jesus' death on the cross will be an exaltation. Thus, the episode in Numbers 21 is a type of Jesus' death on the cross. Just as the lifting up of the bronze serpent brought healing to sinful Israel, so Jesus' crucifixion will both reveal God and give "eternal life" (3:15).
9. 3:16-21 is best thought of as a discourse. It is as if Nicodemus has completely faded from view and Jesus addresses not him but the reader. We move from the befuddlement of a Jew well-disposed to Jesus to addressing God's intentions for "the world" (1:16). What is behind the "lifting up of the Son"? Quite simply it is the love of God. God's gift of the Son is for salvation but, of course, this raises the issue of judgment. The primary work of the Son is salvation and not condemnation (3:17). We should not think of salvation and condemnation as being opposite equals. The work of the Son is salvation; condemnation is for those who refuse to accept this work.
10. Condemnation follows upon the refusal to accept God's revelation in Jesus Christ (3:18). Condemnation follows this refusal because such a refusal is predicated on a choice in favor of darkness and the life which takes place in darkness. The revelation of God is resisted precisely because it is Light, it exposes evil. Accepting God's revelation in Jesus Christ is not a one-time affair for to accept this revelation is to live more and more into the Light. Genuine faith bears fruit. Faith involves living in the light and it becomes clear that the actions of believers "have been carried out in God" (3:21).
11. **Reflection on John 3:5 and 3:14-16:** Reflecting on this text, St. Augustine draws upon an analogy. Just as we are born from a human father and through a human mother and receive a temporal inheritance from them, we are reborn from God through the Church to an eternal inheritance. This new birth takes place, St. Augustine says, through word and sacrament in the Spirit. (*Tractates on John*). Reflecting on John 3:14-16 in light of Numbers 21, St. Augustine says "What are the biting serpents? The sins of the mortality of the flesh. Who is the uplifted serpent? The death of the Lord upon the cross. For since there was death from the serpent, by the likeness of the serpent death is symbolized. The bite of the serpent was deadly; the death of the Lord was life-giving...In the death of Christ death died; since life, having died, killed death, the fullness of life swallowed up death; death was swallowed up in the body of Christ". (*Tractates on John*)

#### IV. John 3:22-36

1. Thus far, we have seen two Jewish responses to Jesus. In 2:13-22 “the Jews” reject Jesus and demand a sign from him. In 3:1-15 Nicodemus makes a movement toward Jesus but is unwilling to go beyond what he knows. Here we see John the Baptist providing a witness to Jesus.
2. Jesus and the disciples now leave Jerusalem for the “Judean countryside” (3:22) and Jesus resumes his ministry of baptizing (the imperfect tense of the verb in 3:22 makes this clear). Meanwhile, John the Baptist is also baptizing (at a location probably in Samaria). 3:24 provides a chronological note: all of this took place before John was put in prison (by Herod Antipas).
3. Some of John’s disciples engage in a discussion over purification with “a Jew” (3:23). We are not given any details about this, but two possibilities present themselves: (1) There is a dispute about whether baptism is a means of purification or (2) There is confusion over whose baptism effects purification, John or Jesus’. John’s disciples provide an interesting piece of information. At one point, Jesus was with John and involved in his ministry (3:26). Now, they report, “all are going to him”. As John’s disciples see it, Jesus is now a competitor who threatens to push John into eclipse.
4. John’s witness to Jesus begins in 3:27. He says, correctly, that with respect to God no one has anything to offer unless God has given it to them. John makes it clear that both he and Jesus have received authority from God but that the authority Jesus has received is far greater than his. John also makes it clear that he is not the Christ but was simply sent by God “before him” (3:28). John knows his place in the larger plan of God’s designs—he knows that he is not the center of these designs.
5. John’s central witness to Jesus involves the use of nuptial imagery (like 2:1-12). The Old Testament often presents God’s relationship to Israel as being nuptial (Isaiah 62:4-5; Hosea 2:21). What John means in 3:29 is that Jesus, not he, is the head of the New Israel. Jesus has the Bride (New Israel/Church) while John is simply the bridegroom. John may be referring to actual wedding practice. The bridegroom accompanied the groom until such time as the bride and groom were married and then he departed. Jesus is taking possession of the New Israel/Church and so it is time for him to depart. He has played a role on the unfolding drama, but he is not its culmination. Far from being sad at being displaced (or exiting the stage), John rejoices at the arrival of the bridegroom (3:29). Not only does he rejoice, but his joy is “complete” (fulfilled, brought to fullness). Like Mary, John is another figure who hears and responds to the word of Jesus. Faith leads to joy and it works against human blindness and hardness of heart: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (3:30).
6. 3:31-35 seems to be the narrator’s comment. This comment has to do with the dynamics of revelation. The One who reveals God “comes from above” and so is “above all” (3:31). We have already seen this in 1:18. The one who is “of earth” can know or offer a truth that is beyond the world. For this reason, only the Son can reveal the Truth for he “bears witness to what he has seen and heard” (3:32). The truth of what he reveals, and the truth of his origin are in no way undermined by the failure of people to believe. The human acceptance of revelation is not what renders it true. The Son does two fundamental things which no human agent can do: he speaks the “words of God” and he “gives the Spirit without measure”. The Son is himself the Father’s own spoken Word (and in this sense he is not a mere prophet) and he can impart the Spirit in his full reality.



7. There is a bond of love between the Father and the Son and all that the Father has has been entrusted to the Son (3:35). The use of the term “Son” should not lead us to think of the Son as inferior to the Father; Father and Son are distinct but equal. The Word which the Son speak is such that its acceptance (in faith and obedience) leads to eternal life. What is received from this Word is not information but Life. The refusal to receive this Word results not in Life but in wrath—the constant opposition that God directs against sin. 3:33 provides an important insight into faith. To believe testimony is to accept the truthfulness of God. Faith is faith in the trustworthiness of God. Of course, this means that lack of belief is the refusal to trust God and involves holding the view that God is untruthful. This is why unbelief is met with wrath.

# The Gospel of John

## Session 3 John 4:1—54

### I. John 4:1-15

1. 4:1-2 seems to contradict 3:22 but it is theologically important. This Gospel does not want Jesus to be thought of as a baptizer, however important baptism is. Jesus is the One who reveals God and, therefore, a firm line of demarcation must be drawn between John the Baptist and him. It is possible that 4:1-2 is a refinement of 3:22. While Jesus' ministry did involve baptism, the act was carried out by the disciples. In any case, we are not to think of Jesus as a "baptizer". Jesus and his disciples depart for Galilee and on the way of Samaria. 4:4 says that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria". Geographically speaking this is not true but 4:4 is probably speaking of "divine necessity".
2. Jesus and the disciples arrive in Samaria around midday and stop to rest at Jacob's well. The fact that he stops at Jacob's well (given to his son Joseph) hints that this is no mere rest stop. While at the well alone, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman. Violating three social conventions, he speaks to her and instructs her to give him some water from the well. In this culture, men did not speak to women with whom they had no relation and a Jewish man would certainly not have spoken to a Samaritan woman. Jesus' apparent willingness to receive something touched by a Samaritan is also irregular. 3:9 notes that Jews considered Samaritans unclean. What the woman says in 4:9 has a note of mockery to it: "What? You, a holier-than-thou Jew, are willing to have something touched by a Samaritan! Wow! Aren't you progressive!". Note that Jesus does not respond to this.
3. The first stage of their conversation is 4:10-14. Instead of replying to the woman's mockery, Jesus moves directly to presenting her with the truth and this truth is suggested by Jacob's well. The "gift of God" (4:10) is speaking to her and if she asks for it, she will receive "living water" (4:10) or eternal life. The woman chooses to understand "living water" in the same way that Nicodemus understood rebirth, that is in an earthly way. Jesus can't possibly offer any water because he has nothing to draw it from the well! The woman's question in 4:11-12 is *the question*: "Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?". She finds it impossible to think that Jesus is greater than Jacob. Jesus responds to this by attempting to point her beyond the well. While Jacob did give this well, which still offers water, it remains the case that this water only satisfies a physical thirst and that whoever drinks from it will have to return for more. But Jesus offers a different kind of water. His "living water" leads to "eternal life" (4:12). Is there a "water" which permanently satisfies the deepest human thirst? Can human life be supernaturally transformed? (This was the question posed to Nicodemus.)
4. The woman replies to in 4:15 and it becomes clear that she is still working within the confines of what is familiar. She is happy to receive "living water" if this means she never has to return to the well again! What Jesus has said has been understood in an earthly sense and, thus, deeply misunderstood.

## II. John 4:16-30

1. The conversation between Jesus and the woman is clearly faltering so Jesus redirects it in 4:16. Jesus' intent seems to be to dislodge her from her superficial understanding of "living water" and to draw her to a true understanding of himself. When Jesus asks her to get her husband, she replies that she has no husband and it emerges that the man with whom she is currently living is not her husband (4:17). Her marital life has been irregular. She has been married successively to five men and is now living with sixth. Jesus' knowledge of this woman's life is the turning point in their conversation.
2. In 4:19 the woman's posture toward Jesus changes. It began with mild mockery and skepticism (4:9, 11-12) and now moves to openness. Jesus is "a prophet" and so might have something worthwhile to say.
3. Since Jesus is a (Jewish) prophet, she puts before him a thorny issue for resolution. Briefly stated, the issue is this: Gerizim or Zion? Which one of the two temples is the place where God is to be worshiped? A dispute over this question was one of the main disagreements between Samaritans and Jews. Jesus is not being asked to settle it.
4. Jesus attempts to draw her beyond this dispute by pointing her to the time when this question will be rendered irrelevant (4:23-24). The worship of the Father "in spirit and truth" (4:23) will render this dispute irrelevant and so the attempt to resolve it is wasted effort. The partisan claims of Jews and Samaritans, used to buttress identities and reinforce positions, simply do matter. The "place" where God is to be worshipped will be "in the Son" and "through the Spirit". This is not to say that the question of Gerizim or Zion is simply a matter of opinion for "salvation is from the Jews" (4:22).
5. The true "place" of worship is, in fact, already here (4:23). Although the true "temple" was on Mt. Zion, Jesus is himself the "temple" (2:21). The Greek verb that John uses for "worship" in 4:23 literally means "to prostrate oneself before". One is not properly bowed to God by going to a mountain. One worships God by the quality of one's life and this quality can only be supplied by God. Because God is "spirit" (4:24), an all-pervading, non-physical Presence, only he can make appropriate worship possible. In this sense, the Temple on Mt. Zion was a means of forming proper worship, but it has been transcended in the Son. This is certainly not the answer that the woman expected from a Jewish prophet!
6. Just like Nicodemus, this woman, when challenged, falls back on what she knows. She knows that the Messiah is coming and that when he does all of this will be settled. It is worth noting the progression of the conversation. It begins with Jesus as a "Jew" (4:9), moves to Jesus as a "prophet" (4:19) and arrives at the mention of the Messiah. Does she think that Jesus could be the Messiah? It is difficult to say. Jesus responds with a self-disclosure which recalls the self-revelation of God in Exodus 3:14: "I who speak to you am he".
7. At 4:27 the disciples return (note 4:8) as this conversation has reached its final stage. They are simply shocked that Jesus is speaking with a woman not related to him (because this violates cultural convention). The disciples say nothing and the narrator has to say it for them: "What do you seek?" (4:27). Why would Jesus be speaking with a woman not related to him (and a Samaritan woman at that!). Jesus is still something of a mystery to them. In 4:28 the woman departs the scene, leaving her water jar behind. This is probably an indication that the narrative is not yet over. We must expect further developments. The woman has clearly moved from where she started but she has not yet arrived at the truth about Jesus. She is amazed as his knowledge of her life and she is willing to entertain the idea that he is the Messiah: "Can this be the Christ?" (4:29). This woman has progressed beyond Nicodemus who could not get beyond thinking of Jesus as a "teacher". Given the disparity between them, we are invited to see how strange this is.

### III. John 4:31-38

1. The disciples have returned with food and urge Jesus to eat. The mention of food allows him to direct the conversation to his mission, moving from “food” to “harvest”. Just as the Samaritan woman could not accept Jesus’ word about “living water,” the disciples cannot accept his word about “food”. When he mentions another kind of food in 4:32, they can only imagine that someone else (the Samaritan woman?) has brought him something.
2. Jesus says something important about himself. His “food” is to do the Father’s will and to accomplish (or fulfill) his work (4:34). Completing the Father’s work is not a burden or mere form of obedience but, rather, the Son’s nourishment. The Son completes the Father’s work but not as a subordinate. He completes the Father’s work as one sent by the Father and as one who life consists in doing just this.
3. In 4:35-36 it becomes clear why Jesus has come through Samaria. He directs their attention to something they already know—the grain harvest is four months away. But there is another harvest that is taking place now, a harvest Jesus is already reaping (and the harvest appears in 4:39). The approach of the Samaritans shows that the fields really are “white for harvest” (4:35) and this harvest extends beyond Israel. The emphasis here is on the realization of God’s work. The completion of God’s work is not simply a future event but something that is happening now. The “sower” (Jesus) and the reapers (the disciples and others) can “rejoice together” because they are gathering “fruit for eternal life” (4:36). 4:38 reminds the disciples of their position. They are reaping a harvest that they did not sow. Who did sow this harvest? The answer seems to be John the Baptist and Jesus. It will be the position of the Church throughout history to reap a harvest she did not sow. Ultimately, the sower is God and the Church will always be in the position of “reaper”. It is the send of the Son and the sending of the Spirit which makes the sending of the Church possible.
4. While we have seen a stern critique of a faith based upon signs (2:23-25), this does not mean that the events of Jesus’ ministry are unimportant. Quite the contrary. The events of Jesus’ ministry (life, death, resurrection) are the source of Christian faith. Of course, merely knowing of these does not induce faith. John’s worldview is essentially sacramental; the physical is the point of departure for encountering God.

### IV. John 4:39-42

1. In 4:39 the Samaritans come to the well to meet Jesus and the disciples seemingly vanish. Their faith is clearly partial and was initially based upon the woman’s partial witness to Jesus.
2. Jesus is asked to stay with the Samaritans and does so for two days. Note that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews seems to be overcome.
3. What the Samaritans say in 4:42 is of great significance. Their faith began with the witness of the woman, but it has now gone beyond this. They have accepted the word of Jesus and this has brought their faith to fulfillment. Jesus is not a “prophet” or even the Christ but “the Savior of the world” (cf. 3:17).

### V. John 4:43-54

1. Jesus now departs from Samaria and goes to Galilee (4:43). Once there, he goes to Cana (cf. 2:1-11) and then to Capernaum (cf. 2:12).
2. At Capernaum, there is an official (of Herod Antipas?) whose son is “at the point of death” (4:47). Just as the Samaritans had heard about Jesus from the Samaritan woman (4:39), this official has heard about Jesus and this prompts him to seek Jesus out.
3. Jesus’ response to this man is at first abrupt and it is a warning against expecting “signs and wonders” (4:48). Signs and wonders are not the foundation of true faith and they are not to be sought after.

