

Heart to Heart

Written by Jeff Bradshaw, United Missions, Inc.

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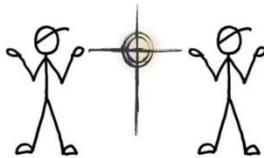
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United Missions, Inc.



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EMAIL: united.missions@aol.com

US MAIL: 2403 Griffin Court
Ocoee, Fl. 34761

URL: www.unitedmissionsinc.com

Heart 4 God
(Spiritual Formation Journey)

Mark 12:30 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...”



The **Heart 4 God** series of writings are meant to lift hearts up to be loved by God and to love Him and others:

1. Heart to Heart (Devotions on the Gospel of John)
2. The Light of Christ and God's Kingdom (walking in relationship, covenant with God)
3. Righteous Heart and Radical Love (The Gospel Life which sets God's children apart)

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i. Introduction

John 9:35 *Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*
36 *"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."* 37 *Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."* 38 *Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.*

This encounter in the Gospel of John occurs after Jesus has healed this man who was born blind. Since this man was blind when he walked away from Jesus with mud in his eyes, he had never seen Jesus before this encounter. The Pharisees have thrown the previously blind man out of their presence because he told them that Jesus was sent to him by God. This is a very special encounter as Christ himself is standing before the man and asking him "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Many today will tell you that they too had a personal encounter with Christ as they came to faith, were in a time of crisis or during worship. Faith comes by the Spirit of God and when faith in Christ is quickened in our hearts there will be encounters with the Son of Man.

A series of devotions have been written on the Gospel of John with the hope that many through faith will encounter Jesus repeatedly as they read the devotions. Although the Bible can be difficult to read, faith in Christ has a way of opening up the Scriptures and speaking into our lives. Our Lord desires to plant, water and harvest His Living Word in us as we encounter Him. As we encounter Him daily, He inhabits our thoughts, words and deeds. Daily encounters with God's Living Word will change our lives radically just like the blind man's life was changed in the healing story found in John 9.

Make a daily appointment by setting aside a time and place where you can sit comfortably and meditate upon these devotions which take the reader through the Gospel of John. Most of us have been taught how to consume written material quickly for information. Fight the tendency to read quickly. Rather, read slowly through these devotions with the expectation of encountering Christ. Re-read them as well. Our devotional time is a time for us to fellowship with our God in Spirit and Truth. Some even journal in a notebook or electronic notepad to capture what they have received during their devotional times. It's strongly encouraged to do this to extend the written devotions that have been provided.

As you begin this devotional journey, I want to share this timeless blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 with you:

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you and
be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and
give you peace.”

1. The Light of Men

Reading (John 1:1-10)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

Reflections:

Have you ever gone to the beach early in the morning to watch the sunrise? There is a sense of wonder and awe that comes over many who have watched the sun rise in the morning over the ocean. This reading shares that there is another light that has come into the world that is greater than the sun light. What does verse 4 tell us about “the light of men”? Like the sun, the light of men comes to illuminate the world and bring life. Later in this chapter, John points to God’s Word, full of grace and truth in John 1:14. This “light of men” illuminates darkened hearts and lives with God’s “grace and truth”. As great as our awe of the sunrise can be, our awe every morning of the life of Christ shining upon us should be greater. His light has come to remove the fear and power of “sin and death”, the darkness.

How else can we compare sunlight to the “light of men”? We know that abundant vegetation grows on our planet due to the shining of the sun. The light of Jesus shining upon us can bring abundance, growth into hearts daily. Instead of seeing vegetation grow, one witnesses God’s love growing in us.

What process is behind the sun shining? We know that the sun in our universe burns brightly because of a physical process called “fusion”. God’s spiritual process called “forgiveness” has come to shine (burn) brightly in the hearts of His children. God’s forgiveness in Christ is an eternal light unlike the sun’ which will burn out one day. Only the process of forgiveness found in the heavenly body (finished work) of Christ lights the Way to eternal life.

When you wake up in the morning are you aware of His light shining upon your heart? We don’t have to rush down to the beach early in the morning to experience this. No cloud or bad weather pattern can hold back God’s light being available to us every morning. God sent the “light of men” into this world to reconcile (to draw) all of humanity back to Himself. Trusting in Jesus, the “light of men” keeps us on the unending path of walking with God out of and away from the darkness.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for your light that shines upon my heart every day. When you found me, I was certainly walking with my back turned to You in darkness. May the radiance of the Son of God, forgiveness, light the Way for me to live my days and walk in Your life-giving, “grace and truth”...

Personal Insight:

How often do you consider the blessing of waking up every day not just to the sun but to the “light of men”?

2. One Blessing after Another

Reading (John 1:11-18)

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" ¹⁶From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Reflections:

Have you ever visited a restaurant with a large food buffet? Would you describe a good, buffet style restaurant as having one culinary delight after another? Wouldn't you describe this place to others as a place that you never leave hungry? The Lord has a spiritual buffet place that He wants to take us to be filled and never leave hungry. Sometimes there are physical blessings arrived but no matter what it's a place that one never leaves empty. What does verse 16 say is the source of "one blessing after another"? Verse 16 points to God's "fullness of His grace" as the source of receiving "one blessing after another". Where one seeks to be filled impacts one's ability to be continuously satisfied. In this world, many look to their labors, fruit of their hard work or the relationships they build as the main means of receiving blessings. These avenues of attaining blessings don't completely satisfy us. In fact, they can leave us feeling empty despite what's been gained. God has provided His "fullness of His grace" to satisfy our souls greatest need to know Him.

Jesus has come so that we might step into the fullness of God's grace every day of our lives. This well or spring is His greatest blessing to us. Humanity was created for "grace and truth" NOT sin. Stepping into God's unconditionally love will bless one's soul infinitely. Have you heard of or believed in the infinite blessing of God's unconditional love? Was there ever a time of worship, a moving Christian event or an experience alone with God such as enjoying His creation that drew you into adoration for God? Whether it was a quiet time with God reading the Bible, in prayer or meditation just drink from the well Jesus has provided of His grace and be filled with the fullness of grace that His forgiveness has brought into the world. "One blessing after another" is the continuing presence of God that His forgiveness has brought to His people of faith, especially during the challenging times. Listen to the words of someone who experienced God's presence intimately, the Apostle Paul who declared in Phil. 4:12 *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*

How does God reveal this truth to you? The Gospel of John emphasizes that "grace and truth" comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus connects one's heart to the source of God's "grace and truth" which belongs in every heart. His truth declares to us that we have been born, made alive in Christ, to fully experience God in the fullness of His grace (one blessing after another). Jesus came into my life and His river of blessings continues to change/uplift my heart. Try jotting down some of the ways that God has blessed your life through his presence, His unconditional benevolence?

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me a life of one blessing after another. Help me to see life's blessings the way You do and to embrace the riches of Your grace, truth and presence in my life. Come Holy Spirit and bring a deeper revelation of the truth about one blessing after another, the unending spring of Christ alive in me...

Personal Insight:

Who/what is the source of continuous blessings in this life?

3. The Lamb of God

Reading (John 1:19-34)

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ."

²¹They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

²²Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

²⁴Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶"I baptize with water,"

John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

³¹I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³²Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

³⁴I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

³⁴I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Reflection:

John the Baptist was quick to confess that he wasn't the messiah. He understood God's purpose for his life. He knew he was to point to Jesus and did this as he saw Jesus walking towards him and declared "Look, the Lamb of God."

We call Jesus “Savior” and “Lord” but if He wasn’t the “Lamb of God” first, He would be no different than John, a man of God, full of the Spirit to us. In the Old Testament, it was taught that a Jew should make atonement for their sins through the sacrifice of a lamb to receive forgiveness. According to verse 29, God has sent a man, His Son, to make atonement (one sacrifice for all) for ALL sin in the world. Has God spoken / revealed to you why everyone needs this one for all atonement / forgiveness for your personal sins? This is at the core of the Gospel teaching. The angels look at the Gospel as a mystery. Isn’t it mind boggling how God could provide one sacrifice for the sins of the world? Why do you think the Lord’s sacrifice was desperately needed?

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus by emphasizing our need for forgiveness and calling the religious leaders of his time to repentance. The Pharisees thought that they were living holy lives and therefore were perplexed by John’s words. John, a holy man himself, in verse 27 declares that he is unworthy even of untying the thongs of Jesus’ sandals. Indeed this is a dirty deed and points to John’s humility as he looked towards his need for the Lamb of God. As you look to Jesus where do you see yourself? Are you humbled like John who saw his need for Jesus? He gave his life to the Lamb of God as he testified about the coming of the Savior. When sin has been removed from one’s life they receive the freedom and power to live as God always sees humanity. God sees humanity through His righteousness and justice. Has the Lamb of God established His righteousness and justice in your heart?

Most will say that the beginning of the Church occurs in Acts 2 when Pentecost occurs, the coming of the Holy Spirit to ALL humanity. Could one make the case that it begins when the Holy Spirit marks Jesus as the Lamb of God? What is the difference of baptizing with water (as John does) and baptizing with the Holy Spirit (as Jesus does)?

Water baptism was originally a Jewish ritual performed to signify that a person had been temporarily cleansed of sin. The baptism of the Holy Spirit brings God's eternal forgiveness and holiness based upon the finished work of Christ on the cross, a permanent work. God tired of the temporary work of animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. Through Christ the Holy Spirit has come to connect people permanently through faith to the peace, the forgiveness of sin that Jesus, the Lamb of God has brought. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is God's sign to us that He is taking us to the Promised Land.

Think about some of the people that God has placed in your life to point you to Jesus. John the Baptist knew he was placed here to testify about the Lamb of God. Doesn't God want us to testify about the Lamb of God to the people He has placed around us? As we humbly receive the Lamb of God, like John, we can become His witness. Today, look for God to provide an opportunity for telling someone about the Lamb of God and the eternal forgiveness we all need to receive?