4. Two themes emerge at this point. First, it is not Jesus' presence that heals but his word. This is in keeping with 1:1-2. Second, true faith is faith in Jesus' word (4:53). Jesus does not wish to be perceived as a wonder worker but as God's powerful Word present in history. Signs may point to faith, but they are not its substance.
5. 4:54 notes that this is the second "sign" which Jesus has wrought. The first sign (2:1-11) points to Jesus bringing about the marriage between God and his people while this second sign points to Jesus as bringing Life to humankind.

#### **VI. Reflection on John 4:31-34**

1. Commenting on this text, Origen of Alexandria notes that the will of the Son and the will of the Father are indistinguishable. This is not a case of two wills which might be in conflict or a case of one will dominating another but, rather, a matter of the two wills being perfectly harmonious. This is why in 10:30 Jesus declares that he and the Father are one.
2. Origen thinks that the "food" of which Jesus speaks here is Wisdom in that the Son and the Father share perfectly in the Wisdom. Jesus' work, Origen says, is to reform human beings in the Wisdom of God such that doing the will of God becomes not a mere obedience but a joy, a feeding and sustenance. (*Commentary on John*)

# The Gospel of John

## Session 4 John 5:1—6:24

### I. John 5:1-18

1. Jesus now travels to Jerusalem for the second time (cf. 2:13) in conjunction with a “feast of the Jews” (5:1). This phrase suggests some distance between Jesus and “the Jews” (cf. 2:13-22).
2. 5:2-3 provides information about the location of what is about to be narrated. This is the Pool of Bethesda, located to the north of the Temple and near the Antonia Fortress. While the pool was probably used by pilgrims for purification before entering the Temple precincts, it is also associated with healing. 5:4 (often placed in brackets or a footnote because of weak attestation) reports the belief that at certain points an angel would stir the water such that whoever stepped in the pool first would be healed.
3. The pool is a setting of misery with the blind, lame and paralyzed gathered around it and all hoping for healing. The fact that the man whom Jesus approaches has been an “invalid” for thirty-eight years suggests both misery and futility. Jesus’ extraordinary knowledge is on display in 5:6. Despite knowing the man’s condition, Jesus asks him if he wishes to be healed. This is because he does not wish to be known simply as wonder worker; the aim of this encounter is to bring this man to faith.
4. The man clearly does not know who Jesus is for he simply wants physical help in getting to the pool so as to be healed (5:7). His desire in getting help to get to the pool is met by a command from Jesus: “Get up, take up your bed and walk” (5:8). This command creates the condition for its being carried out. Note that the healing is only the beginning of the narrative and not the culmination. 5:9 indicates that conflict is ahead for the healing has taken place on the Sabbath.
5. In 5:10-13 “the Jews” appear to accuse the man of violating the Sabbath. Since he is carrying something, this constitutes work (5:10). The man refuses to take responsibility for violating the Sabbath since he was simply following the instruction of the man who healed him. It is made clear that he does not know who Jesus is (5:13).
6. In the next scene (5:14), Jesus finds the man in the Temple and immediately shifts the focus from the Sabbath to sin. In doing this, Jesus makes it clear that he is more than a healer or miracle worker. We have already been told that Jesus is the true Temple. For John, it is important to see that Jesus transcends the Sabbath.
7. In 5:16-18 makes it clear that “the Jews” began to persecute Jesus and were seeking to kill him for breaking the Sabbath and putting himself on a level with God. Jesus’ defense of his actions is grounded in the theology of creation. Because God is not inactive on the Sabbath (since if he were the universe would cease to exist), neither is Jesus inactive on the Sabbath. The actions of the Father and the actions of Jesus are inextricably connected. The Sabbath celebrated the sovereignty of God over creation

### II. John 5:19-30

1. In this section the man whom Jesus has healed and “the Jews” fade from sight and Jesus speaks about his mission and relationship to the Father. The fact that Jesus works on the Sabbath becomes a way into speaking of his identity (signaled by 5:17).
2. In 5:19-20, Jesus defends his actions and counters the accusation that he is making himself into a rival god. While the Son and the Father are equal, the Son does not act as an independent agent. Because of

the love of Son for the Father, the action of the Son is perfectly coordinated with the Father. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he is doing.

3. To show that the Son is “Lord of the Sabbath,” Jesus makes it clear that he shares the sovereign authority of the Father which is the authority to give life. This was, of course, of the things that God did on the Sabbath. Likewise, the Son shares the Father’s authority to judge. In fact, the Father has given the authority to judge to the Son (5:21).
4. Because the Son shares completely in the Father’s authority, such that while they are distinct their authority is not, those who do not honor the Son do not honor the Father who sent him (5:23). This is the central fault of “the Jews”. While the Father and the Son are distinguishable, they are not separable.
5. In 5:24-25, the one who hears Jesus’ word and believes that he was sent by the Father has already passed from death to life. Eternal life is not simply a future reality. Jesus’ actions on the Sabbath are justified because he is the source of Life. In short, all the work that Israel understood God to do on the Sabbath is done by the Son.
6. In 5:26-27, we find Jesus’ central claim about himself, one which echoes 1:4. The Son has “life in himself” and so possesses the same nature as the Father. If reality is divided between the Creator and that which is created, the Son is with the Father on the same side of this division. The role of executing judgment, which is the task of bringing creation to its intended fulfillment, has been given to the Son. This means that the Son does something which the Old Testament teaches that only God can do.
7. 5:28-29 looks toward a future consummation (referred to by the word eschatology). If the Sabbath celebrates the sovereignty of God, then the future will reveal the sovereignty of the Son for his word will raise the dead and will usher the good into life and the evil into judgment. Note the point being made here: the word of the Son is sovereign in that it reaches beyond death.
8. 5:30 brings this section to a conclusion. What is Jesus’ response to the accusation made in 5:16-18? The Son only does what the Father does and does not have a will or purposes independent of the Father. This is not a sign of inferiority but an indication of the fundamental unity of the Son and the Father. Because of the love between Father and Son, neither seeks to be independent of the other.

### **III. John 5:31-47**

1. This section continues Jesus’ address to “the Jews” (although they were last referred to in 5:19). If Jesus is on trial, then he needs witnesses. Who testifies on his behalf?
2. Jesus acknowledges that his own testimony about himself is insufficient. (In a Jewish trial, two witnesses were required to establish the truth.) Jesus says that there is “another” (5:32) who testifies on his behalf. This witness is John the Baptist whose witness is found in 3:22-36. Jesus makes it clear that he is not in need of John’s testimony, but that John was sent to bear witness to “the Jews” so that they might be saved (5:34). They were, however, unable to accept John’s testimony
3. But Jesus has a witness who is greater than John for he has been entrusted with a work from the Father (5:36). Jesus does this work to perfection and this testifies to who he is. What he does points to his identity as the one sent by the Father. Ultimately, it is the Father who bears witness to Jesus (5:37). Jesus levels a very serious charge against “the Jews” which is that they have never heard his voice or seen his form (or image). As becomes clear in 5:38, he is speaking of himself. Jesus is the voice and form of God and because “the Jews” have not believed in him, their claim to know God is shown to be false.
4. While Jesus has been put on trial, he now accuses his accusers. They misunderstand Scripture because it is a witness to the Son and “the Jews” are blind to its witness (5:39). While searching Scripture for eternal life, they are unable to see the Word of Life in their presence.
5. In 5:41-44 two opposed notions of glory (or esteem) are introduced. Jesus does not seek glory from human beings because he knows that he has come in the Father’s name (5:43). “The Jews” seek human

glory (praise and esteem from other people) but not the glory of God. Ironically, in rejected Jesus who is sent by the Father on the grounds that he is breaking the Sabbath, they reject the God of the Sabbath. It is important to note here that “the Jews” are not being criticized for being Jews but for failing to be Jews.

6. Jesus notes that in their trial their chief accuser is actually Moses (5:45). Here, Moses probably stands for the whole Law. Jesus presents Moses as one of his witnesses (5:46). A failure to truly believe Moses leads to a refusal to believe Jesus in that Moses points to Jesus and Jesus brings the Law to fulfillment (as in 1:17).

#### **IV. John 6:1-4**

1. This section introduces the miracle of the loaves and fishes in 6:5-15 and provides a context which suggest how it is to be read.
2. We are given three important details which will help us to read what follows. (1) A “large crowd” follows Jesus because of the signs that he is doing. We have learned that “sign faith” is radically incomplete. (2) Jesus ascends “the mountain” with his disciples and this should recall Moses’ ascent of Mt. Sinai. (3) Passover is at hand and this suggests something important about the miracle which follows.

#### **V. John 6:5-15**

1. Jesus sees a “large crowd” coming to him and poses a question to test the disciples (6:6). From where can enough bread be bought to feed such a crowd? The motif of bread/food has already been introduced in 4:31-34. Phillip offers his opinion that a substantial amount of money would not buy enough food to feed such a crowd (6:7). Andrew sounds a similar note by pointing out that what little food is on hand is totally inadequate. Like Nicodemus, the disciples are limited by their presuppositions and are unable to see past them.
2. Ignoring the views of the disciples, Jesus has the crowd sit down in preparation for a meal (which were eaten in a reclining position). The detail about there being “much grass” seems to recall Psalm 23:2 where the Lord allows his people to recline in “green pastures”. There are five thousand men present (6:10).
3. Jesus next performs three actions which are associated with the Eucharist. He takes the bread, gives thanks, and distributes the bread (note Luke 22:14-23). Not only are all fed, all are satisfied (6:11). And not only are all satisfied, twelve baskets of leftovers are gathered up. As with the miracle at Cana (2:1-11), the emphasis is on superabundance. Not only have Jesus’ actions suggested the Eucharist, this feeding takes place at Passover and so recalls the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). While only enough manna was given for each day, at this feeding there is abundant food even after everyone has eaten. The disciples will be stewards of this miraculous food and this may be a sign of their future role in the Church. Here, the Eucharist appears as the fulfillment of the Passover.
4. The aftermath is reported in 6:14-15. It is clear that the crowd has not been led to genuine faith by the miraculous feeding. They think that Jesus is “the Prophet” anticipated by Deuteronomy 18:15-18, a prophet “like Moses”. The crowd, like Nicodemus, cannot imagine anyone greater than Moses. Because the messiah was expected to bring manna with him, the crowd also sees Jesus through its own messianic expectations. Jesus refuses to allow this to happen and withdraws (6:15).

#### **VI. John 6:16-24**



1. This is the aftermath of the events just described. Jesus has withdrawn from the scene and the disciples now get into a boat to return to Capernaum. As they set out, it is dark. Adding further to the frightening nature of this journey, a strong wind begins to blow (6:18). Then Jesus approaches them walking on the Sea of Galilee. All of this is enough to produce fear. It is important to note the association which Jews made between the sea and chaos (note Genesis 1:1-2). This is the key to meaning of this narrative.
2. 6:20 lets us see that this is a theophany, a self-manifestation of God. Like the God of Israel (Psalm 93:4-3), Jesus has authority over the sea and the elements.
3. While the crowd has sought to make Jesus king because it thinks he meets its messianic expectations, Jesus comes to the disciples as I AM, as the Lord.
4. In 6:22-24 we leave the disciples and return to the crowd. It has noticed that the miracle-working provider of messianic manna has vanished along with his disciples and so decides to follow. 6:23 emphasizes the eucharistic nature of the miracle. While the crowd is simply interested in miraculous bread, John emphasizes that the importance of this bread is that Jesus gave thanks (eucharist) over it. We are reminded that that in its "following" of Jesus the crowd is not enacting genuine discipleship. When 6:24 reports that the crowd was "seeking Jesus" this is said ironically. It is not really seeking him at all.

# The Gospel of John

## Session 5

### John 6:25—7:52

#### I. John 6:25-59

1. 6:25-29: The crowd now locates Jesus and it appears that their understanding of him has diminished. When it last met him, the crowd wanted to make him king (6:15) and now it refers to him as rabbi. Jesus offers his own diagnosis of what the crowd is looking for. Its fascination with signs has worn off and now it simply seeks food. (Needless to say, Jesus is not surprised by this.) He now begins a conversation with the crowd that reminds us of his previous conversation with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman.
2. The crowd is searching for “the food that perishes” when it should be seeking the “food that endures” (6:27). There is a food which yields eternal life and it is given by the Son of Man (6:27).
3. The Son can give this food because the Father has set his seal of authenticity upon him (6:27). The crowd misunderstands what Jesus says for its question in 6:28 takes it away from what Jesus has said. It seems to have taken the “labor” of 6:27 literally. The “works of God” or those actions pleasing to God are set forth in the Law which is a source of life. But in Jesus, one finds Life (remember the contrast drawn in 1:17). The work that is pleasing to God begins with belief in the Son whom he has sent (who brings Life and Light and to whom the Holy Spirit witnesses).
4. The rest of the discourse will have this theme as its central theme.
5. 6:30-33: The crowd realizes that Jesus is speaking of himself and so asks him two questions: What signs do you do which authenticate your claim? What work of God do you do? They feel confident in trust Moses because he gave their ancestors manna in the wilderness. In 6:31 they cite Exodus 16:4. Within Judaism, this “bread” is understood to refer to the Law. The Law gives life. Can Jesus do something greater? For them, there is nothing beyond Moses and Torah. Can Jesus challenge the unique authority of Moses and can he surpass what Moses gave to Israel? Jesus points out that it was not Moses who gave the bread in the wilderness but God (6:32). Jesus claims to be the “true bread from heaven” (6:32) which gives life to the world. The manna of Exodus 16 is a prefiguration of Jesus.
6. 6:34-40: The crowd clearly misunderstands Jesus for it asks to be given this bread again and again (6:34). Jesus has to make it clear that he himself is the bread of heaven and that he is the once-for-all gift of God. Whoever comes to him/believes in him will find permanent satisfaction (6:35). It is important to note that Jesus speaks in the future tense here. There will be a future moment at which this bread from heaven will be supplied. Jesus emphasizes the complete unity between himself and the Father. Those who come to him (in faith) are given to him by the Father and his will and the will of the Father are one. The will of the Father is that all (note the universal emphasis) who believe in the Son should have eternal life (6:40). The nature of eternal life is hinted at in 6:40. “Eternal life” and “resurrection of the body” mutually qualify one another.
7. 6:41-51: Note that in 6:41 “the crowd” becomes “the Jews”. They raise an objection: How can Jesus claim to be the bread from heaven when his human parents are known? To the extent that one focuses on Jesus’ human origins, one will fail to understand him. In 6:44 Jesus emphasizes his origin from the Father. The Father has sent him and draws people to him. Jesus is speaking of a fundamental shift away from the dynamic of the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, God taught Israel through the Law. Now, the Father draws to himself people from all nations through the Son. In 6:45 Jesus refers to Isaiah 54:13 and claims to be its fulfillment. Through him, all people will be “taught by God”. The status of the Son is

made clear in 6:46. Only the Son knows the Father and so only he can make him known (1:18). Jesus contrasts himself with the manna in the wilderness. Those who ate the manna eventually died; Jesus is the bread who comes down from heaven and makes it possible for one to “live forever” (6:51). 6:51 concludes with a revelation: “And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh”. Note that once again the future tense is used and that the focus is firmly on Jesus. The bread to be given has something to do with his self-offering.

8. 6:52-59: In 6:52 we see that “the Jews” have misunderstood Jesus. In responding to them, Jesus does not say that he is only speaking symbolically or metaphorically. Rather, he emphasizes that he is speaking of his “flesh” and “blood” (6:53). The meaning of what he says has been hinted at in 6:1-14 with its eucharistic overtones. That Jesus is speaking of actual eating become clear in 6:54 where he shifts from using the verb to eat (6:53) to using a verb which means “to crunch with the teeth”. Jesus is not speaking of a “spiritual eating”. The emphasis falls here on both the Word enfleshed and physical nature of Jesus’ death. The separation of flesh and blood is the Old Testament’s idiom of sacrifice and so Jesus is already interpreting his physical death as a sacrifice. Jesus insists that his flesh is “true food” and that his blood is “true drink”. In 6:56 Jesus says that whoever crunches his flesh with their teeth and drinks his blood will live or “abide” in him. It is important to note that believing in Jesus and eating his flesh and drinking his blood are parallel expressions and both convey the idea of a person entering into the life of Jesus. Those who share in the life of Jesus will pass through death to Life. This section closes in 6:58 with another contrast between the manna and Jesus. Once gain (as in 6:49-50), the emphasis falls on the fact that those who ate the manna eventually died but those who feed on Jesus’ bread will be granted to “live forever”. One encounters Jesus’ true food and true drink in the Eucharist which offers the truthful interpretation of his sacrificial death and in which his flesh and blood are sacramentally present.

## II. John 6:60-71

1. Since 6:41 Jesus has been addressing “the Jews”. Now, at 6:60 the response of the disciples to what Jesus has been saying is reported. They have seen Jesus’ self-revelation in 6:16-21 and yet some of them find what he has said about himself impossible to accept. Jesus has claimed to reveal God in a way that surpasses Moses and the Law, and some disciples find this impossible to believe. Jesus challenges them with a question: If you saw me ascending to the Presence of God, would this convince you? These disciples are kept from faith by their insistence that their own human standards determine what is possible; they are attempting to measure Jesus with standards which will always fall short. Their outlook is “fleshly” (perhaps better rendered as earth-bound). This outlook is of no value; only the revelation of the Son and the work of the Spirit can result in faith. Ultimately, discipleship is a gift of the Father for it is not information which makes disciples or human desire but the response to the Son made possible by the Spirit given by the Father (6:63-66).
2. At 6:67 “disciples” is narrowed to “the Twelve”. Would they like to leave as well? Peter responds for the group and acknowledge the truth of what Jesus has said in 6:63. The words which Jesus speaks are indeed spirit and life. Peter speaks in 6:68-69 as one who has been led to Jesus by the Father. Peter sees Jesus as “the Holy One of God” and this is only possible because he has been led to the Son by the Father. Faith recognizes that Jesus’ origins are from God. This confession of faith takes place at the same time that a betrayer is mentioned (6:70).

### III. John 7:1-9

1. 7:1 indicates that Jesus now confines his activity to Galilee since “the Jews” in Judea are planning to kill him. However, the Feast of Booths has arrived, and it was the obligation of all male Jews to go to Jerusalem to keep this feast.
2. Jesus’ brothers offer counsel which reveals their misunderstanding of him. They advise him to go to Judea so that his works can be seen and so that he can show himself (7:4). They fail to see that Jesus is not simply known by his works and that he has not come to show himself but to reveal God. If Jesus’ brothers are disbelieving, we should think of disbelief as being widely spread.
3. Jesus makes a distinction between “my time” and “your time” (7:6). Jesus and his brothers belong to two different worlds. Jesus’ time is dictated by the Father’s design while the brother’s time is dictated by their own wishes. The “world” (creation corrupted by sin) hates Jesus while his brothers face no such hatred (because they do not challenge it).
4. Jesus announces that he is not going up to “this feast” (7:8). What he does follows the design of the Father and not what others think he should do. This theme appears several times and will appear with particular clarity in chapter 11.

### IV. John 7:10-36

1. 7:10-13 completes the preparation for the narrative which follows in 7:14-36. In 7:10 Jesus reverses his earlier decision. Why? John wishes us to conclude that this is due to the Father. Jesus follows the will and prompting of no person (including his mother, as we have seen). He certainly is not guided by the wishes of his brothers.
2. Note that Jesus deliberately goes against the advice of his brothers. He goes to Jerusalem but “in private” (7:10). He does not go in order to show himself. During the feast, “the Jews” are looking for him. Remember in 5:18 “the Jews” were intent on killing him.
3. We get a sense of the popular debate about Jesus in 7:12-13. There is much “muttering” about him with opinion clearly divided. Neither of the opinions mentioned is correct. Jesus is neither a “good man” nor is he leading people astray.
4. Mid-way through the feast, Jesus goes to the Temple to teach. “The Jews” marvel at Jesus and this alerts us to the fact that marveling at Jesus is not the proper response to him. Jesus does not teach with any recognized authority. He has not studied Torah with a recognized teacher and so is wholly suspect (7:15). This allows Jesus to address the issue of his authority.
5. Jesus makes it clear that his teaching is not his own but that of the Father and says that all who genuinely desire to do God’s will will be able to recognize this. A genuine openness to God results in the reception of Jesus. Because Jesus seeks the glory of the Father who sent him, he is to be trusted for there is no falsehood in him (7:18). By implication, there is falsehood in those who reject him (“the Jews”).
6. 7:14-24: “The Jews” claim that their authority derives from Moses who derived his authority from God. Jesus draws a direct line from Moses to himself such that the Law is fulfilled in him. The attempt to kill him can only result from the rejection of God’s will. Thus, Jesus accuses “the Jews” of not keeping the Law (7:19). Note the fundamental argument here: the rejection of Jesus is a rejection of the Law. In 7:20 “the crowd” (distinct from “the Jews”) speaks. It knows of no attempt to kill Jesus and so concludes that he is insane. “The Jews” have rejected Jesus while “the crowd” is still in the process of making a decision. In 7:21 Jesus refers to his action in 5:1-18, an action they marveled at. Jesus then refers to a Jewish tradition which held that it was acceptable to circumcise a male child on the Sabbath because this was a fulfillment of the Law and the completion of the person. Such a thing of life-giving importance overrides the Law. If this is the case, Jesus asks, why do they object to his restoration of a person’s full

potential? The problem, Jesus asserts, is that they judge by “appearances” and this is because they are unable to see the completion of the Law in him. Because of this, all their judgments will be finally wrong.

7. 7:25-31: At 7:25 it seems that a new audience is introduced: “some of the people of Jerusalem”. Whoever these people are, they know of the plot of “the Jews” to kill Jesus. This group marvels at the fact that Jesus is speaking openly and that no attempt is made to stop him (7:26). Significantly, this group knows (or says it knows) that Jesus cannot be the Christ for no one will know where the Christ comes from and they now where Jesus comes from (7:27). In this they are mistaken, for they assume that Jesus’ origin is to be understood humanly. Jesus immediately questions their claim to know where he comes from (7:28). But Jesus goes even further: as they do not know where he is from, they also do not know who sent him. They not only do not know where he comes from, but they also do not really know God. (Ironically, Tabernacles involved the public profession of faith in God and a rejection of all idols.) The Jerusalemites then attempt to arrest Jesus but are unable to since “his hour had not yet come” (7:30). As we have seen, Jesus’ “hour” is the God-appointed time of his crucifixion. In 7:31 another group appears which is identified as “the people”. These people do believe Jesus (or are on the way to doing so). Note that we have now seen four distinct responses to Jesus: the crowd, “the Jews,” the Jerusalemites and “the people”. The response to Jesus is certainly not uniform.

#### **V. John 7:32-53**

1. 7:32-36: The Pharisees overhear these opinions about Jesus and apparently are alarmed (because some believe Jesus). Together with the chief priests, they send officers from the Temple to arrest Jesus. He emphasizes that he will be with them a little while and then he will return to the Father. This makes it clear that their plot to kill him will not ultimately succeed. “The Jews” respond to this with incomprehension. They interpret Jesus’ departure in geographical terms (having interpreted his origins in the same way). Once again, the chasm that exists between Jesus and “the Jews” is emphasized. In John’s portrait, “the Jews” are unable to understand Jesus because their presuppositions blind them to the truth.
2. 7:37-52: At 7:37 we arrive at the culmination of Booths or the eighth day. The Feast of Booths involved the pouring out of water in the Temple both as a reminder of the miraculous water in the wilderness and to ask God for adequate rainfall. Jesus identifies himself as the fulfillment of the Feast of Booths. He is the true source of “living water” (7:38). In Ezekiel 47:1-11 a stream of water flows out of the Temple and imparts life to all that is in its path. Jesus may have this in mind as well. Note that Jesus takes the place of the Temple as the source of the living water. The meaning of this water is specified in 7:39 as the Spirit. As will be made clear later, the gift of the Spirit, expected in the last days (Joel 2:26; 3:1) will be the fruit of Jesus glorification (his death and resurrection).
3. 7:40-44: Once again, Jesus provokes a variety of responses. For some, Jesus is “the Prophet” (Deuteronomy 34:10) while others think that he is “the Christ” (7:40-41). Still others judge that this is impossible since the Messiah is to be a descendant of David and so must come from Bethlehem (7:42). As we have seen, this fails to grasp the fact that Jesus is “from God”. Once again, there is a “division” (7:43). Since Jesus does not fit into Jewish messianic categories, efforts to understand him within them are doomed to fail.

4. 7:45-53: The “officers” were sent out to arrest Jesus in 7:32 and now return to the chief priests and Pharisees in 7:45 without a prisoner. When asked why they have made no arrest, they reply “No one ever spoke like this man!” (7:46). The Pharisees accuse them of having been led astray by Jesus and they note that the “crowd” cannot be trusted to make a proper judgment because it does not know the Law (7:49). For the Pharisees, those who do not oppose Jesus have been, in their ignorance, deceived by him. Nicodemus now reappears (remember 3:1-15) to challenge the Pharisees. Nicodemus says that Jesus may only be judged if one listens to his words and sees his actions. The Pharisees are unwilling to hear this and accuse Nicodemus of being a “Galilean”. They claim that no prophet has come from Galilee (although Hosea and Nahum were from there) and although Jesus was not from Galilee.

# The Gospel of John

## Session 6

### John 7:53-10:21

#### I. John 7:53-8:11

1. Our earliest manuscripts of John do not contain 7:53-8:11 and some translations place this section in brackets to indicate this fact. In its current location, it seems to be an interruption in the narrative. It seems to have been simply inserted at this point.
2. 7:53-8:2 sets the stage for the action. Jesus comes to the Temple “early in the morning” (8:2) and “all the people” come to him. Jesus is in the Temple teaching a large gathering when the scribes and Pharisees enter the scene.
3. The scribes and Pharisees are intent on a public confrontation with Jesus. They wish to test him and to show that he is in conflict with the Law (8:6). They bring with them a woman who has been caught in the act of committing adultery (8:3-4) and demand to know what Jesus would do about this. It is clear that they are unconcerned about what might happen to this woman and equally unconcerned about her husband. They have a point to make and both she and he are only important insofar as they can be used in this way.
4. It is certainly significant that the man with whom she committed adultery is not brought with her for it is impossible to commit adultery without a partner. Where is he? When challenged to make a judgment, Jesus begins to write in the dust on the ground, a gesture which should probably be taken as a sign of indifference. When pressed for an answer, Jesus responds with a challenge: “I think that everyone who is without sexual sin should execute the penalty prescribed by the Law” (Deuteronomy 17:1). He then resumes writing.
5. The gathering of scribes and Pharisees disperses beginning with the oldest members. What are we to conclude from this? For the first time, Jesus addresses the woman and treats her as a person, not as a pawn in a game of chess. Where are her accusers? Jesus allows her to go with the admonition to sin no more.
6. The point of this narrative is not that Jesus thinks adultery to be a minor issue. Nor is it that while the scribes and Pharisees are strict rule keepers, Jesus is not. Instead, this narrative shows that it is possible to keep the law without thereby intending any real obedience to God. It is also possible to advocate for strict enforcement of the Law while being blind to one’s own sin. Here, the Word of Life simultaneously acknowledges the woman’s sin and opens the way to new life for her.

#### II. John 8:12-20

1. 8:12 would make sense if it were immediately preceded by 7:52. We need to remember that what Jesus says here is being said in the context of the Feast of Booths (7:2). This feast involved the lighting of torches in the Temple at night. It is within this context that Jesus says, “I am the light of the world” (8:12). We also want to remember that Torah or the Law was considered the light of the world (Psalm 119:105). Here, Jesus claims to both personify and go beyond both Temple and Torah.
2. The Pharisees immediately assail Jesus. They say that what he says is invalid as testimony for instead of producing at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6) he simply bears testimony about himself. As we have seen the validity of Jesus’ self-testimony is dependent upon his identity as the one sent from God,

the Word. As such, he transcends the Law. Jesus' self-testimony is true because of his origin and destiny (8:14). For John, the all-important truth about Jesus the Word is that what he says is self-authenticating.

3. The Pharisees know nothing of Jesus' origin and destiny and, therefore, cannot judge what he says. The key issue here is judgment and the basis upon which judgment is made. Unable to go beyond external appearances, the Pharisees are unable to make a true judgment about Jesus.
4. While the Pharisees judge falsely, Jesus does not judge for all that he does is not simply his own action but a joint action of the Father and the Son. As the light of the world, he is the precondition for right judgments to be made. For both of these reasons, Jesus' judgment has no trace of falsity.
5. In 8:17 Jesus refers to Numbers 35:30 and notes that the requirement of two witnesses and also notes that it does not and cannot apply to him. Since all that he does is done conjointly with the Father, he and the Father are their own witnesses (8:17).
6. The question posed by the Pharisees in 8:19 reflects their failure of understanding. They think that Jesus is speaking of his biological father and this only shows that they do not know his Father. This is because, one knows the Father through the Son; the failure to know the Son is also the failure to know the Father. Of course, Jesus is telling the Pharisees that do not truly know God.