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, I thank you for taking away the sin of the world. Help me to not take this gift of forgiveness for granted. Teach me to walk in the power of Your forgiveness. Help me to testify of Your life given for me to others. Empower me to be a bold witness like John the Baptist...

Personal Insight:

Have you learned first and foremost about the purpose of Jesus Christ? He came so that we could receive and walk in God's forgiveness and its power for all eternity with Him.

4. Come and you will see

Reading (John 1:35-51)

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). ⁴³The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." ⁴⁸"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." ⁵¹He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Reflection:

The story of the calling of Jesus' disciples is very interesting and thought provoking. Why would Jesus ask John and Andrew the question "What do you want?" when later we see the Lord's ability to know the details of our lives as He tells Nathanael "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree...?"

Often, these questions from Jesus provoke dialogs between Himself and His disciples that get to the deeper issues of life. The disciples respond to Jesus' question with a question "Where are you staying?" John and Andrew have been abiding under the ministry of John the Baptist. Now the time has come for them to step out from his anointed shelter to the greater shelter of the anointed ministry of Christ. As they were with John, they were seeking the Messiah. If the Lord asked you these 2 questions "what do you want?" and "what are you seeking after?" would he encounter someone who was both seeking after and had found shelter in the Messiah? It's interesting that the disciples didn't answer Jesus' question by saying they were looking for the messiah. We can play these games of being coy sometimes with God but He knows our hearts.

In verse 39, take note of the answer Jesus gives to Andrew and John' question of "where is He staying?", "Come and you will see". Jesus extends these words to all who seek Him, "come and you will see", as we are invited to abide in Him and walk with Him towards God's heavenly abode. The Lord is leading people upon an unending journey of the heart (faith). Explaining this journey with a quick answer will never provide either God or one's deep, soul needs justice. If we have responded to Jesus' eternal words "come and see" like the disciples by following Him, our hearts have joined these disciples in this reading.

We know that the disciples paid a price for following Jesus. What is the price that must be paid if we refuse Jesus' invitation? Following the Lord will change our lives (the price). If we remain away from Him and unchanged there will be a price to be paid as well. Following Jesus like the disciples will change our thoughts, our words, our decisions and our actions every day. Denying Christ will lead us further and further away from what our heart was created to desire most.

When we follow Jesus, we believe He speaks (as we read His words recorded in the gospel) truth into our lives. Therefore, we should especially take special notice in those scriptures where Jesus emphasizes His words with the statement "I tell you the truth" (verse 51). Ponder the truth Jesus shared in John 1:51. One day, believers will see Jesus face to face. One day, they'll see the angels ascending and descending upon the throne of grace where the Son of Man is seated. Now hear this invitation of Christ again spoken to your heart personally, "Come and you will see."

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting me to "come and see." Help me to continue this journey of faith seeking after You daily. When your first disciples followed after You they had no idea where their lives were heading but they believed Your Words and life would lead them to where they needed to go. Open my heart to hear and receive Your words of invitation again spoken to my heart so that my trust in You continues to grow every day of the week, not just on Sunday mornings...

Personal Insight:

Can you remember when You first accepted His personal invitation to follow Him (come and see)? If not, right now, you can tell Him, Lord I'm accepting your invitation "to come and see where you live" in my heart now and risen up in heaven one day. This world will NOT satisfy within us what God has created His children for. When we journey by faith after Jesus, we leave the futility of this world behind.

5. Fill the jars with water

Reading (John 2:1-11)

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." ¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

Reflection:

In verse 7, we see Jesus telling the servants "Fill the jars with water." What do you think the servants were thinking as they heard the mother tell them to do whatever Jesus said and then received Jesus' instruction to fill the jars with waters?

Mary understood the necessities of a good wedding and she knew that her son was a special gift from God. Her words lead us to believe that this perhaps wasn't the first time that she witnessed her son' ability to perform miracles. If private miracles occurred, they aren't written down in Scripture for us to read about. However, now we see Jesus' public miracles testifying to the coming Kingdom of God through His Son.

Verse 4 points to another time in Scripture when Moses changed the Father's (God) mind about destroying the Israelites in the desert. Like Moses, a man of tremendous faith, Mary, a woman of tremendous faith, who has had an angelic visitation is appealing to the very heart of God through the Son to be merciful to her people at the wedding. Moses asked God to be merciful on his people numerous times while traveling through the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. What was happening here as water was being changed into wine? What similarity in God's miraculous activity was both Moses and Mary privy too? Is not this miracle similar to what God did when turned the Jewish slaves of Israel held captive in Egypt into His special light for the world, family of faith? Mary had heard the prophecies about her son and was ready for a bevy of miracles like Moses performed to come through her son. These thoughts might change the way we view this first miracle of Jesus and explain why the Apostle John has chosen to mention this miracle first in his gospel. He wanted to tie together the freeing of the slaves from bondage in Egypt with the freeing of humanity's bondage to sin with a miraculous work that was represented by fine wine, a cherished commodity at that time enjoyed mostly by royalty.

Also, we take note as we look at this 1st miracle in the Gospel of John that it has occurred during the celebration of a marriage between husband and wife. The marriage is a foreshadowing of the New Covenant marriage (union) that God is now will offer in Christ. It's like God is proposing to us, the world as He has sent His miracle working Son to humanity. We see in the husband, Christ a foreshadowing of the total obedience and blessing that God is bringing to this covenant through His Son who in the flesh obeys the Word of God. In the Ten Commandments is the command to obey one's parents and the promise that in doing so they shall be blessed with a long life. Jesus has honored His mother's request and in doing so is observing the fifth commandment of the Law. In Matt. 5:17 Jesus says "He came to fulfill and not to abolish the law." Certainly, this first miracle testifies to this.

The resurrection of Christ testifies to the eternal life ALL will be blessed with as they obey their His Heavenly Father. We have a “Good Father” who specializes in changing the ordinary into the extraordinary as He walks with us. The natural becomes joined with the supernatural as one follows Jesus. Mary knew her son as both an extraordinary man and God’s “Chosen One (Christ)”. What were some of the keys to this miracle of turning the water into wine in verses 5 - 8? The keys to participating with God as He changes the ordinary into extraordinary are: 1) doing what Jesus tells you (teaches us); 2) using what is available in the moment; 3) releasing our situation to God no matter how challenging it looks; and 4) having faith that God desires to move with power and love in our lives for His glory. Don’t we see all these four keys at work when we approach someone to share the Gospel message, life of Jesus with them?

Do you ask the Lord to guide you with simple instructions like “fill the jars with water” when you encounter challenging situations or are performing acts of service to others? Re-read the keys that were shared above and think of how Jesus wants to bring supernatural breakthrough into the difficult situations of our lives but we are reluctant to do what goes beyond our definition of what works. These keys to seeing the ordinary become extraordinary are important for all aspects of our lives, especially when sharing the love of Christ with others.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us simple commands like “fill the jars” or “love one another”. As I submit my life to be Your hands and feet, You make it easy to co-labor with You and bring our Heavenly Father glory. Our part is to do the small tasks your Spirit instructs us to do and to believe that Your ever-present love moves the big obstacles. Help me to grow in my ability to listen for the Spirit’ simple instructions and to look for Your wonder working power to be demonstrated again and again as I trust in Your life and NOT mine...

Personal Insight:

Do you find yourself always looking for complicated rather than simple instructions to follow when you approach Your life of following Jesus? Ofcourse there are times for planning big events but don't miss God's presence in the simple things of life. Being consumed by large challenges separates us from enjoying God's work in our lives and our midst, even to miss the miracles that He wants us to see. Remember, every day of life is a gift and a miracle in itself which is composed of many simple tasks, opportunities to encounter God 😊

6. Zeal for your house

Reading (John 2:12-25)

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. ¹³When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. ²³Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. ²⁴But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

Reflection:

In this story, we see a somewhat different side of Jesus as he cleanses the Father's house of merchants and money changers (verse 16). The Bible teaches us about a God of both holiness and abounding love (mercy). Was the temple work of the merchants and money changers a major distraction that was preventing people from experiencing heart-felt worship for the one, true God of holiness and love?

If we looked towards our life as a temple erected for God; what would the zeal of Christ want to remove from our lives so we could better encounter God? When we begin to draw close to God through Christ, the Holy Spirit performs house cleaning in our lives to remove obstacles that keep us from heart-felt worship of God. Think about the ways Christ has changed your life since you placed your faith in Him. Some of us have “tables being turned over” testimonies to share. Jesus has sent His Holy Spirit to do this work not because He is mad at us but because God desires unbridled heart-felt worship.

In Greek, the word for “consume” (verse 17) can actually be translated as “devour.” Why would God want us to have a zeal for Him that devours the body (house) we inhabit and life we live? In Scripture, we are told that we can’t serve two masters. When we have finished running our race of faith there will be two bodies of work we have to show for our lives: 1) the body of work done in disobedience and 2) the body of work done in obedience. Zeal for Christ leads us to surrender to God daily so He can devour the sin in our hearts and replace it with the love of Christ.

In verse 19, Jesus speaks to the Jews saying “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.” What is Jesus saying here to the Jews and what does He want to do in our lives? The sacrificial system of Jesus’ day didn’t lead to heart-felt worship and was a very corrupt system. For many it had become an experience like doing your annual taxes. The leaders of the temple were satisfied with the sacrificial system because they made money off of the exchanging of currency and the selling of the sacrifices. Christ’s zeal has led to the building of a place of worship through His sinless life, death and resurrection that satisfies the holiness of God and perfectly demonstrates His love. This is the zeal God wants us to connect to through faith in Jesus. His house that will stand for all eternity and was built in three days. The Apostle Paul speaks of his zeal for this house in Phil. 1:21 “to live is Christ and to die is gain”. God desires to remove all barriers.