### III. John 8:21-30

1. The conversation begun in 8:12 continues. The conversation partners continue to be "the Jews" (identified as the Pharisees in 8: 13). Jesus is speaking of his mission: he has come from the Father and will return to him. "The Jews" will seek him but where he is going, they are not able to God (because they do not know God (8:19). The emphasis here is on the fact that although "the Jews" plan to kill Jesus, they exercise not control over him at all. His death will actually effect his return to the Father.
2. Their incomprehension becomes clear in 8:22 as they understand Jesus to mean that he will commit suicide. Not knowing of his origin and his return to the Father, they can only understand what he has said in this way. Jesus makes clear the fundamental difference between they and he: "You are from below; I am from above" (8:23). They are of "this world" (as corrupted by sin) while Jesus is "not of this world" (8:23). Despite the fact that they claim to believe in God, their orientation is completely conformed to the world and, thus, they are blinded to God's revelation. Note that it is possible for "religious" people to be "of this world".
3. Jesus issues a warning: "unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (8:24). This is not a fate since belief in Jesus could change this outcome (note 3:16-21). The division between "above" and "below" is only made final by unbelief. Here we see another huge claim: spiritual death can only be avoided by faith in Jesus as the life-giving Word of God.
4. In 8:25 "the Jews" ask what appears to be a genuine question: Who are you? This question can only be answered in relation to the Father and this is the obstacle which stands in the way their progress (8:19). Jesus makes it clear that from the beginning of his ministry he has sought to reveal the Father and to answer this question. Jesus could list their faults and offer a critique of them, but his mission is to declare to the world what he has heard from the Father (8:26).
5. It is important to note that Jesus wants to communicate with "the Jews"; their hatred of him is not met with hatred in return. When Jesus is "lifted up" (crucified) by "the Jews" this will result in the revelation that he is the One sent by the Father. The "hour" of Jesus' death and glorification will be simultaneous. Jesus offers an answer to the question posed in 8:25: "I do nothing on my own authority but speak as the Father has taught me" (8:28). Jesus can only be understood when one recognizes the fact that he and the Father are always with one another. Even when he is "lifted up" and is seemingly abandoned, Jesus will not be alone (8:29).
6. 8:30 makes it clear that "the Jews" are not simply lost in darkness since some of them believe in him.



#### **IV. John 8:31-38**

1. 8:31 requires careful interpretation. It seems that “the Jews” identified here are different from those in 8:30. The group in 8:31 seems to be those who have the beginnings of faith but who still have some way to go. They have a partial faith in Jesus. Jesus now attempts to draw them into genuine faith.
2. The way to genuine faith is through abiding in the word of Jesus. Here, faith is presented as a pilgrimage which takes place by a continuing commitment to and trust in Jesus. To abide in Jesus (8:31) is to be united to him despite that fact that one does not yet possess a complete understanding. The fruit of discipleship is knowledge of the Truth and it is this Truth which liberates one (from sin).
3. “The Jews” are convinced that the Law brings freedom and so respond that that they have no need of the freedom Jesus is speaking about. As the “offspring” of Abraham, they have never been enslaved and so, they maintain, Jesus cannot supply them with freedom. How can Jesus accomplish what the Law has done?
4. Jesus responds to this that simple descent from Abraham is not sufficient to make one free. If one sins, then one is enslaved to sin (8:34). Descent from Abraham cannot prevent one from sinning. “The Jews” think of themselves as children of God but are they really? Jesus claims that only the Son can make one a child of God (1:12). Their claim to be Abraham’s children is falsified by the fact that the word of Jesus finds no place in them; they refuse to allow space for Jesus’ word. “The Jews” are self-deceived and the reason for this is that their “father” is not the Father of Jesus.

#### **V. John 8:39-47**

1. In 8:39 “the Jews” repeat their claim to be children of Abraham. Jesus notes that Abraham was supremely a man open to the word of God (as in Genesis 12:1-9) and a man of faith. If they were truly children of Abraham, they would be open to his word rather than attempting to kill him (8:39-40).
2. In refusing to hear the word that comes from the Father, they show that they are not children of Abraham. “The Jews” respond to this by accusing Jesus of being conceived in an act of adultery. (In other words, he is the one with the questionable paternity.) This accusation could refer to both Jesus’ physical descent and to faithfulness to God as “adultery” can refer to unfaithfulness to the covenant (note Hosea 1:2).
3. They move from their claim of descent from Abraham to a claim to be God’s legitimate children (8:41). Jesus responds to this by saying that if they were true children of God, they would love him because he has come from God and has been sent by God. In 8:43 Jesus states the key issue: they cannot hear what he says. Instead of having God as their father, they clearly have the devil as their father because they reflect his fundamental disposition as one opposed to the truth (8:44). Jesus is probably thinking of Genesis 3:1-24 and the serpent’s act of deception: “When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (8:44).
4. It is to be expected that the children of the devil cannot hear the truth for their aim is to suppress it. “The Jews” have made a decision to reject the Truth and this explains their opposition to Jesus and their refusal to hear his words: “The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (8:47).

## VI. John 8:48-59

1. With this section, the conversation with “the Jews” concludes and their hostility and intransigence is on full display.
2. In response to Jesus saying that they are children of the devil, “the Jews” accuse Jesus of being insane and being a Samaritan (8:48). Jesus is attempting to make a theological point while they respond with personal insult. Jesus makes it clear that what he has said about himself is not self-promotion. He does not seek his own glory. This is the role of the Father who seeks to glorify the Son. Those who receive the Father’s Word from the Son will be delivered from death into Life (8:51).
3. “The Jews” remain within what they know. Just as the Samaritan woman found it difficult to believe that Jesus was greater than Jacob (4:12), “the Jews” find it impossible to believe that Jesus is greater than Abraham. Abraham and the prophets died, so how can Jesus possibly offer eternal life (8:52-53)? For “the Jews,” whatever Jesus says about himself must be self-promotion.
4. Just as the Son bears witness to the Father, the Father glorifies the Son. While “the Jews” claim to worship God, they do not know him while Jesus knows him perfectly. Jesus says that Abraham looked forward to his coming. This is probably based on a Jewish tradition that the secrets of the messianic age were disclosed to him (8:56). “The Jews” misinterpret this to mean that Jesus is claiming to have known Abraham, and this only increases their sense that what he is saying is simply absurd.
5. The culmination of this conversation comes in 8:58: Jesus is not claiming to be a contemporary of Abraham for this would be to claim too little. Jesus preceded Abraham: “before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). Jesus identifies himself in the same way that God identifies himself in Exodus 3:14.

## VII. John 9:1-41

1. The whole of chapter 9 involves another encounter with “the Jews” (9:18). Upon seeing a man blind from birth, the disciples ask who is responsible for his blindness, his parents or the man himself (while in the womb). Jesus replies that neither is responsible; he was born this way so that the power of God might be displayed in him. Note that in 9:4 Jesus includes the disciples in his work. Jesus is the light of the world but there is the coming “night” which will result from Jesus’ absence. Because Jesus has included the disciples in his work, the work of revealing God will continue. Remember that in 1:4 Light and Life are closely associated. Of course, light was one of the themes of the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2).
2. Without consulting the blind man, Jesus applies a mixture of dirt and saliva to his eyes and instructs him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man does so and returns with the ability to see. It is clear that the water from the pool has not brought this about. Note that the blind man instantly follows Jesus’ instruction (9:7).
3. There is now a dispute about this man among his neighbors, with some saying that the man with sight is the formerly blind beggar and others insisting that the man with sight only looks like the blind beggar. Jesus has once again brought about division. When asked, the man is able to say how his sight was restored and he is able to name the one who restored his sight as Jesus. Beyond this, he knows nothing (9:11).
4. The neighbors bring the man to the Pharisees and now “the Jews” enter into the picture (9:18). What most interests the Pharisees is not that the man’s sight has been restored but that Jesus has “violated” the Sabbath by making clay (9:14). There is a division regarding Jesus’ origin, with some saying that someone who breaks the Sabbath could not be from God and others insisting that a sinner could not do such a sign. When they ask the man’s opinion, he offers that Jesus is a “prophet” (9:17; cf. 4:19).
5. “The Jews” call the man’s parents in an effort to prove that he was not born blind. They are willing to testify that he was born blind but will not comment on how his sight was restored or on who restored it.

9:22 notes that what they say and do not say is highly influenced the fear of being “put out” of the synagogue.

6. The Pharisees now call the man a second time (9:24) and demand that he “give glory to God” (a phrase used before giving testimony). At this point, they are not really interested in testimony though. Their opinion should be the man’s opinion as well: Jesus is a sinner (9:24). “The Jews” continually focus on the “how” of the restoration of sight (9:26) and ignore the “who” involved. The man finds this obsession with “how” puzzling and he can only conclude that they want to become Jesus disciples (9:27).
7. In 9:31 the man puts things in a clear way: Jesus cannot be a sinner because if he were God would not listen to him and he would not be able to do what he has done. On the other hand, “if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him” (9:31). Compare this with 4:34. He notes, correctly, that no Old Testament figure is reported to have restored sight to someone born blind. What Jesus has done is without precedent and so the judgment that he is a sinner must be false.
8. “The Jews” have no counter argument and so they insult him and eject him from among them. Note that they accept that he was born blind and that this is in indication of that he was born in “utter sin” (9:34). Both Jesus and this man are sinners and, thus, in no position to teach them. Ironically, Jesus is the Word of the Father and the man has spoken the truth in 9:31-32. “The Jews” will not hear the truth (note 8:42).
9. This narrative concludes with Jesus coming to the man. As “the Jews” have been moving further away from Jesus, the man has been moving toward him. Jesus poses a question: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (9:35). “Son of Man” is a title Jesus uses to designate himself (note 3:13-14). The crucial moment comes in 9:36. The man does not know enough to answer this question, so he asks Jesus to supply the answer: he is willing to hear the word of Jesus. When Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man, the man believes him and then worships (9:38). The twofold nature of Jesus’ ministry is expressed in 9:39. He has come as the light of the world (8:12) to lead the blind to sight and to reveal the blindness of those who refuse to have faith in him. The choice is between light and darkness.

#### **VIII. John 10:1-21**

1. 10:1-21 is a discourse with the “good shepherd” at its center. This discourse is directed against “the Jews” and what they have said in 9:40. The Old Testament is essential background for understanding what is being said. Israel’s leaders can be spoken of as “shepherds” and, ultimately, God is the Shepherd of Israel. Furthermore, the messiah can be thought of as a shepherd as well. All of these themes can be found in Ezekiel 34.
2. 10:1-6 a parable, contrasting two different kinds of leaders. On one hand, there is the “thief” who enters the sheepfold surreptitiously for the purpose of promoting his own interests. On the other hand, there is the shepherd who is known to the sheep as their protector and provider. Just as sheep respond when their shepherd calls their name, because they know him as their shepherd, they will not follow the voice of a stranger. Clearly, Jesus thinks of the “the Jews” as thieves and not as genuine shepherds. The true Israel will not listen to them.
3. Since “the Jews” did not understand this parable (10:6), Jesus now explains it. He is the “door” to the sheepfold (10:9) in that all legitimate access to the sheep is through him and in that the true well-being of the sheep is gained through him. The “shepherds” which have come before Jesus (“the Jews”) are not shepherds at all but “thieves” (10:8). Thieves can harm the sheep in many ways, but the greatest harm comes from teaching falsehood. To do this is to “kill and destroy” (10:10). By contrast, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the True Shepherd. In Ezekiel 34 the Good Shepherd is God. The difference between the thieves (“the Jews”) and the Good Shepherd (Jesus/The Father) is that the latter is willing to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the sheep (10:11). This is a clear reference to the crucifixion which reveals

Jesus' complete dedication to his mission from the Father. The contrast between the thieves and the Good Shepherd is stark. The former only "destroy" while the latter comes to give life "abundantly" (10:10).

4. In 10:16-18 two important themes emerge. First, Jesus the Good Shepherd will create the New Israel (10:16) which will be "one flock" (consisting of Jewish and Gentile Christians). The Good Shepherd brings Israel to her fulfillment (something already hinted at in 4:1-42). Second, the Good Shepherd will not only give his life for the New Israel, he will also claim it back (10:17-18). Jesus' death and resurrection are only properly understood when one grasps the fact that he has the "authority" both to give his life and to "take it up again" (10:18).
5. Jesus' words produce another division among "the Jews" (see 9:16 and 7:12-13). Some conclude that Jesus is simply insane (note 8:48) while others conclude that this could not be the case since Jesus has restored the sight of a blind man (10:21). The view of the latter is similar to the man who received his sight from Jesus (9:31-32). The response of "the Jews" to Jesus is certainly not uniform.

# The Gospel of John

## Session 7

### John 10:22—12:50

#### I. John 10:22-42

1. The Feast of Dedication was a relatively new feast. In 167 BC, the king of Syria (who ruled Palestine) attempted to force pagan worship on Israel. A sacrifice to Zeus was offered in the Temple. This is the “desolating sacrilege” mentioned in 1 Maccabees 1:59. Some Jews (among the priestly aristocracy) supported this effort but it led to a revolt under Judas Maccabeus who purified and rededicated the Temple in 164 BC.
2. In the Temple, Jesus is confronted by “the Jews” who demand to know if he is the messiah. Although this question has been answered by Jesus in 10:14-18 in an unambiguous way, they refuse to listen to him since they judge “according to the flesh” (8:14).
3. Jesus supplies an answer to their question in 10:25-30: As Israel celebrates God’s renewed Presence in the Temple, Jesus tells them that human beings have access to God through him (10:30). Jesus insists that his works bear witness about him (10:25) but that they do not believe because they are not part of his flock. They are unable to hear his voice and, thus, to receive eternal life (10:27-28). The Presence of God in the Temple has been perfect in Jesus and so the Feast of Dedication finds its fulfillment in him.
4. Has Jesus committed blasphemy? “The Jews” certainly think that he has since, as they see it, he is simply a human being who has made himself equal to God. But Jesus has emphasized all along (as in 8:28) that he does nothing himself but has come to fulfill the Father’s will. Jesus is the one whom the Father has “consecrated and sent into the world” (10:36). Jesus invites them to reflect upon his works (in which they seem to have a great interest) which testify to the fact that “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:38). The Father and the Son, while they can be distinguished, work as one.
5. In 10:40 Jesus crosses the Jordan and leaves Judea. He goes to the place where John was baptizing. John the Baptist’s witness has born fruit. On the basis of his witness and on the basis of their own encounter with Jesus the people in this area (non-Jews) come to faith (10:42).

#### II. John 11:1-54

1. 11:1-6 sets the stage for the action. Jesus has a close relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. 11:2 notes that Mary will anoint Jesus in 12:1-3 and 11:5 notes that Jesus “loved” Mary, Martha and Lazarus. When Jesus learns that Lazarus is ill, he delays going to him. While on the surface this seems odd, we have come to know that Jesus does things in his own time. 11:4 gives us a hint about this: Lazarus’ illness is not a chance event, but it has occurred “that the Son of God may be glorified through it”.
2. 11:7-16: The disciples are surprised that Jesus wants to return to Judea for “the Jews” were seeking to kill him (10:31). Jesus will risk death to go to Lazarus and this foreshadows what he will do on the Cross. Jesus refers to Lazarus’ death as a falling asleep (11:11) and this means that Jesus goes to “wake” him. Jesus makes it clear that Lazarus has died and that he is happy not to have prevented his death. This makes it clear that Jesus is about to offer another sign which invites belief (11:14). The suggestion here is that for the Incarnate Word raising the dead is like waking someone from sleep. Like the miracle at Cana (2:1-11), the healing of the paralyzed man (5:1-17), the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15), and

he healing of the man born blind (9:1-41), this sign will reveal the mystery of Jesus. Thomas summons his fellow disciples to die with Jesus (11:16).