God has been very patient with the Jewish people for years. However, Jesus' actions demonstrate how displeased God is with the cluttered hearts of His people and the leaders who believe that God ignores their heart issues as they worship Him? Be thankful that the zeal of the Lord leads us to the perfect sacrifice and worship that God deserves. Under the old sacrificial system the people travelled all the way to Jerusalem to demonstrate their zeal for God. Now, with the New Temple established in Jesus, we demonstrate our zeal for God by travelling in our hearts to the cross and by lifting them up in worship as we walk with the Risen Christ.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the zeal You demonstrated during Your ministry here with your first disciples. You came for more than the cleansing of a physical temple. You came to build a holy and eternal temple. Forgive me when I misunderstand Your zeal and turn it into a superficial religious activity that focuses on self-righteousness. Mold me to be a royal vessel, temple You use to express Your love and devotion for God to this world...

Personal Insight:

The more we let Jesus pour His life in and through us, the more God's love takes hold of us. This is the form of worship and zeal God wants us to demonstrate. Do you recognize this zeal for His house in your life?

7. The Son of Man must be lifted up

Reading (John 3:1-15)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." ⁹"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Reflection:

The "Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite self-designation in the gospels. Another designation for Him by other writers (The Apostle Paul) has been the second Adam. In the early statement of faith, the Apostles Creed we read that Jesus is fully man and fully God. The title "Son of Man" emphasizes that Jesus is the perfect man. The title "Son of God" emphasizes that Jesus lives in union with God's Holy Spirit.

This difference between the first Adam who fell into sin and second Adam who was sinless is what Jesus emphasizes as He calls Himself the “Son of Man”. We read in Genesis how the first Adam was formed from the dust in Genesis and fell into sin. Now in the Gospel we read how the second Adam, Jesus the “Son of Man”, is sinless and has come to us from heaven (born of God’s Spirit in the virgin Mary). Only the sinless “Son of Man” can lift up humanity through His perfect life and sacrifice to overcome sin and its bondage to death. As one believes in Jesus being lifted up for all sin, one enters the eternal Kingdom of God.

When there is a dramatic change in someone’s life it’s often described as being re-born. In verse 5, how does Jesus say that a person must be re-born to enter the Kingdom of God? Water is used in baptism to symbolize the washing (cleansing) away of sin. A baby before birth is formed in the mother’s womb filled with water which to us is a place of innocence from which the newborn child is birthed from. From this place of innocence, the Holy Spirit infuses one with new life which is separated from sin and its wages. Only via the cleansing of the water, baptism into Christ for the forgiveness of one’s sin and the righteousness of the Spirit does one receive by faith eternal life in Christ, the “Son of Man” and “Son of God”.

Nicodemus was certainly familiar with the Jewish ritual of baptism that accompanied one’s repentance (turning) from sin. However, this ritual like others was something that had to be done repeatedly during the life of a Jewish believer for sanctification because they weren’t baptized into Jesus. Christian baptism is done once for the remission of all our sin as one receives the sinless life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit which leads one into new “Kingdom of God”, righteous living. What’s Jesus describing to Nicodemus as He speaks of the wind? As you trust in Christ’ life (given to us on the cross), you become alive in His Spirit and are led by its unseen presence which moves like the wind in our hearts.

Living by the Spirit is a new way of living our lives. One lives by faith in the unseen presence and power of God. Those who live without Christ are blind to this movement of God's spiritual presence and power. To those who live by sight and not by faith, God's Spirit is like the wind. They see the evidence of the wind but are unable to discern from where it is coming or going. Only by giving one's life to live by faith in Christ can Nicodemus or anyone be yoked to the source of the life Jesus is talking about being re-born into here.

In verse 14, Jesus compares the death of a snake placed on a pole in the desert to the sin he must carry to the cross for all to see its defeat. Jesus knew exactly the reason why He was sent to us even though the Pharisees (including Nicodemus) were unaware. Has the Spirit awakened your heart to your need to overcome sin? Only the Savior Jesus can lead us to victory over sin and the Holy Spirit who brings God's righteousness into our hearts. He calls us to be born again, to let Him make His life our life forever. Sin blinds many to this truth. Embrace God's truth spoken about in verse 15 with your heart. This is the reason that Jesus gave His life for us and for sending the Holy Spirit to help ALL to lift Him up.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for your gift of eternal life that comes by faith and has won the victory over sin and death. I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to raise up Your new life within my heart as I walk by faith in You. As Your new life flows within my heart, empower me through the Holy Spirit to commit myself to knowing You and making You known...

Personal Insight:

For Jesus to be lifted up in our lives we must surrender to the Holy Spirit. Have you lifted Jesus up above all earthly things?

8. For God so loved the world

Reading (John 3:16-21)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Reflection:

The Bible emphasizes that God has always loved the people of this world whom He has created. Verse 16, tells us that God gave his very best (His one and only begotten, holy Son) in love so that we might receive his very best (His mercy and the gift of eternal life). Without His Son Jesus, where do our lives lead us; to eternal life or to eternal condemnation?

God has a singular purpose for the life of His Son given to us. His purpose is for us to live in holiness and love with Him forever. To live any other way is to bring death (condemnation) upon oneself. This is why those who choose other ways to live are called lost because they have lost their way to God's holy love and eternal life. This is why God sent His Son; not to condemn us but to save us. Many, who don't believe in the Lord, when asked about themselves, will tell you "I'm not a bad person". They do not realize that their life without God's holy love and Christ' forgiveness has left them condemned by their sin. They have fallen short of God's goal for living; to live in blessed union with a Holy God.

The Law, given by God to Moses, was sent to condemn sin. Jesus was sent by God to save us from our sin as His sinless life was given as a ransom (payment) for our sin. This sacrifice of Christ is God's mercy (love) demonstrated for us in the flesh. What does verse 18 say about our state of condemnation? Without faith in Christ and His holy sacrifice we stand condemned by the Law. Unfortunately, there's too many who don't realize the gravity of their situation. Great is our inclination to embrace the darkness (evil) in this world rather than the holiness (love) of God. The greatest evil in this world is the denial of the Christ, the holy one of God.

God stands against evil (lawlessness), not people and He has condemned evil's child (verse 19), faithlessness. Through Jesus, God has shined His light on the only way that leads to eternal life. We find our way (or are found) when we open our hearts to accept Jesus' righteous life given for us. The greatest demonstration of God's love was to save us from the wages of sin, eternal death through His Son Jesus.

In verse 21, Jesus states that living by the truth brings a person into the light and His light will testify about God's work in them. When the Light of Jesus illuminates one's heart, they have begun to understand why sin is so unacceptable to God. The dignity of man (being the apple of God's eye) has been undermined by sin. Evil in this world has the opposite purpose of the holiness Christ brings into life. Evil's purpose is to destroy human dignity and to remove ALL from God's sight. God sent His Son to restore human dignity, to connect humanity permanently to God's righteousness and to unite humanity forever with His eternal life. Praise God!

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, truly the Heavenly Father sent you to us so that ALL might live forever with Him in holiness. Shine Jesus shine Your light of Your truth upon us ALL. May Your light illuminate God's love for people, Your condemnation of sin and Your plan of salvation. May we live to love you back...

Personal Insight:

How many different ways can you describe to another how Christ' love is alive in your heart? Is there anything more precious than the gift of eternal life encapsulated in the love of Jesus? How does the truth of the Gospel change the way one looks at life? At every breath of air? At every provision received each day? Now knowing who you are in Christ and where you are headed change your perspective on life 😊

9. He must become greater

Reading (John 3:22-36)

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. ²³Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. ²⁴(This was before John was put in prison.) ²⁵An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. ²⁶They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." ²⁷To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' ²⁹The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰He must become greater; I must become less. ³¹"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³²He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. ³³The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. ³⁴For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Reflection:

The prophet, John the Baptist, has served God mightily as he has prepared the way for Christ' coming. Now John is being tested as he is asked by one of his disciples to compare himself to Jesus. Earlier, John had prophesied that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Remember, he is speaking before Jesus' ministry has been completed. Do you believe this was a difficult test for John to submit his ministry to Jesus as his followers were dwindling and crossing to the other side of the Jordan? Certainly, as we read verses 27–31, we should praise God for John's answer.

There is an analogy of a marriage used in verses 29-30 to describe how we (and John) should receive the person and testimony of Jesus. What two main participants of a marriage are described in these verses? Who is the friend of the bridegroom in this story? Jesus is recorded in Matthew 11:11 saying "I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist." John was called to attend to the bride who was being prepared for the bridegroom.

When two people are married, can a marriage be successful if both parties are always competing and fighting for authority? What does John say about his relationship with Jesus in verse 30? I must become less is a statement of submission by John the Baptist. Does becoming less mean that we are any less significant or important to God? Becoming less is a sign of tremendous maturity as we submit to others when led by the Spirit to do so and trust that God is in control. As we are joined into the body of Christ, like John we are called to attend to the bride for the bridegroom; to prepare others for the return of Christ. Verse 35, demonstrates that John has placed his faith in the knowledge that God the Father has placed everything in the Son's, bridegroom's hands.

It's important periodically to take inventory of our lives. Are we submitting to our role of preparing the bride for the bridegroom? Or are we wrestling with God to be the bridegroom who has been given all control? In prayer, we must surrender those things that seem so important to us in order to obediently play the role God has given us. The Lord Jesus has been given all authority over heaven and earth. He will care best for ALL life and its situations.

This is exactly what John did when he declared “he must become less”. The ministry of John the Baptist was the most critical ministry of the Bible. John got to announce the arrival of Jesus Christ to His community of faith who had been waiting for years for the Messiah. This work is like sending out invitations to a wedding. If no invitations are sent out, there will be no celebration of what God has done and no heavenly blessing upon it. Jesus said of John “There was no man born of a woman greater than John.” God wants our greatness in His eyes to come through trusting in His Son and through submitting our legacies to the greatest legacy of ALL.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, our Heavenly Father has placed all things into Your righteous and merciful hands. Again, I submit all I have and all I am to You, the One who has been given all authority over heaven and earth. You are the faithful bridegroom and I am called to be and attend to Your bride, all who trust in You alone. You must become greater and I must become less. How blessed it is to know that in Your Kingdom less is more...

Personal Insight:

Have you learned yet that we do our best leading when we place all things in Jesus’ hands? As Jesus humbled Himself to the will of the Father He was lifted up. We must remember this so that like Jesus we will humble ourselves to the will of the Father. Like the bridegroom, Jesus will lift up His bride. He will carry her over the threshold of sin and death.

10. Will you give me a drink?

Reading (John 4:1-10)

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, ²although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Reflection:

The earth is an amazing, life sustaining planet. It is called the water planet because of both the availability and dependency of all life upon water. It's interesting how in this reading the discussion moves in this Gospel from the cleansing water of baptism into the life sustaining aspect of receiving a drink of water. In both discussions Jesus is connecting physical water to living water (eternal life) which He has come to bring into the life of those who believe in His testimony (Word).

In verse 4, what religious significance is there that the Lord would willingly travel through Samaria? Pious (highly religious) Jews didn't associate with Samaritans because they were thought to be unclean. The Samaritans didn't worship in Jerusalem like those identified with the tribes of Judea. Therefore, the religious Jews unlike Jesus would rather travel around Samaria then through it.

Why did Jesus put himself in the position of traveling through Samaria and then having to ask a Samaritan woman for a drink of water? Scripture declares that Jesus lived a righteous life and was sinless before God. Therefore, during His ministry we see the Lord Jesus living in a righteousness given to Him from God that didn't restrict Him to follow the harsh religious regulations of the Jewish leaders. The Lord's "words and actions" at times gave testimony to the truth that humanity's best, well intentioned religious practices still could prevent people from following God's will. This story shows that God's will is to send Jesus to save the Samaritans, too.

In verse 9, the woman is making a big issue about Jesus, a Jew, speaking to her, a Samaritan woman. Jesus doesn't want to get sidetracked by a discussion about His religion. Rather, His answer, in verse 10, points to the larger issue of "living water" (eternal life) that He came to offer her. Jesus is teaching us (through the Samaritan woman) that eternal life and holiness are a gift from God available to ALL who ask. This "living water" has come from heaven and not from a life of religion duty. The religious Jews lacked love in their hearts for both their people and people like the Samaritans. Therefore, they were unprepared and unwilling to be vessels for God's greatest act of mercy, the sharing of His Son's life with the world. Jesus came like the Father in love (John 3:16).

Now do you understand why it was appropriate for Jesus to go directly to that the Samaritan woman needed "living water"? She had the opportunity to offer Him a drink to satisfy His body while He offered her a drink to satisfy her soul. False religion spends an inordinate amount of time trying to look good on the outside. However, God is always looking at the inside, our hearts. Only drinking the living water of Christ brings the drink one's soul thirsts for.

Have you asked Jesus like the Samaritan woman for a drink of His living water? Whether we have sinned much or little we all must approach Jesus like the Samaritan woman whose soul was parched on the inside of her being. Drinking His living water brings forgiveness for our sins and its power. It brings His life within which wells up inside one like a well which never runs dry. You don't have to ask Jesus for a drink more than once. Coming to Jesus isn't coming to religion; it's entering into eternal, unbreakable fellowship with the God of "Living Water".

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for bringing the drink that satisfies one's soul, Your living water. As I have partaken of Your "Living Word" with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well today, I have dipped my cup into Your spring of "Living Water". Holy Spirit come and continue to refresh me anew on the inside so that I might testify about the goodness of God...

Personal Insight:

As you drink of God's unconditional love, it changes you forever. Have you imbibed the presence of God (His unconditional, everlasting love) as you believed in Him? *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1st John 4:7-8)"*

11. He will explain everything to us

Reading (John 4:11-26)

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" ¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." ²⁵The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Reflection:

This conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus is one of the longest dialogs we see between Jesus and others excluding His twelve disciples. Reading verse 11 and then verses 25-26, we see that this woman's view of Jesus has gone from him being a thirsty Jewish man standing at the edge of a deep well with no means of drawing water, to a man who is capable of explaining everything. This encounter with Christ, both prophet and Messiah now in her eyes has caught her by surprise.

During this conversation, Jesus has remained focused on the topics of salvation and worship. What did Jesus specifically mean when he says "salvation is from the Jews" to the Samaritan women? Despite one's view of Jewish people, there was bad blood between the Jews and Samaritans, the Jewish people were God's chosen vessel to bring God's light (revelation and salvation) unto the gentiles. God's eternal plan foretold in Scripture, His promise to Abraham was to reach both Jew and Gentile through His descendants. The Messiah would come from the ranks of His Jewish people.

What is the water that Jesus talks about in verse 14 that replaces all thirst with a spring of water welling up to eternal life? In verse 15, we see the Samaritan woman ask for a drink of the water Jesus offers. Her motivation could very well be to alleviate herself of the burden and shame which has led her to regularly draw water in the heat of the day. During the cool of the morning, others from town who went to the well would shame her for her past sins (divorces). Doesn't shame in our lives cause our souls to thirst for righteousness? Jesus brings to us the living water for our souls that removes our daily thirst (shame and sin) and replaces it with His righteousness. Jesus is now emphasizing that the people's worship will no longer be enslaved by one's attempt to follow the Law. Rather, God was calling His new family of "Jews and Gentiles" to worship Him in "Spirit and Truth" (verse 23), to worship Him by trusting in the "Word and Spirit" of His Son.

We all struggle with questions about our life, the meaning of one's life and if its purpose is greater than just surviving. The answers to these questions have come to many as they trust in the righteousness of Christ. One of my favorite worship songs declares that "Jesus is the center of it all". Worshipers of God in "Spirit and Truth" have received the revelation of the Messiah being the "Center of It All". They have come to the truth that Christ has come to fulfill us and answer our deepest questions. They process life with the Holy Spirit within them explaining as best as only He can the circumstances of one's life. In this moment, for the first time the woman's heart has been opened to hear from Jesus, her Messiah too. This begins with Him sharing with her that He knows about her past marriages and her inability to be made whole by a man, husband. God knows us intimately. Then at the end she is testifying about the Holy Spirit and the Messiah this way, "He will explain everything to us".

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, there are times that we offer You earthly water like the Samaritan woman but your greatest desire is to share with us Your heavenly water, Your holy presence and eternal life. Our worldly knowledge gained in this life, pales in the light of Your eternal truth. Lead us to worship God in "Spirit and Truth" as Your everlasting love holds us near to You. In Your timing, Your eternal life will explain everything to us...

Personal Insight:

Did you know God wants nothing greater than to reveal His eternal presence and truth to us? Have you ever said this simple prayer "Come Holy Spirit!"?

12. To do the will of him who sent me

Reading (John 4:27-42)

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" ³⁰They came out of the town and made their way toward him. ³¹Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." ³³Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" ³⁴"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. ³⁸I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." ³⁹Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹And because of his words many more became believers. ⁴²They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Reflection:

The disciples urged Jesus to eat but he replied "I have food to eat that you know nothing about (verse 34)." How often does thoughts of hunger capture one's minds? What has kept Jesus from being captured by this thought? Jesus is focused on the will of the Father (God). Jesus was sent to testify about himself and God's plan for His people of faith.

Often, when we are focused on our work, we can forget about hunger. Jesus was sent to sow the seed (Good News) that produces an eternal crop. As we serve God, like Jesus, we can experience the Holy Spirit focusing us on doing the will of God the Father. Who is the sower and who is the reaper in verse 36? What are the wages (harvest) that sustain them and make them glad? There are multiple ways we view the sower and the reaper as we read Scripture. In this context, the prophets of old and the “Living Word”, Jesus could be considered the sowers. The Holy Spirit and the Lord’s disciples could be considered the reapers. After Jesus finishes His work at Calvary, His disciples sow the “Good Seed” while the Holy Spirit brings faith, reaps an eternal harvest. This harvest, the eternal salvation of souls is what the sower and reaper are glad together about (verse 36).

Jesus spends two days with the Samaritans, a people the religious Jews avoided like the plague. These people were occupants of a land originally ruled by King David and later after Israel split by the Northern tribes (Ephraim). God is demonstrating His love and mercy for ALL through faith in Jesus. In this story, we see how God remembers ALL the people of the Promised Land and not just those who occupy the land of the obedient tribes. If the Pharisees were unwilling to reach across their current borders, how could they do the will of God and reach the Jews and Gentiles with the Gospel?

There are two important things to consider as we do the will of the Father: 1) God brings joy to the hearts of those who let themselves be consumed by His will; 2) God directs us to cross boundaries, places we are uncomfortable with as He leads us to love others through the Gospel. It’s important to remember this as we serve God and love others. Jesus was experiencing tremendous joy and contentment as He accomplished His Father’s will through the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God makes the same Spirit available to His children to lead them to follow Jesus (His Son) who perfectly followed (did) the will of the Father.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, the Father sent you into this world to do His will. Now, likewise, as I am sent to follow You, I desire to obey the will of God. May Your Spirit guide me to experience the joy and contentment of testifying to a love starved world of the goodness of God through the Gospel message. This is the purpose that You have for everyone, to testify about the one true God. Once, I was like an unreachable Samaritan with so many boundaries around me separating me from You. Now, You have forgiven my sin and have sent me to share with others the world deems unreachable. There is tremendous joy that awaits ALL who sow and reap, even the Samaritan woman. We've been given eternity to spend with You and celebrate the harvest being produced from the Seed of the Gospel 😊

Personal Insight:

Do you believe God's will for you is to be a witness to the world? *"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. (Isaiah 43:10-11)"*

13. The man took Jesus at his word

Reading (John 4:43-54)

After the two days he left for Galilee. ⁴⁴(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) ⁴⁵When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there. ⁴⁶Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. ⁴⁸"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." ⁴⁹The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵²When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." ⁵³Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. ⁵⁴This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

Reflection:

Jesus has returned to Cana where he turned water into wine. The reading above states that the people received Him very well because of that miracle. Also, they have heard about His ministry in Jerusalem. As the people received Jesus, they viewed Him as a prophet. Many have hopes that He might be the promised Messiah. As we meditate on this reading we remember that many people want to believe the "Good News" of the Gospel but they first are watching the people of the Gospel to see signs of its truth living in them.