3. 11:17-27: By the time Jesus reaches Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days (11:17). Jewish tradition held that the spirit of a person left the body after three days. This means that Lazarus is certifiably dead. Martha goes out to meet Jesus while Mary remains home to mourn (the period of mourning was seven days). Martha has faith in Jesus but is puzzled by his actions. Why was he not there (11:21)? Jesus refers to the resurrection of the dead in which many Jews (especially the Pharisees) believed (11:23). Jesus moves from the affirmation that the dead will be raised at the end of history to an affirmation about himself: "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:24). To have faith in Jesus is to share in his life and to share in his life is to enter into communion with God (note 10:30). Jesus asks Martha if she believes this and this results in a confession of faith: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (11:27). This is a true confession of faith which clearly goes well beyond traditional Jewish messianic expectations.
4. 11:28-37: Martha returns to her house to tell her sister Mary that Jesus is calling for her. Mary then goes to find Jesus who is still outside Bethany. Note that in 11:32 Mary says the same thing her sister said in 11:21. They both express faith in Jesus' power to heal. "The Jews" have accompanied Mary in her mourning and Jesus now behold both they and Mary weeping. Jesus is "deeply moved" and "greatly troubled" (11:33) by this. This will happen again in 12:27 as his "hour" approaches. Jesus is "deeply moved" at two levels. First, he is responding humanly to the death of someone he loves and the grief of those close to him. Second, he is responding to the reality of death and what it says about the human state under sin. If we think of Jesus as filled with the love of God, we can begin to imagine (but only begin to) the nature of his grief.
5. 11:38-44: Jesus now arrives at the tomb and is "deeply moved" again (11:38). The body of Lazarus has been anointed for burial and placed in a tomb. This tomb has been sealed by rolling a stone over the entrance. To tomb would have contained shelves in the wall on which corpses would have been placed. Jesus wants the tomb to be opened. While Martha has made a profession of faith in Jesus as the Resurrection, she has not yet come to a full understanding of what this means. She protests that Lazarus' corpse has begun to decompose and that opening the tomb will only release the odor. (Why increase the suffering by literally smelling death?) Jesus makes it clear that he is about to reveal the "glory of God" (11:40) which is his power to give life. The glory of God is revealed in his delivering human beings from sin and death. In 11:41-42 Jesus offers a prayer to the Father. The purpose of this prayer is to allow those listening to know that he has been sent by the Father. Jesus is not asking for the Father to raise Lazarus but to show those listening that he and the Father share a perfect communion. What is about to happen will be done by the Father and the Son acting in concert. The actions of the Son reveal and glorify the Father and the Father glorifies the Son. In 11:43 what Jesus said in 5:28-29 takes place—the dead hear his voice and come out of their tombs. It is important to notice that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead by command. This, of course, takes us back to 1:1-3. Jesus is the Word of Life. The release of Lazarus from death is signified by the removal of the burial linen (11:44). Lazarus is no longer dead. As a sign, this indicates that Jesus' resurrection will free human being from death; they will be unbound and set free.
6. 11:45-54: The response to the raising of Lazarus is, as we should expect, mixed. Some of "the Jews" who came to mourn with Mary believe. In their case, the sign conduces to faith. Note that some of them accept that Lazarus was raised from the dead but that this only hardens their opposition (11:46). The reasoning of the Council is interesting: if Jesus is allowed to continue his signs, many people will believe him and the Romans, interpreting his movement to be a messianic rebellion, may respond with force. This might even involve the destruction of the Temple. Ironically, a Jewish rebellion seeking to defend

the nation and the Temple, results in this very thing. Caiaphas, unknowingly, speaks prophetically. It is best that one man die “for the nation” (11:51). Note the interpretation of Jesus’ death in 11:51-52.

### **III. John 11:55-12:11**

1. In 11:55-57 the stage is set for Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. Passover was a pilgrimage festival which meant that it could only be celebrated in Jerusalem. In order to celebrate the Passover, pilgrims would have to ritually purify themselves and so would arrive in Jerusalem early to wash in the various pools near the Temple. The tension in the city is made clear. The chief priests and the Pharisees are determined to arrest Jesus having already made plans to execute him (11:53).
2. 12:1-11 is a symbolic scene which anticipates Jesus’ death and takes place “six days before the Passover” (12:1). In the context of a dinner given by Martha, Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with a pound of scented oil. This anticipates the large quantity of perfumed ointment which Nicodemus brings to Jesus’ tomb in 19:39. At this dinner, Jesus is being symbolically prepared for burial. Mary then wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair, and this anticipates Jesus washing the feet of the disciples in 13:1-20. Both the preparation for burial and the washing of the disciples’ feet symbolize Jesus’ self-oblation on the Cross. The whole house is filled with the fragrance of the oil and this symbolizes the extravagance of Jesus’ act.
3. Judas Iscariot protests against this “waste” (12:5). But his protest is completely insincere for he has stolen money from the common purse (12:6). Jesus’ words in 12:8 recall Deuteronomy 15:11. There will always be an opportunity (and an obligation!) to help the poor but there will not always be an opportunity to anoint Jesus.
4. The situation now grows more tense as “the Jews” are now determined to kill not only Jesus but Lazarus as well. The stage is now set for Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem.

### **IV. John 12:12-19**

1. As he enters Jerusalem, Jesus is given a royal, messianic welcome. Palm branches were symbols of Jewish nationalism and liberation and had their origin in the Maccabean revolt against Greek rule (1 Maccabees 13:51). He is also given the messianic greeting in 12:13 which comes from Psalm 118:25-26. Jesus is also hailed as Israel’s king. The crowd may think of Jesus as warrior-king who has come to liberate Judea from Roman rule. This is the way that “the Jews” will present Jesus to Pilate.
2. What Jesus does in 12:14 may be understood as a response to all of this. He enacts Zechariah 9:9-17 (Zechariah 9:9 is quoted in 12:15). In doing this, Jesus sends the message that he is the messiah but that he has come to usher in a reign of peace; he has not come to drive the Romans out of Judea. It becomes clear that the crowd and Jesus have very different understandings of kingship. 12:16 notes that when this happened, the disciples did not understand the significance of Jesus’ actions. Understanding only came later when they reflected on these events after the resurrection.
3. The crowd which witnessed the raising of Lazarus has followed Jesus to Jerusalem. This group has arrived at an incomplete faith even as they witness to Lazarus being raised from the dead. This popular acclaim clearly frustrates the Pharisees since it is their intention to have him arrested (11:57).

## V. John 12:20-26

1. Now, some Greeks (Gentiles) enter the drama. They may be “God-fearers” or Gentiles who have an interest in Judaism but who have not yet converted. They have come to celebrate Passover.
2. It is significant that at their appearance Jesus begins to talk about his “hour” of his glorification. This is a reference to his death and resurrection. This is another indication that Jesus will create a new Israel which will include Gentiles. This has already been mentioned in 10:14-16.
3. The image of the grain of wheat shines a light on the nature of Jesus’ hour. In order for there to be wheat, grains of wheat must “die” by being put into the ground. But this “death” actually yields fruit. The same is true of Jesus’ hour. He will die but his death will bear fruit in new life.
4. The pattern of Jesus’ life and death is to be the pattern for Christians (12:25-26). Jesus’ disciples are to be characterized by loving self-sacrifice for they understand that life is kept by giving it away. Ironically, it is by giving one’s life away, expending it in the service of God, that one receives life.

## VI. John 12:27-36

1. This scene resembles the synoptic accounts of Gethsemane (note Mark 14:32-42). Jesus says that his soul is “troubled” at what approaches. And yet, he says that he will not ask the Father to save him from “this hour” (12:27). The reason is that “this hour” defines his mission from the Father. This “hour” is the hour of Father’s glorification in the Son’s death for the self-offering of the Son reveals the Father’s glory which is his love.
2. Bearing witness to the Son, the Father responds: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (12:28). The Father has glorified his name in the Son’s ministry thus far and he will glorify it again in the Son’s death and resurrection. It is important to note that in John Jesus’ death is not a disaster that befalls him but the event in which the glory of God is revealed.
3. The voice of the Father does not provide Jesus with new information; it is for the sake of those listening (12:30). The voice confirms that the Father and the Son always work in concert for theirs is a union of perfect love.
4. In 12:30-32 Jesus returns to the theme of his being “lifted up” (note 3:14 and 8:28). This “lifting up” refers to the Cross but it has already been presented as being prefigured by Moses “lifting up” the bronze serpent in the wilderness for the healing of Israel. Through his self-offering on the Cross, Jesus will cleanse and purify humankind. Jesus’ self-oblation will be both a “judgment” (12:31) on “this world” (the world distorted by sin) in that it will result in the world being set right. Ironically, Jesus’ death will result in the destruction of sin. His self-oblation will also be a kind of exorcism in which the “ruler of the world” will be “cast out” (12:31). Both of these images suggest the completeness with which human sin will be dealt. God will be revealed in the total overthrow and removal of sin and evil.
5. In addition, Jesus’ being “lifted up” will result in people being drawn to him (both Jews and Gentiles). Jesus’ self-oblation will be the birth of the New Israel. That Jesus is talking about his crucifixion is made explicit in 12:33.
6. The Jerusalem crowd has not yet arrived at a mature faith for it is puzzled by what Jesus has said. It refers to the belief that the Messiah would restore Israel and then reign forever. A King whose throne is a cross and who triumphs by suffering death is beyond its grasp at this moment.
7. The time for coming to a mature faith is limited and, finally, the only possible choices available are either walking in “darkness” (12:35) or being “sons of light” (12:36).



## **VII. John 12:37-43**

1. This section is a report on the consequences of Jesus' presence in Jerusalem up to this point. It sets the stage for Jesus' arrest and trial. Jesus hides himself from the crowd, indicating his distance from them.
2. Despise Jesus' signs, the crowd has not come to genuine faith (as 12:34 indicates). This should not be surprising as the citation from Isaiah 53:1 indicates (12:38). Israel has a persistent pattern of disbelief and the response to Jesus shows that this endures. 12:39 says that they "could not believe" and in support of this Isaiah 6:10 is cited. For John, faith involves both the initiative of God (6:44) and the response of a person (12:42-43). The crowd's blindness is to be understood as either willed or permitted by God, quite possibly for the sake of bringing about deliverance. The crowd's blindness is not something which God has simply imposed upon it. 12:41 is important for it says that when Isaiah had a vision of God (Isaiah 6:5) he also saw the Word who has become incarnate in Jesus. Thus, what Isaiah says may be understood to be prophetic of Jesus.
3. 12:42 notes that many of the "authorities" came so some kind of faith in Jesus but their fear of being put out of the synagogue outweighed their new faith and so they did not confess it. Of these people, John comments that "they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God" (12:43). This is what Jesus has accused "the Jews" of in 5:44.

## **VIII. John 12:44-50**

1. This section may be taken as a summary of what Jesus has taught in chapters 1-12. The first affirmation (12:44-45) here is that whoever believes in the Son believes in the Father who sent him. The Son is transparent to the Father such that to believe in the Son is simultaneously to believe in the Father who is revealed in him.
2. The second affirmation (12:46) is that Jesus is the light of the world, the Light of Divine Truth shining into the darkness of sin and revealing it to be darkness. To receive this Light is to walk out of darkness and to pass from death to Life.
3. The third affirmation (12:47-48) is that those who reject Jesus reject the only means of salvation. Those who reject Life and Light have condemned themselves to death and sin. Quite simply, nothing can be done for those who have rejected Life and Light.
4. The final affirmation (12:49-50) is that Jesus has not spoken on his own authority but has spoken what the Father has given him to say. This does not mean that his authority is secondary to that of the Father's but that the Father and the Son share one authority conjointly. In other words, the Son is not anxious about his authority and it is not his mission to somehow assert it.

# The Gospel of John

## Session 8

### John 13:1—16:4a

#### I. John 13:1-11

1. Jesus' "hour" has now come (13:1) and this "hour" is the New Passover, the New Exodus which is God's final act of salvation. This "hour" involves Jesus' departure from the world and his return to the Father. In coming to this "hour," Jesus has loved "his own" "to the completeness of love". Most English translations render the end of 13:1 as "he loved them to the end" but the word "end" here is an inadequate rendering of the Greek word *telos* which means something like "completion" or "fulfillment". Jesus' "hour" is the hour of the fullness of God's love.
2. Against Jesus in this "hour" is not Judas or "the Jews" but the devil (13:2). The devil wishes to destroy Jesus and enlists the help of human agents in doing so. This effort reveals the fact that he understands neither the love of God nor God's power. Jesus, however, knows that the Father has given "all things" over to him and that he is sovereign over the events of his death. He is not a powerless victim but gives himself over to death knowing that nothing can finally overcome him (13:3).
3. During the Passover meal, Jesus engages in a symbolic action which offers an interpretation of his "hour". This is a symbolic pre-enactment of his Passion. The washing of feet was a gesture of hospitality, but this task was generally performed by slaves or people of low social status. Therefore, the fact that Jesus assumed this role would have been shocking. This act of service accompanied by the stripping away of Jesus' outer garment (13:4), certainly symbolizes his death and interprets it as an act of service and love.
4. The shocking nature of Jesus' actions are reflected in what Peter says in 13:6. Peter's question is a challenge (made even more firm in 13:8). Jesus makes it clear that the disciples will not understand what he is doing now but that understanding will come later (13:7). Because this act of service represents Jesus' self-oblation, Peter must submit to it. Jesus' self-oblation makes possible a spiritual cleansing, a cleansing which makes one pure ("completely clean"). Of course, not all of the disciples are "clean" (13:10). Not all of them will submit to the cleansing power of Jesus' death. 13:11 reminds us that Jesus is betrayed not by "the Jews" or the Romans but by one of his own disciples.

#### II. John 13:12-20

1. Jesus now makes it clear that the disciples are to follow the pattern symbolized in act of humble service. Jesus has performed an act which is below his status and the disciples are to do likewise. The community of disciples is to be a place of self-sacrificial love. If Jesus is not above serving, they are not either (13:14-15).
2. Jesus' actions have set a pattern for the disciples. They are not to think in terms of status and being "above" certain things. If their master has become a servant, they should assume the same posture (13:16)
3. Not all the disciples will assume this posture. Citing Psalm 41:10 in 13:18, Jesus notes that someone who has shared bread with him will act to betray him. Jesus tells them of this beforehand so that when it takes place their faith will not be affected (13:19).
4. 13:20 makes it clear that the pattern of sending continues with the disciples. The Father sends the Son, and the Son will send the Spirit. Finally, the disciples will be sent such that to receive them is to receive

them is to receive Jesus and the One who sent him. The sending of the disciples can only be understood within the context of the sending of the Son and the Spirit (note 20:19-23).

### III. John 13:21-30

1. The subject of betrayal has already been introduced (13:10-11) but now comes into focus. Once again, Jesus is “troubled” (cf. 11:33). He announces that the betrayer will be one of the disciples.
2. We are introduced to the “beloved disciple” in 13:23 who has a special status. The position of this disciple at the Passover meal suggests that he is the host and that Jesus is the guest of honor. This presence at Jesus’ side (13:25) suggests both physical and spiritual proximity to Jesus in that Jesus is described as being at the Father’s side in 1:18.
3. Peter motions for the beloved disciple to ask Jesus about the identity of the betrayer. Jesus identifies this figure in 13:26 which refers, once again, to Psalm 41:10. The betrayer is someone who has shared intimate fellowship with Jesus.
4. 13:2 notes that the devil had already tempted Judas to betray Jesus. 13:27 seems to indicate that Judas now gives consent to this and allows the devil to enter into him. Judas’ betrayal is not simply an individual act. Note that Jesus grants permission for Judas to betray him in 13:27 and this emphasizes his sovereignty over unfolding events. Jesus is not overtaken by events but is, rather, sovereign over them.
5. Judas goes out into the night (13:30). This is not simply a statement about the time of day but also a statement of his spiritual condition. Judas leaves the presence of Jesus and enters into the darkness.

### IV. John 13:31-38

1. With the departure of Judas, the Farewell Discourse begins (13:31—17:26). The glory of God is revealed in the Cross for here God is revealed as self-giving love. The Father gives the Son over to death and the Son surrenders himself to death (he is not passive at any moment). The Son acts out of love for the Father. The Father is glorified in the Son (13:31) and the Father will glorify the Son in the resurrection (13:32).
2. Jesus is preparing the disciples for the time when he is physically absent. Jesus has told “the Jews” that he is going away (8:21) but they mistakenly interpreted this to mean that he was leaving Judea (7:32-36). Jesus is not simply going to a distant geographical location but to the Father (13:33).
3. Jesus now gives a “new commandment” (13:34). The disciples are to practice the self-giving love which Jesus has just shown them. This is not simply a matter of following Jesus’ example or teaching. To follow Jesus’ pattern, one must abide in him. The law of love (note Romans 13:8-10) is not simply a law but presupposes a continuing relationship with Jesus.
4. It becomes clear that the disciples do not understand Jesus for Peter clearly thinks that Jesus is simply changing geographical location (13:36). Peter cannot follow Jesus now because he is going to the Father to prepare a way. Peter will only follow later when Jesus has made this possible. Peter’s stated intention of laying his life down for Jesus both humanly unlikely and theologically impossible (13:38). Peter will betray Jesus in a difficult moment, and it is theologically impossible for Peter to lay down his life for Jesus. All depends on the reverse taking place.

## **V. John 14:1-7**

1. Jesus makes it clear that his departure should not trouble the disciples. He is referring to the distress experienced when one is near to death. Instead, they should trust God and the One whom he has sent. Trusting the Father and the Son, relying on their reliability, is the essence of faith.
2. Where is Jesus going? He is going to the Father so that those who follow him may come to the Father as well. Jesus has already spoken of the temple as his father's "house" and has spoken of himself as the true temple (2:16, 20). Jesus is going to the Father in order to make it possible for people to enter into communion with God. Coming to the Father is entering into communion with him through the Son and the Spirit (13:2-3).
3. Once again, Jesus is misunderstood to be speaking about going to some place (this time by Thomas). And once again, Jesus has to make it clear that he is not speaking of geographical movement. Jesus is himself the way to God because in him the truth about God is revealed. To come to him is to have Life (13:6).

## **VI. John 14:8-14**

1. Now a third disciple (after Peter and Thomas) misunderstands Jesus. Philip seems to want a theophany, an open manifestation of God (such as that on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 33:8). Jesus makes it clear that Philip does not know him for the Father is revealed in the Son (14:9, cf. 1:18). The Son is the Father's self-revelation. Faith involves the trust that the Father and the Son are inseparable (14:10). To know the Son is to know the Father because the Father "dwells" in the Son and does his works through him (14:10).
2. Jesus' works are performed as the result of the close communion between the Father and the Son. When Jesus goes to the Father, he will send the Spirit to unite the disciples to himself (14:16-17) and this union will result in Jesus' works being performed in them. This will glorify Jesus. The life of the Church will bear witness to him and so Jesus' works will become "greater" (not confined to a single person).
3. The communion between Jesus and the disciples will also be made manifest in their prayer life. They will offer prayer in Jesus' name in union with him which means that they will pray in obedience to the Father. Because they will pray in union with Jesus, he will grant their requests, and this will glorify the Father (14:13; cf. Romans 8:26-27). It is important to not misread 14:14 as promising that anything we pray for will be given to us. Prayer is the fruit of genuine communion with Jesus and this communion conforms us to him. Just as the Son loves the Father and loves to do his will, disciples will love the Son and will love to do his will. This is what they will seek in prayer.

## **VII. John 14:15-24**

1. It may seem counterintuitive to us, but in John love and obedience go together. Genuine love of God leads to (joyful) obedience to God. This obedience has been mentioned in 13:34. Note that the disciples' relationship to Jesus mirrors the Son's relationship to the Father. Just as the love of God is revealed in the Son, so the love of the Son is revealed in his disciples.
2. Jesus' going to the Father is good news for the reason stated in 14:16. Jesus will as the Father and he will send "another Helper [or Advocate]" (14:16). This is the "Spirit of truth". The Spirit is "another Helper" because the Son is a "Helper" as well. The ministry of the Son and the Spirit must be seen as mutually supplementing one another. The Spirit is distinct from Jesus but not separate from him. The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it does not know the Son. The Spirit is the Father's gift to those who have faith in the Son. While Jesus will be physically absent (his human nature will be in the Presence

of God), the Spirit will dwell with and in the Church. Through the Spirit, disciples will be able to abide in Jesus.

3. While Jesus is going to the Father, he promises to come to the disciples (14:18). After his resurrection, Jesus will live and through the gift of the Spirit the disciples will live also. As he abides with them after his resurrection, the disciples will know that Jesus truly has communion with the Father because he will share his communion with the Father with them (through the Spirit). Instead of Jesus' departure being a loss, it will actually create a new intimacy with God: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20).
4. Those who keep Jesus' commandments (those who have an obedience producing faith) can be identified as those who love Jesus. There is a difference between nominal faith and genuine faith which is motivated by love, consists in communion with God and bears the fruit of obedience. It is important to notice that love here is a source of knowledge (14:21). We know what we love such that true knowledge is predicated upon love and true knowledge deepens love.
5. This point is made clearly in 14:23-24. Love yields obedience and obedience yields true knowledge of and communion with God. Stated negatively, lack of love yields lack of obedience and lack of obedience yields closure to the truth.

#### **VIII. John 14:25-31**

1. Much of what Jesus has said will be incomprehensible to the disciples. This is because much of what he says can only be comprehended after his "hour". We learn that the Holy Spirit will bring about the needed understanding—it will not be a human attainment. Having sent the Son, the Father will send the Spirit in Jesus' name (14:26). Remember that in 14:16 the Father will send the Spirit at Jesus' request. The Son plays a role in the sending of the Spirit.
2. Note that the mission of the Spirit is not to reveal new things but to remind the disciples (the Church) of what has been revealed in Jesus. The Spirit is sent as a witness to the Son. The Spirit leads the Church into an ever-deeper encounter with the Son and all that the Father has done and revealed in him. The disciples are not let to figure out what has been revealed.
3. Jesus bestows peace upon the disciples (14:27). This is not simply a private, inward sense of all being well. In the Old Testament, peace is an eschatological gift (Jeremiah 33:6-9) and has the sense of restored order based upon the love of God. Jesus calls the disciples to a confident trust in God which is the source of true peace. Apart from this trust, there can be no peace. The "world" cannot supply this peace for it has turned away from trusting God. It might supply a temporary peace (based upon military or economic security) but such a peace is only temporary and can be easily taken away. It is not lasting.
4. Jesus' return to the disciples (14:28) has two dimensions. First, he will return to them through the Spirit. Jesus' return to the Father (14:28) does not mean that he is simply going away. Second, there is his Parousia or return in glory. It is important to note that Jesus' "going away" (14:28), when correctly understood, is a cause for rejoicing.
5. Little remains for Jesus to say to the disciples because the "ruler of this world" approaches (14:30). The devil has already moved Judas to act and soon he will act through "the Jews" and the Romans to kill Jesus. But these actions will have no final effect on Jesus because he is not under the authority of the devil. Indeed, Jesus' "hour" will reveal the futility of the devil's cause. The devil has no power in this situation.
6. Jesus' love for the Father is revealed in his death (14:31). The Son's willingness to surrender his life reveals his perfect love for and trust in the Father. The Father's willingness to surrender his Son reveals his love for humankind. The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus reveal the inner-trinitarian life of God to be an act of love.

## **IX. John 15:1-8**

1. Jesus speaks of the deep communion that will exist between he and the disciples. This communion is the inner reality of the Church. Jesus' claim to be the "true vine" is important since in the Old Testament the vine is Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). In 15:1, therefore, Jesus claims to be the True Israel. Jesus is the True Israel and those who "abide" in him are his branches and so part of the True Israel. The True Israel consists of those who have entered into the shared communion of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
2. Disciples who do not produce the fruit of love (those who do not keep Jesus' commandment as in 13:34) are removed while those who do bear fruit are "pruned" (15:2). The purpose of this pruning is to enable the vine to bear more fruit (15:2). The Greek verb translated as "prune" can also mean "purify". Branches (disciples) can only bear fruit if they remain attached to the vine. Note the number of times some form of "abide" is used to make this point (15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10). The relationship between Jesus and the disciples is made clear: "I am the vine; you are the branches" (15:5). Jesus is the indispensable source of life and empowerment and there can be no genuine discipleship apart from him. Disciples who do not abide in Jesus simply wither as "branches" and nothing can be done with them except to throw them into the fire (15:6). Most probably, this is an image for eschatological judgment. What else can be done with vines which refuse to be vines and bear no fruit?
3. Disciples who abide in Jesus will bear "much fruit" (15:5) because he is the source of fruitfulness. Note the emphasis on mutual abiding: "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (15:5).
4. Abiding in Jesus is both sustained by prayer and fosters prayer (15:7). To abide in Jesus is to share in his love for and obedience to the Father. This means that one's prayer will be in accordance with God's will. True prayer both reflects a human will conformed to God's and brings this conformity about. Just as God has been glorified in the witness of Jesus, so he will be glorified in the witness of the disciples (15:8).

## **X. John 15:9-17**

1. Jesus loves the disciples with the same self-sacrificial and eternal love with which the Father loves him. Disciples enter in the communion that exists between Father and Son. Just as the Son lives out his perfect love for the Father in perfect "obedience" (the Son is not simply "following orders"), so disciples live out their love for the Son by keeping his commandment (15:12). The fruit of keeping this commandment, the fruit of abiding in Jesus, is that Jesus' joy will indwell the disciples and that their joy will attain completeness (15:11). Remaining in communion with Jesus and keeping his commandment are organically related and mutually interdependent. Communion with Jesus makes it possible to keep his commandment and keeping his commandment brings one into communion with Jesus.
2. As has been noted, God's love is most radiantly displayed on the Cross (15:13). It is this love to which Jesus calls the disciples, a love that can only be the fruit of communion with God. The relationship of Jesus to the disciples is not that of master to slave in that the slave simply follows orders and may hate his or her master (15:15). The relationship between Jesus and his disciples is more like a relationship among friends in that friends do things for one another out of love (the Greek word for the love of friendship is *philia*). Slaves do not know the rationale for the orders they obey while friends act out of affection for one another (15:15). Jesus has given to the disciples all that he has heard from the Father and, therefore, they know the reason for abiding in Jesus.
3. Faith is a free gift of God (15:16) and not something anyone gives to him or herself. Having faith is not itself a meritorious act. But God gives the gift of faith with a charge, "go and bear fruit" (15:16). Disciples who abide in the Son and so abide in the Father will ask the Father to accomplish his purposes in their

lives and this will be granted to them (15:16). Note the discipleship is not a static thing but consists in entering into an ever-closer communion with God and an ever-greater bearing of fruit.

#### **XI. John 15:18—16:4a**

1. Jesus now tells the disciples that they must expect persecution (15:18-19). Here “the world” refers to humankind in rebellion against God. When the disciples encounter opposition, they need to remember that the world opposed Jesus before it opposed them. The world only loves those who join in its rebellion against God; it hates those who shine a light on this rebellion and call it into account.
2. The disciples have been chosen “out of the world” (15:19). This does not mean that they are to be removed to a “spiritual zone” but that they are not part of the world’s rebellion. Since a slave is not greater than his master, they are to expect persecution since Jesus was persecuted (15:20). The disciples are not to interpret the persecution directed against them as personal dislike. Persecution is rooted in the refusal of the world to know the One who sent Jesus.
3. If Jesus’ ministry had not taken place, the world would not be held guilty. But Jesus has revealed the Father and so the refusal to receive this revelation brings guilt. The refusal to believe Jesus is the refusal to believe in God (15:23). Jesus sees the reaction of the world as prophesied in Scripture. In 15:25 he cites Psalm 69:5.
4. In the midst of persecution, the disciples will not be left alone for the Spirit, whom Jesus will send from the Father (15:26), will bear witness about him. The Spirit will empower the witness of the Church over time making the witness of the Church possible.
5. The witness of the Church will not convince everyone. Those in rebellion against the Father will not be convinced. Some will persecute the Church and in doing so will think they are protecting “true religion” (16:2).

## The Gospel of John Session 9

### John 16:4b—18:32

#### I. John 16:4b-11

1. Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that his going away is not a cause of sadness but, ironically, a cause of joy. The reason why it is a cause of joy is that Jesus is going to the Father (16:5) and this will make it possible for the Spirit to come. It is not that the Spirit simply follows the coming of the Son but that the Son's coming makes the Spirit's coming possible.
2. This is Jesus' fourth statement about the Spirit (16:7). Note the connection between the Son's departure and the Spirit's coming: "for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you" (16:7). Jesus has spoken about his relationship to the Spirit before. In 15:26 the Son sends the Spirit from the Father. In 14:25 the Spirit is sent by the Father in the Son's name. In 16:7 the Son sends the Spirit. We must think of the ministry of the Son and the ministry of the Spirit as organically related.
3. The language of 16:8 presupposes a trial in which "the world" is proved guilty (even as it thinks of having proven Jesus guilty). The Spirit will witness against "the world" and in doing so will confirm the faith of the disciples. The world will be proven wrong (guilty) on three counts: sin, righteousness and judgment.
4. The essence of sin is the rejection of the divine Word (16:9) as untrue. Sin is a fundamental resistance to God and the Truth he reveals. The Spirit will show that the world is in rebellion against God and that its rebellion is based upon falsehood. The world will also be proven wrong about righteousness. For the world, Jesus' crucifixion shows that he has been rejected by God as unrighteous. But the Spirit will bear witness that Jesus has gone to the Father (16:10) and so is the Righteous One. The witness of the Spirit will counter the assumptions of the world. The Spirit will also prove the world to be wrong about judgment. Jesus' death on the cross will seem to be a defeat in the eyes of his adversaries (over which they will rejoice). But the Spirit will bear witness that it is the "ruler of this world" which has been condemned (16:11). Jesus' death will be shown to have broken the devil's power (note 12:31).