Jesus' response in verse 48 to the royal official (probably of King Herod) appears to be a response that is speaking both to the crowd and the father. (Note: The father had begged Jesus to heal his son.) Why do you think Jesus went to Galilee knowing that "a prophet has no honor in his own country"? Just as He did with the Samaritans, Jesus was sent by the Father to share "Good News" with all the Jews, especially unbelievers. His own town, the hard hearted could never claim that He didn't testify to them.

Often, as we outreach to others with "Good News" we are led to help people with their physical needs (food, clothing, etc.) before addressing their deeper spiritual needs. Jesus came with his miraculous signs to demonstrate how God's "Good News" was sent to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of His people. The dominion of God's Kingdom is at hand. Jesus approaches ALL declaring that God's mercy and compassion is available to humanity, whether they're Jew or Gentile, strong or weak in faith. The man in this story held a position that in many people's eyes would be deplorable because he worked for Herod. Nonetheless, because this man took Jesus at His word, his request was satisfied by the eternal King of Israel. We pray that eventually he too trusted in Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel.

How does "taking Jesus at his word" change our lives? We know that God expects us to place our trust in His Son, the "Living Word". As we take Jesus at His Word, we trust in His dominion, ability to meet all our needs (care for us). Our greatest need is the state of our eternal soul. Add to this list of Bible verses how God satisfies our greatest need:

1. Salvation - John 3:16...
2. Strength – Phil. 4:13...
3. Hope and a future – Jer. 29:11, Rom. 8:28
4. ...

Should we look at every blessing as being aimed at our soul?

Meditate on some of these verses above in the light that Jesus wants us to trust His words because He is the “Lover of Souls”. The man in this reading took Jesus at His word and the man’s life was never the same again as his son was healed. The greatest lesson we can learn on this side of life is to listen to and trust in Jesus’ words. Jesus is the invisible God made visible for us. He has made it so that we can now hear God and see Him speaking to us through His Son well. Ask anything of God trusting His Word and the intention of God’s heart, to build up a people of faith who both see His power and mercy at work, no matter the physical result of our prayers. Like the Nike slogan says when it comes to taking Jesus at His Word, “Just do it!”

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, forgive me for being slow to take You at Your word. I mistakenly believe that I must understand the reason behind everything You command me to do. This makes me slow to respond if I respond at all. Sometimes, I even try to justify my lack of action using the defense that if God really wanted me to do something, He would give me a sign. Your word is very clear when it comes to forgiving and loving others. Your word is very clear when it comes to being a servant of the Gospel. Your word is very clear when it comes to God’s mercy that He sent You to give us eternal life. Every day I need to take You at Your word like the man in this story...

Personal Insight:

When was the last time you followed a heart-felt tug from the Spirit of Christ to love someone around you? If you can’t remember turn to God right now and ask Him for His “presence and power” to “hear and obey” His voice, spiritual leading. I guarantee you that doing this will bring signs and wonders (the faithfulness of Christ) into the lives of those around you.

14. Do you want to get well?

Reading (John 5:1-15)

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ²Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" ⁷"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." ⁸Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." ⁹At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." ¹¹But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" ¹²So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" ¹³The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹⁴Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Reflection:

For 38 years this man had been disabled and during those years had been coming (or carried) to the pool named Bethesda. His hope, as he lay down next to the pool, was that he could get himself into the pool and receive healing when the waters were stirred. Doesn't Jesus' question "Do you want to get well?" seem inappropriate? What part of this man's repeated efforts to get well is Jesus questioning?

The man responds to Jesus' question with the explanation that he can't get well because there's no way for him to get into the pool when the water's stirred. It was believed, that on occasion angels would come to the pool and stir the water. When this happened, the first person to get into the pool after this happened would be healed. The man's answer reveals the hopelessness of his situation and yet he continued to come to the pool. Is there an area of your life that seems hopeless right now?

Jesus knew that this man was desperate to be healed and the One who was greater than the angels came to the man that day to have mercy on him. Faith in Christ, not religion or superstitions is the way to healing for God's people, even when everything looks hopeless. Did this man know who Jesus was when he commanded him to pick up his mat and walk? Isn't it interesting how the man responds? He doesn't ask Jesus "who are you?" Rather, the man appears to connect Jesus with God through the Holy Spirit and places his faith in the Jesus as he speaks to Him. We know when we are born again that the Holy Spirit moves us to follow God's commands. The Holy Spirit directs this man to obey Jesus and pick up his mat so he may receive God's gift of healing.

Once again, through this miracle God's Son demonstrates the authority (dominion) given to His words by the Father. Afterwards, rather than praising God, the Pharisees immediately harass this man who received healing. The Pharisees' religious system had become a vehicle for superstitions and legalism. They had no room in their hearts for receiving their Messiah and giving thanks to God for His mercy. Nothing pleases God more than being merciful (Hosea 6:6), approaching people in love. Remembering God on the Sabbath includes remembering His mercy, love for people. Now the Lord of the Sabbath (Jesus) has demonstrated that God is bringing rest to His people in Christ. He is demonstrating God's unbroken, continuous mercy.

God never stops being merciful even on the Sabbath. He wants to be worshipped by a people who love and obey Him for both His “truth and grace”. No matter our situation its timing (even on the Sabbath), Jesus now speaks this question to the hearts of many “Do you want to get well?” He desires to teach all of us how to pick up our mats that we have laid down upon next to a hope we have in this life. In denial of the state of this life we are first born into, we are crippled by sin. Jesus brings God’s forgiveness that replaces hopelessness with His new life of eternal possibilities. If we only attempt to be healed in our bodies and deny the need of our souls to be free from sin (healed), we might hear Jesus saying to us “Do you want to be healed?” The Lord desires to lift up every heart off the mat of seeking its own way to be healed. As one learns to lift up their heart to Jesus who meets every need, they find like the man in this story did, a new way to be healed. God always sees the yearnings of one’s soul.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Your greatest healing comes from the pool of Your forgiveness for ALL sin. Thank You for giving me access to this pool through faith in the Gospel. I have placed my faith in You. I have received Your new life through Your grace and begun to follow You through the Holy Spirit. I know that Your work of mercy is an unending work that makes all things new by removing my sin. May You be worshipped forever from hearts who adore God for His mercy and dedication to making them holy through Your perfect love. As I walk with You and grow closer to You, I must continue to seek Your way of healing for the world from every sin...

Personal Insight:

How are you seeking God’s healing and being an instrument of His healing with those around you? For a long time Jesus asked me, “Do you want to get well?” as I only looked at life from my physical perspective and NOT God’s perspective of how He wants to heal me. God in His timing brings physical, emotional and spiritual healing to all through faith in Christ.

15. The Son gives life

Reading (John 5:16-30)

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. ¹⁷Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." ¹⁸For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. ¹⁹Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. ²¹For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²²Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. ²⁴"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. ³⁰By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

Reflection:

The Jews did not like how Jesus wasn't following their Sabbath regulations and was speaking about God being his Father. Was the Sabbath created for God or man? Does God need anything created? Christ was teaching about what was missing from the Sabbath for some time. Humanity's heart was NOT in the Sabbath and God created the Sabbath for humanity's heart. Certainly, the Sabbath was created to be a time set aside for worshipping God and to give people rest from their daily routines. The life of Christ demonstrated how to perfectly worship the Father and rest in His love. How were the religious leaders not honoring God by their actions? In verse 17, Jesus emphasized that the work of God's love never ceases even on the Sabbath. No matter the day or the time we should realize that our Heavenly Father's work in one's heart never ceases. As children of God look with their hearts towards Jesus' example of love they see what the Father is doing. This leads them to both worship and follow wherever God's love is going.

Consistently, we see our Lord Jesus walking in his Father's love and trusting that God's love was active in the midst of life. When we connect with the presence of God's love, we experience the abundant life that Jesus has brought. How should one celebrate the Sabbath now that Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness (Matt. 5:17)? Jesus didn't come to lead God's people away from righteousness as He previously told the Samaritan woman, God wants people to worship Him in "Spirit and Truth". He came to bring the ultimate sacrifice for the Sabbath so that the heart of God's children could be free to worship the God of unconditional love.

What is Jesus offering in verse 24? All who trust in the testimony of Christ coming from the Father will enter into eternal life and worship of the Holy God of unconditional love. The Pharisees trust in the Law which certainly held their community of faith together for many years. Now, Jesus is calling them to believe in God's Redeemer sent into the world.

Do you like everything tightly wrapped up within your understanding? Do you like to think that you can control the outcomes of Your life, what's going on around you? That perspective about living is an illusion and the Redeemer has come to take one's life to its perfect conclusion. Only the life and legacy of Christ follows the perfect will of God and leads to the perfect conclusion, eternal life with God.

Have you crossed over from the illusion (lie) to the perfect life of Jesus? Only faith in Christ takes one beyond death to the everlasting life the Son has brought into this world. His gift of life is a gift that is unwrapped by "hearing and believing" His Word. We can't perfectly love God but Jesus does. His righteousness becomes our righteousness as we begin to say "yes" to Jesus the "Lord of Life". First, one's heart says "yes, I believe your life is so much greater (holier) than mine". Second, one's heartbeat declares "yes, I'm following you all the way to the resurrection". This is where God's "Spirit and Truth" is leading His people. It's leading them away from "sin and death" into the holy, eternal presence of a loving God.

Hear Jesus speaking these words to you daily, "you will not be condemned and you have crossed over from death to life" as your heart is captured by His love. There is no longer a need to fight to make everything perfect as Jesus has already won this battle. "Faith in Christ" moves one to trust that God's love has brought one into the perfect, wondrous place of possessing a "love and life" we don't deserve. It's like the Lord Jesus has hit one's reset button and now commands one's soul to live from this place forever, His life.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the "Lord of Life", the true spring of holy life and unbreakable union with God. Your promise of eternal life is like a spring that quenches my thirst. By faith I will drink only of Your spring, daily. How great is Your life Jesus? You have set me free to live with You forever. You have now removed the scales from my eyes to behold Your holy love...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe that only the Son can give life? Have you opened your heart to His gift of life and His love that leads one to walk in freedom, away from the world's grasp on their heart? What changes when a person crosses over in their hearts to living by faith in Jesus?

16. There is another who testifies in my favor

Reading (John 5:31-47)

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. ³²There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. ³³"You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. ³⁶"I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. ³⁷And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹"I do not accept praise from men, ⁴²but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

Reflection:

Who was the one who testified in Jesus' favor that he was speaking about in verse 32? He was speaking about God the Father who spoke through the Holy Spirit to all His prophets. Verse 33 refers to the prophetic ministry God gave John the Baptist who pointed God's people (and leaders) to the prophecy concerning the coming of their Messiah.

Now, John represented all the prophets who spoke of the coming Messiah. Even as fresh as John's prophecy was to the people, the Pharisees still questioned God's prophets (Matt. 3:7-9). In verse 32, Jesus is speaking of the prophetic Word (testimony) that came to God's people through the Holy Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit was making His ministry visible through Christ' healings, signs and wonders as He fulfilled the most important prophecy of God's King (Son) come to earth.

As we relate to Jesus' situation of being wrongly judged (verse 43) because He boldly came in God's name, have you ever been wrongly judged for boldly speaking in the Father's name? Has your calling to be an ambassador for Christ ever placed you under the microscope of others who judged your every word and deed? It's easy to receive the praises of men when we say what they want to hear and do what benefits their agenda. However, we will only receive the praise of God, like Jesus in the reading above, when we confidently rest upon the knowledge of God being with us and His Word alive in us. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is God's witness to "The Truth" and He is unfairly judged because of it.

John the Baptist spoke with boldness and authority via the Holy Spirit. The prophets of old, many years before John the Baptist did the same and performed many miracles (signs and wonders). In this unique situation, John the Baptist spoke boldly of the One who was foretold to come. Meanwhile, Jesus confirmed John's prophetic words of the Messiah at hand with many miraculous signs and wonders.

The Pharisees judgments appear to be motivated by their desire to hold onto their secured positions of leadership, as keepers of the law. Most paid money to receive and secure these positions. Therefore, their hearts were hardened against any changes to God's leadership. Also, they were secure in their self-righteousness; both their understanding of the Law and their sheltered lives as the ruling religious class that dictated to others how to live. They were very prideful people.

Moses was a prophet who spoke of another prophet (deliverer) sent by God to come (Duet. 18:15-19). Moses would have accused the Pharisees of being prideful and disobedient because he instructed his people to look for another leader sent from God. At this time, the pharisees foolishly thought their leadership group was heaven sent by God. This is why they looked to discredit others, including John rather than be open to God's "King of kings" (Son).

Over time, we can let comfort and security lead us in this life. Even when we are good at doing the right religious activities, we can be caught off guard like the Pharisees. Look at the harm it has brought to the Jewish people. Our lives are meant to be lived in partnership with God's continuing work of love. The Holy Spirit is establishing God's Kingdom through Christ and His Spirit (teachings) alive in us. As one trusts in Jesus, they place their eternal security in God's Kingdom (authority and dominion) which transcends this temporary life we occupy. Followers of Jesus remain open to God's Word and His will being done as they let His Spirit testify through them. Our lives aren't meant to testify about ourselves. Rather, they testify about the eternal favor (life) that God brings into the lives of those who love Jesus.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, both prophetic Scripture and the Holy Spirit were there to testify on your behalf and yet You pointed to God the Father. Now, we have both the Scripture and the Holy Spirit to testify about You. Your amazing grace has put us in this wonderful position. Our security is in Your finished work on the cross. Our greatest comfort comes from the Comforter, Holy Spirit You placed in us. May we be bold and unashamed to share Your testimony through the life You have given us, full of "grace and truth"...

Personal Insight:

Have you opened your life to let God's Spirit testify through you? To live by faith is to testify about what you believe...

17. Five small barley loaves and two small fish

Reading (John 6:1-13)

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ²and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" ⁸Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹²When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Reflection:

As we read about this miracle of "feeding the five thousand", it's hard to envision the sprawling crowd, the disciples and Jesus meeting in this place not far from the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has crossed the Sea of Galilee and now great crowds are following Him everywhere because of his healing miracles. Have you ever experienced a large healing service and the crowd activities that are found at them? These settings contain crowds of people who have both tremendous needs and high expectations of being healed.

In the midst of this sea of expectation and need, Jesus positions himself up on the mountainside and sits with His disciples. What might Jesus have been thinking and feeling as he looked out upon this crowd of people? In verse 5, Jesus' words display His concern for the care of the people as He spoke to his disciples about what they had available to eat. He wants His disciples to join Him in caring for the crowds needs. Jesus asks Phillip "Where shall we buy bread for the people to eat?" Phillip answers that it would take eight month's wages to feed the people and Andrew shows Jesus what the boy brought to this event, his lunch but doubts it will go far. Serving God's people at times can lead us to similar feelings the disciples experienced as the immensity of the need seems totally overwhelming.

In verse 11, we should take notice of what Jesus does first as He responds to the need. He faithfully gives thanks to God the Father for what they already have. After He gives thanks and blesses the small meal, He passes the blessed food to His disciples to be shared and then the feeding miracle occurs. Have there ever been times in your life where you pictured yourself like the boy bringing five loaves and two fishes to Jesus amid a sea of tremendous need? Do you thank God for what you have and look for the opportunity to use whatever God has given you despite the overwhelming need? Or do you hold back what you have until you can see that your gift will make a difference in meeting a significant part of the need? Faith will lead us to look for opportunities to thank God and release what we have even when faced with overwhelming need. There are many stories of God's people whose small act of giving started an avalanche of blessings to flow from our Heavenly Father. Every act we do in faith has tremendous potential to expand God's Kingdom. The story of the widow's mite has been used to inspire people to give in the church for generations. Her gift was small (2 mites) but if you add up all of the giving that has occurred after people heard that story shared its quite a fortune.

The impact of this insignificant gift multiplied upon God's Kingdom is greater than the miracle multiplication of the bread and fish in this story. As we follow Jesus' example when a need is presented to us, we should start off by giving thanks to God for what He has already given us. We should believe that God multiplies our gifts after we release them without reserve. God always wants to increase our faith through the multiplication of our gifts as Jesus' miracles did for His disciples. It's important for us to take notice of how the boy donated his lunch. He gave his lunch to Jesus believing that what He had was significant and that Jesus would use it to bring praise to God. He didn't give because he saw others giving. He gave because He trusted that Jesus would glorify God and do whatever He saw fit to do with His lunch. The spirit of generosity behind the five loaves and two fish is what God multiplied. It was a spirit that came from the boy's faith in God despite what his eyes saw, an exceptionally large need.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for making available Your supernatural presence real to us. Your ability to multiply our resources for the glory of God can even bring us more than we need as You demonstrated this with all the leftovers of food collected after this miracle occurred. You saw the needs of the people in the crowd. You see our every need and care deeply for us all. Help us to see what You see by approaching You with a thankful heart. When we have You Jesus, we ALWAYS have something to share. As we serve others, help us to remember that we don't do this alone. You have come to be with us to give us eternal life and to live to know You more. As we approach life in this manner our temporary needs no longer control us. May we follow the example of this young boy who decided that his need to eat lunch was secondary to seeing God show others that He was present and cares...

Personal Insight:

Do you often think to give God thanks in prayer before sharing your time, talents and treasures?

18. It is I; don't be afraid

Reading (John 6:14-21)

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. ¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Reflection:

On this day both the disciples and the crowd have witnessed an amazing miracle which contradicted both reason and the laws of nature. Jesus could sense that pandemonium was about to break out as they were starting to scheme ways to use His miracle working power for their social agenda. What did the crowd want to do with Jesus (verse 15)? Jesus knew that they wanted to force Him to be their earthly king and this caused Him to withdraw from the crowd. As Jesus went in one direction, He sent his disciples in another. This exit strategy caught the crowd off guard and kept them from following through on what they were scheming. If the crowd had been successful in forcing Jesus to be their type of king, they would have missed the greater blessing Jesus was sent to earth to bring. Jesus, who was already royalty (The Son of God), would bring a Heavenly Kingdom to ALL the people. His Eternal Kingdom would triumph over the sin and death of this world, an enemy greater than the Romans.

Have you ever experienced a special day where at its end you struggled to comprehend all that had happened? It's hard to imagine what was racing through the minds of the disciples at the end of this day with the miracle they had just witnessed and the reaction of the crowds. Now, darkness has fallen on the lake as they row across it and a strong wind is halting their progress. As if they hadn't seen enough that day, they see Jesus walking towards them on the water. What did he say to them in verse 20?

Often, when we struggle with understanding what is happening around us, we become afraid. Certainly, the disciples realized that day that following Jesus was taking them far beyond what they could comprehend or imagine. Have you ever confessed to God while you followed Jesus that you don't understand what is happening? Have you ever thought deeply about what it means to be a co-laborer with Christ, the Creator of Heaven and Earth? These disciples struggled with the fear of the unknown just like us. All of us need to hear and believe Jesus' words "Don't be afraid; It is I" when we lose sight of Him amid life's uncertainties. It was becoming obvious at this point to the disciples that with Jesus the inconceivable is possible. Just being comfortable all the time is NOT standard operating procedure for His followers.