#### II. John 16:12-15

1. This is the fifth promise about the Spirit. Jesus has "many things" to tell the disciples but they are not ready to receive these things now. What will be communicated later by the Spirit must be communicated by the Spirit because it will not simply be a matter of applying human intelligence.
2. Now the Spirit is designated as the "Spirit of truth" (16:13) because he will guide the disciples in "all the truth". The Spirit will lead the disciples into the Truth which has been revealed in Jesus. Through the Spirit, the meaning of what Jesus has revealed will be imparted to the disciples and will saturate their hearts and minds. This Truth cannot be appropriated in a merely mechanical way.
3. The Spirit will "glorify" the Son (16:14). The Spirit will disclose the identity of the Son and his relationship to the Father. The Son is glorified in being shown to share equally in the glory of the Father.
4. The relationship between the Father and the Son is such that they share completely in one another. The Father gives all that he has to the Son and the Son pours himself completely out for the Father. Through the Spirit, this communion is revealed to us and we are allowed to share in it. The one mission of God is carried through both the Son and the Spirit. The truth about the Son can only be received through the Spirit.



### III. John 16:16-24

1. In 16:16 Jesus states a paradoxical truth: In a “little while” the disciples will not be able to see him but also in a “little while” they will be able to see him. Jesus is speaking of his death and resurrection. The disciples must think about their experience of what is about to occur in the light of this promise.
2. The disciples appear to be thoroughly confused (16:17-18). Jesus briefly describes what they will experience: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (16:20). To illustrate this point, Jesus used the example of a woman in childbirth (16:21). When “her hour has come,” a woman in childbirth is in great pain but after the birth of her child the joy of giving new life helps her to see that the pain was worth it. (Note that in Romans 8:22 Paul uses childbirth as a metaphor for the new creation.) Likewise, the disciples will experience great sorrow at Jesus’ death, but this sorrow will give way to joy when the “birth” comes about (Jesus’ resurrection). Note the emphasis in 16:22. Jesus’ resurrection will be such that their sorrow will be replaced by joy “and no one will take your joy from you”. This enduring joy is grounded in the resurrection.
3. During the time of the resurrection, the disciples will not question Jesus about anything (16:23) as they have just questioned repeatedly. The reason for this has been indicated in 16:13. The time of the resurrection will be a time of communion between Jesus and his disciples, a communion made possible by the Spirit. This communion will be manifested in the way in which they pray (16:23-24). They will pray in communion with Jesus and will, thus, pray in accordance with God’s will. By praying in communion with Jesus, what they ask for will be given. It is important to see here that prayer is not simply a matter of asking God for things but a matter of drawing nearer to God and becoming more and more open to him. This openness to God results in a joy that is “full” (16:24).

### IV. John 16:25-33

1. While Jesus has spoken to the disciples in “figures of speech,” the time is coming when he will speak to them “plainly about the Father” (16:25). The difference between now and this future time is the coming of the Spirit (16:13). While they can not understand this now, the disciples will have a new relationship to Jesus, one of intimate communion. This communion will be based on love. Note that in 16:27 love and faith are essentially the same thing. The love of the disciples for Jesus is expressed in their faith that he is from the Father. Having loved the Son, they have also loved the Father. In the Son, they receive the love of the Father (16:27). Once again, Jesus’ departure from the world is not to be seen as a bad thing, as Jesus somehow abandoning the disciples (16:28).
2. In 16:29—30 it becomes clear that the disciples misunderstand Jesus. At this point, true understanding is impossible for Jesus has not yet been glorified and the Spirit has not yet come. Their faith is still incomplete and must be so at this point. In fact, at the approach of “this hour” they will be scattered and will leave Jesus alone (16:32).
3. In light of all this, Jesus offers consolation. While the disciples will leave him alone, Jesus is actually never alone because he and the Father are always together. The success of Jesus’ mission is not dependent upon the unwavering faith of the disciples. The peace which the disciples are to have is not the product of their own intelligence or steadfastness and it is certainly not the product of never experiencing difficulty. Jesus makes it clear that the peace they are to have come from him and his relationship to the Father. Note the contrast: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. The “hour” which approaches is the victory of Jesus, not the victory of the disciples.

## V. John 17:1-8

1. 17:1-26 is an extended prayer offered by Jesus on behalf of the disciples (and the Church which is to follow). For this reason, it is sometimes called the High Priestly Prayer. It is analogous to the prayer the high priest would have offered on behalf of Israel and the Day of Atonement. This prayer emphasizes the intimacy of the Father and the Son.
2. Jesus' "hour" has now come, and it is to be an hour in which God is glorified (17:1). While Jesus' death may appear to be an hour of shame, defeat and rejection it will in fact be the hour in which the Father will glorify the Son (by raising him from the dead) and in which the Son will glorify the Father (by revealing his love). The Cross involves the Father surrendering his Son and the Son surrendering himself.
3. The Son have been given authority over everyone (17:2) and now asks that the Father give eternal life to all who belong to the Son. As crucified, risen and ascended, the Son become the source of eternal life (Life). Eternal life is knowing the Son for in knowing the Son one comes to a knowledge of the Father or, better, one enters into communion with the Father. Note that the Son is not receiving a glory which he has not yet possessed. His glorification by the Father reveals something about him that has always been true. In the Presence of the Father, the Son will possess the glory (the divine radiance) which he had "before the world existed" (17:5).
4. Jesus has fulfilled his mission of revealing the Name of the Father (17:6). Note the reciprocity of Father and Son: Those who have come to Jesus belong to the Father who has given them to the Son. The Son has imparted the Father's words to them (17:8) and they have come to know the truth about God. This truth can be simply stated but it has many implications. The truth about God is that he has sent the Son into the world to redeem the world.

## VI. John 17:9-19

1. Jesus prays for the disciples as they are about to be sent out into the world. Jesus emphasizes the communion between the Father, the Son and the disciples. The Father has given the disciples to the Son, but this action is qualified by the fact that all that the Son possesses belongs to the Father and all the Father possesses belongs to the Son (17:10). The Son is glorified in the disciples. Note one of the consequences of this communion: the Father is glorified in the Son, the Father glorifies the Son and the Son is glorified in the disciples.
2. The Son is going to the Father, but the disciples will remain in the world and so Jesus prays for their protection and for their unity (17:11). The unity of the disciples will be a sign of their communion with the Father and the Son.
3. The communion of Father, Son and disciples results in the joy of the Son being fulfilled in the disciples (17:13). It should be noted that this is not simply a human joy, but the joy of the Son given to the disciples. This joy is supernatural in nature. Because the disciples have received Jesus' word, they are not the possession of the world but, rather, have been set apart from it just as the Son has himself been set apart from the world (17:14).
4. Jesus prays for protection for the disciples, particularly for protection from the evil one (17:15). He does not, however, pray that they will be removed from the world because they are being sent into world (17:18) because this is where their mission unfolds. The disciples can only carry out their mission in communion with God and this means that while they will be in the world, they will not be of it.
5. 17:17-19 is of great significance. Jesus asks the Father to "consecrate" the disciples. The Greek verb he uses here is the same one as is used in the Septuagint version of Exodus 29:1, where "consecrate" refers to the ordination of the sons of Aaron to the priesthood. Jesus has already spoken of himself as being consecrated and sent into the world (10:36). The disciples are to be "ordained in the Truth" which is

Jesus himself. However, before the disciples can begin their mission, Jesus must “consecrate” himself as the Sacrifice which seals the New Covenant. Jesus’ sacrifice is the source of the consecration and mission that the disciples will receive.

#### **VII. John 17:20-26**

1. Participation in the communion of God’s Triune life is now extended to future disciples. 17:20 highlights the fruit of the apostolic ministry—there will, despite the opposition of the world, be future generations of disciples. Jesus prays that these disciples will be unified because of their common sharing in the communion of the life of God. Just as the Father and the Son are “in” one another, future disciples will be “in” the life of God (17:21). The participation of human beings in the divine communion is salvation.
2. The unity of the disciples should be a witness to their being sent from the Son (17:21) and the glory that the Father has given to the Son, the Son will give to the disciples (17:22-23). The community of disciples has a destination—they will see the Son’s glory, a glory given by the Father to the Son “before the foundation of the world” (17:24).
3. Jesus’ final prayer for the disciples is that the love with which the Father has loved him will be in them as well. Father, Son, Spirit and Church will form a communion of love and this love will constitute the very essence of the Church and will be the source of her witness.

#### **VIII. John 18:1-14**

1. The scene now shifts from the place where Jesus and the disciples kept the Passover to a garden “across the Kidron Valley” (18:1). This garden was most likely located on the Mount of Olives and is known as the Garden of Gethsemane.
2. When we last saw Judas, he gone out into the “night” (13:30) or the darkness of sin. Now he reappears with soldiers and some officers sent from the chief priests to arrest Jesus (18:3). It is significant that this arresting force consists of both Gentiles (Roman soldiers) and Jews (officers from the chief priests). This group represents the whole of sinful humankind.
3. Jesus has already said that the “ruler of the world” is his chief opponent (12:31) so we may take Judas and this band of soldiers and officers as representing him. Appropriately, they act at night.
4. John’s account emphasizes that Jesus is in full control of all that happens (18:4). Note that when Jesus identifies himself in 18:5 (“I am he”) the arresting party behaves as if it has experienced a theophany—it falls to the ground (18:6). Jesus identifies himself in this way a second time and then acts with authority. He allows himself to be arrested and commands that the disciples be let go (18:8).
5. Peter decides that Jesus need to be “protected” and so responds in the way that the chief priests has anticipated. They expected armed resistance and so sent an armed force to arrest Jesus. Peter’s attack on the servant of the high priest on reveals his lack of understanding. Attempts to “protect” Jesus reveal a merely human understanding of his mission. Jesus’ response to Peter in 18:11 makes this clear. The language of drinking the “cup” is an Old Testament way of fulfilling God’s will (note Psalm 16:5). Jesus has come to “this hour” by his own choice and out of love for the Father.
6. In 18:12-14 the dual composition of the arresting party is mentioned again. There are both soldiers and “officers of the Jews” (18:12). Jesus is arrested because he allows himself to be arrested. He is taken first to Annas (a former high priest and a person of influence) and then to Caiaphas. 18:14 refers back to 11:50 and Caiaphas’ (unconsciously) prophetic remark.

#### **IX. John 18:15-27**

1. John has arranged his narrative so that Jesus' appearance before Annas is placed between two scenes in which Peter denies Jesus. Both Peter and Jesus are on trial, but Peter's frailty is fully exposed.
2. Does "another disciple" in 18:15 refer to the beloved disciple (13:23)? If so, this disciple may have had aristocratic priestly connections. Because he was known to Annas, he is allowed to gain access to the courtyard of Annas' house. He is able to get Peter admitted (18:16). The "servant girl" watching the door questions Peter: "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you" (18:17). Peter's response is emphatic: "I am not". As he stands among Jesus' enemies, he denies any contact with Jesus.
3. In 18:19-24 Jesus appears before Annas. When questioned, Jesus replies that he has spoken openly and has taught in the synagogues and the temple. Jesus does not have a "secret doctrine" that has been taught to a few (18:20). Jesus tells Annas that he can easily ask anyone who has heard his teaching the questions he is asking. Note that by only mentioning Annas and not reporting his actual words, John allows the spotlight to remain on Jesus. This scene underlines the fact that the outcome of this "trial" has been predetermined.
4. Having listened in on the questioning of Jesus, we return to the questioning of Peter. He has already been questioned by the servant girl (18:17) and now those standing around the fire question him: "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" (18:25). Is Peter a disciple of Jesus? He is questioned a third time by the relative of the man whose ear he had cut off in the Garden of Gethsemane (someone who could have factual knowledge of his association with Jesus). Note that his question is more specific: "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" (18:26). Peter has now denied being a disciple three times (note 13:36-38).

#### **X. John 18:28-32 (Trial, Scene 1)**

1. This is the first scene in Jesus' trial before Pilate. As John's narrative makes clear, it is not really Jesus who is on trial but Pilate and "the Jews" (18:31). Note that John tells us nothing about Jesus' appearance before Ciaphas, only that "they" ("the Jews") bring him from Ciaphas' house to the praetorium (Pilate's residence in Jerusalem).
2. While "the Jews" are happy to hand Jesus over to Pilate for execution, they refuse to enter the praetorium since doing so would render them unclean (since it is the house of a Gentile). They do not want to be "defiled" (18:28) by being in the house of a Gentile but they have no reservations about sending Jesus to his death.
3. Pilate comes out of the praetorium to speak to them. Following procedure, Pilate asks them about the accusations made against Jesus. Significantly, they offer no specific accusations: "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him to you" (18:30). Pilate can not conduct a trial with no accusations being made, so he tells "the Jews" to take Jesus and judge him "by your own law" (18:31). At this point, Pilate sees only an intra-Jewish dispute in which he has no interest.
4. "The Jews" now suggest that the crime involved is a capital crime and that administering such a punishment is beyond their authority. In 18:32 John makes it clear that Jesus' death on the cross has already been hinted at (note 12:32). Once again, John makes it clear that Jesus is not a victim.

# The Gospel of John

## Session 10

### John 18:33-21:25

#### I. John 18:33-38a (Trial, Scene 2)

1. Pilate now returns to the praetorium to question Jesus. This scene is centered on the fact that Pilate and Jesus have two very different understandings of what a king is. In a literal sense, they are from different worlds. While no charge has been made against Jesus (18:30), Pilate's question in 18:33 reflects the fact that he has either heard something (note 12:13) or an implicit charge has been made. If Jesus has presented himself as a king, then he is guilty of sedition.
2. Jesus then questions Pilate: is this a charge Pilate is making or has it been suggested to him? Jesus does not deny being a king, but he also suggests that Pilate's understanding of kingship is very different from his own. In 18:35 Pilate puts some distance between himself and "the Jews". He has no interest in settling Jewish disputes (and probably holds them in contempt).
3. In 18:36-37 Jesus does not answer Pilate's question. Instead, he explains the nature of his own kingship. Two statements capture its essence: "My kingdom is not of this world" and "my kingdom is not from this world" (18:36). Jesus is not saying that his kingdom is merely "spiritual" and has no relationship to the world. He is simply saying that his kingship and kingdom are of a different order than what either Pilate or "the Jews" hold them to be. Jesus' kingdom is not based upon human political power or military force; it does not come from the world, but it certainly involves a reordering of the world.
4. The unspoken question here is this: What is the purpose of a king? For Pilate, kings subjugate and rule while for Jesus a king bears witness to the Truth and orders the world around this Truth. As Pilate's question makes clear, he finds this incomprehensible. Like "the Jews," Pilate has simply closed himself off from the Truth.

#### II. John 18:38b-40 (Trial, Scene 3)

1. Pilate now goes back into the praetorium to speak with "the Jews" (18:38b). He reports that he has found Jesus to be innocent.
2. In 18:39 Pilate seems to mock the Jewish leaders (an action which coheres with what we know about him). Surely, he asks, they would like for the "King of the Jews" to be released in a Passover amnesty.
3. "The Jews" demand the Barabbas be released. Significantly, his name means "Son of the Father". 18:40 reports that he is a "robber". This was the term used to designate those who rebelled against Roman rule. "The Jews" may be getting back at Pilate, attempting to force him to release someone who is actually guilty of rebellion.