The disciples would declare that seeing Jesus' miracles made them strong in faith. Jesus wants us to be strong in our faith. How can we overcome our fear as we continue to follow Jesus? First of all, whether we see His power demonstrated personally in our lives or not, we have the miracle of the Bible (written word preserved for us) and the resurrection of Christ to build us up in faith. Second of all, Jesus is still there to tell us "Don't be afraid" as we "go and attempt to make disciples" which at times can be like crossing the lake at night. When you do cross that lake at night, remember that being bold leads to the greatest miracle; witnessing a person take Jesus into their boat 😊

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I confess that following You requires me to go way beyond my understanding. Every day I need You to take me beyond what I can comprehend so that I will experience Your Kingdom moving forward through me. Teach me to recognize Your presence and to follow the Spirit' guidance. Your life given for me has placed me in a boat that travels above the waters of the unknown, fear and death. Come Holy Spirit wind and blow strongly upon the sails of my ship as You set my course. As we follow Your course we learn to hear the sound of Your wind saying "It is I"...

Personal Insight:

Have you invited Jesus into Your ship and made Him Your Skipper? Don't be afraid Jesus, the "Good Skipper" crosses all who do immediately to His shore of salvation. Are you looking for where He's setting sail next; for His heavenly purpose of using Your redeemed ship to go after the "next to be blessed" soul?

19. To do the work God requires

Reading (John 6:22-29)

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." ²⁸Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Reflection:

The crowd has been looking for Jesus. They witnessed His feeding miracle the day before. What is their short-sighted hope for this prophet Jesus they have found? They see Jesus as a prophet sent by God who can fill their stomachs and stop their leaders, Jewish and Romans from levying heavy taxes on them. Jesus is focused on the works God requires.

When they catch up with Jesus on the other side of the lake at Capernaum, they are dumbfounded by the fact that he didn't leave in the boat with his disciples and yet He is on the other side of the lake. They ask Jesus "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus doesn't answer their question directly. Jesus compares "food that spoils" to "food that endures to eternal life" in order to elevate their heart's desires from only a fair earthly kingdom to a righteous Heavenly Kingdom.

The Son of God came to give His people food that endures to eternal life. Jesus' miracles pointed to the Father's approval of His Son's work to bring us His eternal righteousness. We work our jobs day after day to receive a pay check that lasts for a short time. Jesus came to make one payment of righteousness (His holy life) to atone for all sin for all time. Just as Jesus was led by this righteous work, we follow Him in the work of seeing His righteousness imparted to ALL. This is the greater work that goes beyond working only for food and shelter.

What does the work of "believing in Jesus" mean for us today? The people of Israel were looking for an earthly king and kingdom. Jesus was pointing them towards a work that went beyond nationalism. First and foremost, they had to have their hopes re-directed towards a life of participating in God's greater good; His work that produces an eternal harvest. The first Jews who believed in Jesus, received God's greater calling to look beyond only their personal agenda and national aspirations. To do the work God requires His children to walk in His "Spirit and Truth"; to live from hearts that have been possessed by His promise of a greater reward than this world can offer.

Listen to these words from Heb. 11:13 "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth." This work can only be accomplished as one embraces the One the Father has sent.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, trusting You is the greatest work for my life. It changes my priorities and points me towards what pleases God most. When I get caught up in the rat race of this life, I forget about Your work which give us eternal purpose. Fill me again with Your Holy Spirit and guide my heart to what's required, the eternal, redeeming work of God's Kingdom...

Personal Insight:

Do you consider your greater purpose each day as you think about and do your daily tasks? Doing chores is NOT evil. Working without faith in God's purpose moving through us as we live out our days is foolishness (unbelief). Considering God's greater purpose during our days is the work God requires. It changes how we approach the mundane 😊

20. The true bread from heaven

Reading (John 6:30-43)

So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." ⁴¹At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" ⁴³"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered.

Reflection:

Through the words above we see that Jesus desires to bridge the people's faith from trusting in Moses (his manna wasn't bread from heaven for the soul) to trusting in God's Son who brings true bread from heaven (eternal life). The Jewish people are familiar with the story of Moses bringing their people manna in the desert. In verse 32, Jesus now declares that He brings God's people the true bread which provides eternal righteousness and has come down from heaven.

When someone brings you a message, do you consider who the messenger is? The people are struggling with believing Jesus because they see a messenger with ordinary, earthly parents. (Read verse 42). They have believed that God sent to them the prophet Moses who met regularly with God. They believed his testimony about God's will and provision. They witnessed God's daily supply of manna provided for the people as they wandered in the wilderness under Moses' leadership. Now, they have this messenger of God, Jesus whose words produce miracles but their hearts struggle with believing that He is God's "prophet, priest and king (leader)". Jesus is leading them to partake of the manna from heaven, eternal life but their hearts are questioning the messenger and forsaking His message.

How does Jesus' bread compare to Moses' bread? Moses' manna kept the Israelites fed as they wandered in the desert and strengthened them for their journey to the Promised Land. Jesus' bread delivers God's people from sin and strengthens their faith for the journey to God's "Eternal Home". Some learned people have said that Jesus never claimed to be more than a teacher or a prophet in Scripture. Look at the following verses 35-40 and see what Scripture says:

- 35) Jesus is the bread of life which is consumed to satisfy one's hunger and thirst for God's righteousness.
- 36) Jesus came from heaven to earth to make God's salvation visible and consumable.
- 37) God the Father rewards all who trust His messenger.
- 38) The Son was sent from heaven to do the Father's will, to bring eternal righteousness to fallen humanity.
- 39) God's sent His Son from heaven, not any earthly messenger to raise up His people on the last day;
- 40) God's will is that all who trust in Jesus's manna, His righteousness will receive its reward of eternal life.

We don't see these claims being made by others and Jesus definitely claimed that He was more than a good teacher or prophet. Was He crazy or telling the truth?

There are many leaders in history who have led their people well. Moses was renowned for his leadership of God's Jewish people in the desert and the miracles that accompanied his leadership. No leader with a rational mind has made the claims that Jesus has made in this reading. Either Jesus was speaking the truth or speaking irrationally? All scholars who say Jesus only thought of himself as a good teacher or prophet are in denial of the Scripture. Jesus clearly declared that He was sent by God from heaven to supernaturally raise us up from the dead. Whenever we take communion and share in the breaking of bread, we join all people who have fed on the heavenly manna (eternal life and promise) that Jesus brought into this world. The true bread from heaven, Jesus, the bread of life is eaten by all who believe His message and anticipate His return to raise (resurrect) those who have consumed His heavenly bread.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the true, living bread sent down from heaven. This heavenly bread sustains one's soul and gives them the strength to wait upon You, my Lord. Help me to trust in Your promise of the resurrection that will come to all who partake in the true bread from heaven. As I look forward to Your return, help me to share Your righteous bread with others; to let my life speak of the supernatural journey to eternal life that You call all of us to...

Personal Insight:

Has the true bread from heaven changed your appetite for heavenly bread more than earthly bread? More of Jesus and less of what only temporarily satisfies our earthly hunger.

21. They will all be taught by God

Reading (John 6:44-59)

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵²Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Reflection:

When God came to Moses and the people to give them the Law (Exodus 20), the people trembled with fear and refused to meet with Him on Mount Sinai. As Jesus (God's Son) comes to the people in the flesh, the people become fearful again because they couldn't reconcile the words of the prophets with the words given to Moses (The Law).

Remember, earlier John the Baptist had declared that Jesus was the Messiah prophesized about, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)". Often, our fear can pit itself against God's big steps for His people who walk in faith. This was a big step here as God was about to fulfill the Old Testament Law and make New Testament Eternal Way for His people to meet with Him through the righteous body and atoning blood of His Son. Many religious people hearing Jesus speaking couldn't grasp the significance of His messianic words. Jesus as God's Messiah had been sent to God's people of faith, to call them to eat His life-giving bread of righteousness and drink His reconciling blood of forgiveness so they would be yoked into an eternal lifegiving covenant with God.

The people were crippled by the fear of change. Although their religion did NOT provide eternal righteousness and atonement for their sins, they were comfortable with the temporary self-righteousness and atonement of sin that the Law provided. God is a Holy and He wasn't satisfied with where the people's hearts were at. Hence, the Messiah was sent to them with His eternal righteousness and atonement of sin for them to receive by faith.

The books of the Prophets foretold of a time when God would give them a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26) and a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Christ had come specifically to fulfill these prophetic Scriptures and others. The sinless life of Jesus and the exchange of His life for ours was the final BIG step of faith that God was calling His people of faith to take. The first big step is to see our sin (The Law) and the second big step is to see God's solution (The Gospel). The time had come for God's chosen people to receive His Eternal Covenant Way of fellowship with Him, His will for His children.

Through the gift of the life of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, God now teaches His children to follow the example His Son gave us for living and to walk in His Spirit. Walking with God this way never ends and leads us on a journey of growing in intimate knowledge of God's "Word and Spirit". After we've taken the 2 big steps of seeing our sin and trusting in the life of Jesus, we begin walking in the eternal journey of being taught by God.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You have given me life and formed me from Your life poured out at Calvary. Your holy seed of love has conquered all that separates me from taking hold of eternal fellowship with God. Help me to walk with and worship God in "Spirit and Truth". My eternal relationship, covenant with You will always be founded upon Your holy "body and blood". Through Your grace by faith, my heart continues to stand upon the truth that nothing can no longer separate me from Your wonderful life and love...

Personal Insight:

Can you hear the words of Jesus and see His life example in Your everyday life? This is the place that God calls us to as He instructs us. Have you entered His classroom?