#### III. John 19:1-3 (Trial, Scene 4)

1. Pilate now attempts to release Jesus. He has Jesus flogged, a punishment which will allow him to release Jesus despite the demands of "the Jews".
2. This scene is ironic for Jesus is now mocked by being "crowned" and clothed in a purple robe (19:2) but this only calls attention to the fact that Jesus has arrived at the moment of his "coronation" which is the

Cross. For John, Jesus' crucifixion is his "enthronement" and "glorification". By humiliating Jesus, the Roman soldiers actually call attention to what is taking place.

#### **IV. John 19:4-7 (Trial, Scene 5)**

1. The irony continues. Pilate now presents "the Jews" with their king. Jesus is presented beaten and bloody with Pilate's acclamation "Behold the man!". In other words, Pilate is sending two messages simultaneously. First, he is saying something like "Does this man really look like threat to you?". Second, he is saying "Now here is the appropriate king for a conquered people!".
2. In response to this, "the Jews" now explicitly demand that Jesus be executed. This has been suggested already (18:31) but now it is demanded.
3. Pilate tells "the Jews" for the third time that he has found Jesus innocent and he mocks them by telling them to take Jesus and crucify him—something he know that cannot do.
4. "The Jews" now make a charge against Jesus: by making himself the Son of God (by claiming divine honors), Jesus has committed blasphemy, and this is a capital crime (Leviticus 24:16). Pilate's mockery has only moved "the Jews" to be intransigent in their demands.

#### **V. John 19:8-12 (Trial, Scene, 6)**

1. In a sense, this scene is the climax of the trial. Pilate now takes Jesus back into the praetorium and questions him again. The key question is posed in 19:9 and it is the question that has dominated this Gospel: "Where are you from?" Jesus is from the Father and knowing this is the key to understanding who he is.
2. When Jesus refuses to answer his question (because he knows that Pilate cannot receive the answer), Pilate emphasizes his authority. What Jesus says in 19:10 is key to understanding all this now unfolding: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above." On the surface, Jesus is on trial but in truth it is "the world" that is on trial.
3. While Pilate seeks to release Jesus, "the Jews" determination to have him crucified only increases. They now make a threat. If Pilate releases Jesus, they will make sure that the emperor finds out that he let a dangerous revolutionary go free. In short, they threaten to sabotage his career.

#### **VI. John 19:13-16a (Trial, Scene 7)**

1. John tells us that Jesus is sentenced to death at 12:00 on the Day of Preparation, the time at which the Passover lambs would begin to be slaughtered in the Temple (19:14)
2. Pilate engages in some final mockery by presenting Jesus to "the Jews" and saying, "Behold your king!". His message is clear: this is the kind of king you deserve. Similarly, he asks "Shall I crucify your king?" (19:15). But Pilate is ultimately forced to choose between releasing an innocent man or damaging his career. Making this choice presents him with no struggle and "he delivered him over to them to be crucified" (19:16).
3. In 19:15 "the Jews" make a startling confession. They have rejected the Son of God as the King of Israel and state a very different allegiance: "We have no king but Caesar." They have opted for the rule of Caesar over the rule of God.

## **VII. John 19:16b-22 (The Crucifixion, Part 1)**

1. Crucifixions were carried out in very public places so that those crucified could serve as a warning to those who contemplated resistance against Rome. Jesus is taken to Golgotha which at one time was a rock quarry. Today, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands on the spot where Jesus' crucifixion took place.
2. There is an irony with regard to the inscription that Pilate has affixed to Jesus' cross. The *titulus* proclaimed the crime for which a criminal was being crucified. Jesus' "crime" is that "the King of the Jews" (19:19). While Pilate intends this to be an insult to "the Jews," it ironically proclaims the truth about Jesus.
3. The chief priests protest this proclamation. They perceive the insult and also want to make it clear that Jesus was not their king. For them, it is essential that Jesus be known to be a false messiah who was justly crucified.

## **VIII. John 19:23-24 (The Crucifixion, Part 2)**

1. John certainly understands Jesus' death to be the fulfillment of Scripture. The larger framework for interpreting Jesus' death is Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In 19:24 John cites Psalm 22:17. Psalm 22 is about the suffering of a righteous person and so sketches an outline of Jesus' death. This citation from Psalm 22 indicates that Jesus is to be seen as a righteous figure undergoing suffering.

## **IX. John 19:25-27 (The Crucifixion, Part 3)**

1. John's account of the crucifixion differs from that of the other three gospels in that some of Jesus' followers are present at the foot of the cross (19:25). Also unique to John is the report that Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple are among this group.
2. While brief, this scene has great significance. Jesus' last act is to entrust his mother to the care of the beloved disciple. In both 2:4 and 19:26 Jesus addresses Mary as Woman and this suggests that she has a symbolic role to play. In 2:4 Mary seems to represent the Church in her trusting response to Jesus: "Do whatever he tells you" (2:4). Now in 19:26 she appears as the Mother of the Church. Jesus seems to be saying that now the beloved disciple is her "son" and that Mary is the beloved disciple's "mother". In Isaiah 60:1-4 and 66:7-9 Zion is portrayed as a mother, the mother of Israel. Now Mary is portrayed as the Mother of the Church.

## **X. John 19:28-30 (The Crucifixion, Part 4)**

1. Jesus is aware that his mission is now "finished" (19:28). Here, finished means brought to completion. His thirst is not simply physical. In 18:11 Jesus spoke of drinking the cup that the Father had given him. What Jesus thirsts for is the fulfillment of the Father's will.
2. The Roman soldiers interpret what Jesus says in a physical sense and so offer Jesus some common wine. John connects this with Psalm 69:22. John has already cited Psalm 69 in connection with Jesus' Passion in 15:25. We are invited to see the suffering of the psalmist as a prefiguration of Jesus' suffering.
3. The mention of hyssop (19:29) is significant. In Exodus 12:22 hyssop is used to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts of Israelite houses. This is another link which connects Jesus' death to the Passover.
4. Significantly, Jesus' final words indicate triumph and completion: "It is finished" (19:30). Jesus has accomplished the work of the Father and this work cannot be reversed.

## **XI. John 19:31-37 (The Crucifixion, Part 5)**

1. Since it is the Day of Preparation and Passover begins at sundown, it is necessary for the bodies of three crucified men to be removed (19:31; cf. Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Corpses were considered to be unclean and could not be exposed at Passover.
2. To speed up the deaths of the three men, Pilate sends soldiers to break their legs (unable to support their torsos, the men would die more quickly being unable to breathe). The soldiers find Jesus already dead and so do not break his legs. John understands this to be the fulfillment of Exodus 12:10 (19:36) which commands that none of the Passover lamb's bones are to be broken. For John, Jesus is the Passover sacrifice for in him the great and final Exodus takes place.
3. To make sure that Jesus is dead, one of the soldiers pierces his side with a spear and blood and water flow out (19:34). John provides a hint about what this means in 19:37 when he cites Zechariah 12:10. This text is part of a series of oracles in which God promises to purify his people. Zechariah 13:1 speaks of a fountain being opened which will purify Jerusalem from sin. John wants us to see that this fountain proceeds from Jesus' side.
4. The water and blood which flow from Jesus' pierced side also have a sacramental significance. The water is the purifying water of Baptism (note 1 John 5:6) and the blood is a reference to the Eucharist (note 6:51-58). Behind this may be Ezekiel 47 in which a purifying stream flows from the Temple. Of course, Jesus has already made it clear that he is the Temple (2:13-22). Jesus is the true Temple, the true Passover and the true Purification. The sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist provide us with access to the Purification.

## **XII. John 19:38-42 (Burial)**

1. Jesus' burial is accomplished by two Jews. Joseph of Arimathea, who is a disciple (19:38) and Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus at night (19:39).
2. These two men see to it that Jesus receive a royal burial. The mention of myrrh and aloes (19:39) recalls Psalm 45:9 which describes David's royal robes as scented with myrrh and aloes.
3. Significantly, Jesus' tomb is located in a garden (19:41). This takes us back to the beginning of the biblical narrative (Genesis 2-3) and suggests that Jesus' death has restored creation.

## **XIII. John 20:1-10**

1. It is now the morning of "the first day of the week" (20:1), the day we now know as Sunday. It is essential to note that Mary Magdalene comes to Jesus' tomb with the intention of preparing a corpse for burial. When she discovers that the tomb is empty, she does not conclude that Jesus has been raised from the dead but that his body has been stolen (20:2).
2. When Peter and John are informed of this, they go to the tomb. While the beloved disciple arrives first, he waits for Peter (probably out of deference to Peter's authority). The fact that the burial cloths are still in the tomb indicates that the body has not been stolen. We should remember that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he came out of the tomb still wrapped in burial linen (11:44). Jesus is not bound by burial linen for he is not bound by death.
3. What is the nature of the beloved disciple's faith in 20:8? It is probably best to think that at this point he has the beginnings of faith but not faith in its fullest sense (for the Spirit has not yet come). 20:9 makes it clear that the disciples do not yet have resurrection faith since they do not yet understand Scripture. For this reason, they return to their homes (20:10)



### **XIX. John 20:11-18**

1. After Peter and the beloved disciple have left, Mary remains at the tomb. When she looks inside it, she sees two angels, one sitting where Jesus' head was located and the other seated where his feet were located. This certainly suggests the Mercy Seat which sat upon the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 37:7-9) and was central to the Day of Atonement. Jesus is the true Mercy Seat (note Romans 3:25). Angels are signs of the Presence of God and their presence here indicates that God has done something.
2. The central dynamic of this narrative is the gradual turning of Mary away from the tomb (20:14) and toward Jesus (20:16). Only as she turns fully away from the tomb, is she in a position to come to resurrection faith.
3. Mary needs to learn not to "cling" to the Jesus she has known (20:17). As long as she is turned to the tomb and as long as she simply wants her former relationship with Jesus to be restored, she cannot come to resurrection faith. The Ascension must follow and only with this will the Truth about Jesus be available. In an important sense Mary and all disciples must "let go" so that they can receive the ascended and glorified Christ.
4. Note that Mary is given an important role—she is an apostle to the apostles (20:17-18).

### **XX. John 20:19-25**

1. Significantly, the first Easter finds the disciples not filled with faith and hope but locked in a house together and filled with fear (20:19). Jesus enters this house and brings peace to them (note 14:27). Here, peace is situation in which things are properly ordered. This sort of peace can only come from God. This is precisely the gift which the disciples need.
2. Jesus shows the disciples the marks of crucifixion (20:20) and this makes it clear that the crucified Jesus and the glorified Jesus are one and the same person. It is only at this point that they come to resurrection faith.
3. Note that resurrection faith is organically connected to mission. Just as the Father has sent the Son into the world on a mission, so the glorified Son now sends the disciples into the world on a mission. Faith is not a private and personal matter; it sends one into the world on a mission and this mission is essentially public.
4. For John, Resurrection and Pentecost coincide (20:22). The disciples receive the Spirit not simply for their own personal edification but for the sake of their vocation. Without the Spirit they would have no vocation and would not possess the power to carry it out. This seems to be the point of 20:23. The disciples are not simply preachers; they have been given a share in Jesus' mission of cleansing the world. They are consecrated by the Spirit (17:17) to act on behalf of Christ.

## **XXI. John 20:26—31**

1. We have to be careful here because of ingrained prejudices about “doubting Thomas”. With this narrative, we are moving away from a focus on the disciples and to a focus on future disciples.
2. Note that Jesus knows what is troubling Thomas and that he offers to address this trouble (20:27). Jesus has not been raised simply back into his former bodily life nor has he been raised into a completely spiritual form of existence. As he returns to the Father, he presents his glorified humanity to the disciples and this glorified humanity involves a resurrection body which still bears the marks of crucifixion (note Revelation 5:6). We also want to remember that even those Jews who anticipated a resurrection (and not all Jews had such an anticipation), only thought of it coming at the end of history. We do not want to forget how overwhelming this experience must have been.
3. John does not tell us whether Thomas actually touched Jesus’ wounds (20:28). He only tells us about Thomas’ response to Jesus appearance: “My Lord and my God!” This is the strongest confession regarding Jesus in this gospel.
4. 20:29 could be read as either a statement or a question (because Greek has no question marks). If this verse is not a question, Jesus is not rebuking Thomas but simply making the statement that future believers will not have this experience. Future believers will not have Thomas’ experience, but this will not make their faith any less genuine.
5. 20:30-31 addresses this issue. While Thomas could encounter the glorified humanity of Jesus, future generations will encounter Jesus through the witness of this gospel.

## **XXII. John 21:1-14**

1. This narrative is about the mission of the disciples and needs to read symbolically. A group of disciples, led by Peter, is fishing in Galilee at night (the normal time for fishing). As we have seen, night tends to symbolize spiritual darkness and blindness. We see the disciples here on a mission without Jesus and, thus, failing (21:3).
2. Jesus appears at daybreak because, spiritually speaking, this is the daybreak (21:4). The situation rapidly changes from failure to dramatic success and reason for the change is the presence of the risen Jesus. The huge number of fish (21:6) looks forward to the fruit of the apostolic mission.
3. The breakfast of fish and bread (21:9) recalls the multiplication of the loaves and fish (6:11) and certainly has a Eucharistic significance. As they embark on their mission in the world, the disciples will experience communion with the risen Christ through the Eucharist and will come to know him as a personal presence.

## **XXIII. John 21:15-19**

1. At this point, there is a lingering question of Peter’s vocation. After 18:27, the question arises of whether Peter is a disciple of Jesus or not.
2. Significantly, this question is not answered by Peter but by Jesus. It is not Peter who restores himself to Jesus but Jesus who restores Peter to himself.
3. Peter’s three denials of Jesus are effectively erased by Jesus’ threefold question, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (21:15). In place of Peter’s denials, Jesus offers a vocation: “Feed my sheep” (21:17).
4. This vocation will lead Peter to share in the suffering of Jesus (21:18-19). This should not be understood as a punishment but as an honor (note 1 Peter 4:19).

#### **XXIV. John 21:20-25**

1. Peter's question in 20:21 is our question too: "Lord, what about this man?". What about the mysterious beloved disciple? He has followed a different path than Peter. We saw him at the foot of the cross and he immediately recognized the risen Jesus when he stood on the shore (21:7). Peter has been given the task of feeding Jesus' sheep. What about the beloved disciple?
2. Jesus provides the answer: "Peter, that is not your concern. Your concern is to follow me" (21:22). Peter has a vocation and has received the mercy of Jesus. What happens to the beloved disciple is not his concern. He must entrust this to Jesus.
3. The beloved disciple gives us part of an answer to this question. His role, his vocation, is to write the gospel we are now reading (21:24) which tells about, among other things, the miracle of Peter's restoration. Can sinners be involved in the mission of Jesus? Peter bears witness that they can.