22. To whom shall we go?

Reading (John 6:60-71)

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶²What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." ⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹(He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Reflection:

Prior to these verses, Jesus openly shared with all those following Him about the most important spiritual significance of His coming and His ministry. John 6:58 got to the heart of His message with these words, "the one who feeds on me will live...he who feeds on this bread lives forever." Jesus was making it clear to those who follow Him that there would be no going back to trusting in the Law and the manna meant for traveling through the wilderness of sin. It was time now to eat the manna sent from heaven to free us from all bondage to sin and give us new, eternal life. It was time to be all-in for God's Messiah in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the same message. "to whom shall we go?", to the readers of this text today.

Above, in this reading we see some of the followers grumbling about Jesus' words calling them a hard teaching. If you believed Jesus' teachings were meant to fall under the teachings of the law, then they would be hard to receive. What was lacking in the teaching that they had received up to the coming of Christ? The people had more trust in their own abilities to follow the Law than God's promise through the prophets that He was going to restore a life of fellowship based upon more than just physical deeds (perfect faith). As they were stuck in their thinking on physical deeds, they naturally thought Jesus was talking to them about eating His physical body and blood and were appalled.

Do the difficulties of this life sometimes make us forget who we are promised to become (completed in Christ)? The people in the past through the books of "The Prophets" had received God's plan for restoration (ex. Jeremiah 29:11 & 31:34, Ezekiel 36:26). However, their lack of understanding of the prophets was making it hard for them to receive the words of Jesus the Messiah. Proverbs 28:19 says "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Giving up hope leads to becoming a people where there is no vision and future. No wonder they were struggling with receiving the hope of eternal life; Jesus and His teachings which pointed to God's eternal salvation for God's children of faith. It was time for this man who came down from heaven to be received as God's eternal "hope of glory". Through the umption of the Holy Spirit Jesus was demanding that He must be received like the people had previously received the Law.

It's very easy, even in the church today to fall into the trap of being comfortable with the status quo of religion. The Jews were satisfied with the religion they had built for themselves based upon the Law they received through Moses. Trusting in religion is very different than living by faith in Jesus (Romans 1:16-17). It goes beyond just following a moral code when the code itself begins living inside the believer. They HAD to eat His body and drink His blood, consume Him fully.

This is the only way to have victory over sin. To be totally free from sin requires totally faith in the One who has brought God's holy life back to the center of humanity. Jesus would provide this through "the cross and the resurrection" which would release God's saving grace and Spirit to the world. God's Kingdom and salvation of the world was now coming to the Jewish people through Jesus their promised Savior. This explains Peter's words above in verse 68 "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, teach me daily about the depths of Your life-giving Word, Testimony. Often, I try to find meaning in my life based upon my understanding, abilities and past accomplishments. However, You call me to the deeper meaning of life, to follow the Eternal One who is making all things new. Truly, You hold the words of eternal life and have called me to be with You and walk with You forever. I am blessed beyond whatever happens in this temporary, physical life...

Personal Insight:

Have you found peace and rest in the Lord's "words of eternal life"? Personally, I can't make sense of life without Jesus so like Peter, I've eaten His body and drank His blood. As I physically eat and drink the communion elements my spirit is connected to the truth of the Lord's commandment "to eat His body and drink His blood".

23. I testify that what the world does is evil

Reading (John 7:1-10)

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ²But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵For even his own brothers did not believe in him. ⁶Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." ⁹Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. ¹⁰However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.

Reflection:

There are many both family and non-family who don't understand or respect our spiritual life (personal relationship with God). These same people are quick to offer us advice about important decisions in our life. Do you believe that the brothers of Jesus understood His ministry at this point? When you began following Jesus was there anybody in your family who did understand what you were experiencing? Did you discover that the way Jesus was leading you through His Spirit, now stood in stark contrast to the way others around you were being led to live their lives?

In verse 4, the brothers of Jesus tell Him "show yourself to the world." Did His brothers understand the radical change that Jesus was bringing? Jesus knew He came to tell the world that they were lost and that their deeds were evil, not acceptable to God. Sharing this message with both religious and non-religious people can be very dangerous, even today.

Jesus has come to stand against and overcome the stronghold of evil in this world (death). When we welcome Jesus into our lives, the confrontation (conflict) between the evil of this world (death) and Christ in us (eternal life) becomes very visible. Therefore, Jesus' words about God's timing in verse 6 are spoken from a spiritual perspective that His brothers are unaware of. Do you suppose Jesus loves His brothers even though their words are unwise and could have negatively impacted His ministry? All of us are challenged to love God and others even if they are blind to the good fight of faith which overcomes the evil of this world.

This is a time, at the end of chapter 6, where Jesus has been deserted by many of His disciples. In addition, He now finds himself receiving little if any understanding and support from his brothers (family of origin). Yet, He was determined to complete His race of faith and to stand against evil. It is His perfect example of standing up to evil that has turned the world upside down since He came. How many people over the years have chosen to stand against evil like Christ? Their deeds have certainly given us a better world above total chaos. Not only did Jesus come to move hearts to resist the evil which still exists in the world today but He came to eradicate the nonstop proliferation of evil to the ends of the cosmos for all eternity.

If you are sharing the message of the Gospel through your life, expect to be confronted by evil and disappointed at times by your brothers. If you are not sharing Christ through your life, then you may be wasting far too much time on the deeds of this world which Jesus judged as evil. We have seen how Jesus kept on going at this critical juncture in His ministry. He understood he was in a battle against evil. He continued to spend time with God the Father in prayer. He continued to wait on God's perfect timing before taking action. He continued to let the Gospel's light shine through Him as it pointed out the darkness (evil deeds) in this world.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You did not give up when the going got tough. You knew there was evil in this world and that You would overcome it. You kept Your eyes on the greater good and God's timing for all things to happen. You have conquered evil (death) with your life given on the cross and shared this victory over evil (death) with me. Your eternal life has overcome the temporary loses that evil still inflicts. Help me not to cower from evil, dismiss it or become cynical because of the temporary setbacks it causes. Use me to give a strong, loving Christian witness to others about Your truth and the evil that many in this world cling to...

Personal Insight:

Are you aware that the evil deeds of this world are purposely directed towards separating all of humanity from the abundant life Christ has purchased for us? Eventually all of humanity will have its plug pulled from the source of evil...

24. My teaching is not my own

Reading (John 7:11-24)

Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" ¹²Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." ¹³But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews. ¹⁴Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" ¹⁶Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. ¹⁷If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. ¹⁹Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" ²⁰"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. ²²Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. ²³Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? ²⁴Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment."

Reflection:

There are some in the crowd who are amazed at Jesus' wise teachings. However, there are others who question Jesus' teachings because within their incomplete understanding He hasn't meet their religious expectations. How did the prophet Micah summarize God's "Way of Righteousness" for His people in Micah 6:8, "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Unknowingly, those who reject Jesus' teachings are choosing dead religion over Christ' life giving teaching coming from God. The Lord Jesus continues to show them their error, their rigid, unspiritual ways and the problems their resultant sin brings into their relationship with God. Many continue to deny that Jesus' teachings have come from God.

In verse 17, Jesus challenges the Jewish authorities to examine His teachings because they aren't His own but come from God the Father. His teachings continue to point to Scripture like Micah which points out that they are the one's who lack understanding. Jesus teachings point to God's coming Kingdom. Jesus' teachings go beyond focusing on outward appearances. Jesus' teachings challenge ALL to seek after the heart of God (the spirit of the law) as we seek to God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

Jesus points to the flexibility in the "law of circumcision" for a newborn boy on the eighth day which allows the child to be circumcised on the Sabbath (verse 22). If a male child can be set apart as belonging to God as His servant on the eighth day, certainly a servant (child) of the God can be healed on the Sabbath. Their teachings about following the letter of the law had hardened their hearts. It was severely hampers God's people from receiving their Messiah and walking in the perfect will (love) of God. The Law was given to them to point to the fulfillment of God's prophetic Word, NOT to stand in its way.

As Christians follows Christ today they ask the Lord to reveal God's grace and eternal justice in everything they do. In Christ, we are a new creation. His grace enables us to demonstrate God's mercy. God's mercy humbles and moves one to act both justly and mercifully as they honor God. The law by itself doesn't prepare followers to perfectly obey God because it lacks God's Spirit which is making all things new (holy). Jesus gave His life to lead us to the depths of God's "Spirit and Truth" in God's love and power.

Prophetic Scripture spoke of how God had grown tired of the shallowness of the Jewish people's religious practices (Hosea 6:6). Believers today should be careful NOT to over-emphasize their religious practices as they follow Jesus? Jesus has made the ultimate sacrifice that matters so that we would be free to be "salt and light"; to make a difference and to bring a better way to live in Christ. When we are guided by and empowered by God's Spirit, the Kingdom of God that Jesus has brought into the world is lifted up. This is what the Father wanted to do through His Jewish people who refused to acknowledge His new teaching coming through His Son.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, your teachings are certainly from God the Father. Operating from the "Spirit of the Law", Your life-giving teaching goes far beyond just memorizing Scripture or trying to look good on the outside before God and others. Help me to follow Your teachings which challenge me to my core and lead me to the deeper waters God's eternal mercy and justice. I am amazed at how the God of Creation has come to personally tutor His children. The "nanny" of the Law has been replaced with the person of Christ...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe God has brought to us a teaching that obeys and demonstrates both God's mercy and justice? Does this teaching only come from the well of the life of Jesus?

25. No one will know where he is from

Reading (John 7:25-36)

At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" ²⁶Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? ²⁷But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." ²⁸Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, ²⁹but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." ³⁰At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. ³¹Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" ³²The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. ³³Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. ³⁴You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." ³⁵The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? ³⁶What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

Reflection:

The Incarnation of God in man, when God stepped into humanity as the person of Jesus Christ through the virgin birth, is something we'll never fully comprehend. Therefore, no one understood where He came from. Events such as: the transfiguration, the resurrection and the ascension of Christ are also hard to fully comprehend. Those speaking here are unaware that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and the words of Isaiah 9:1-2 which speak of Galilee's great light. Also, the Pharisees expected the messiah to come from earthly royalty.

In verse 26, the crowd wonders if the Pharisees have had any serious private discussions about where Jesus came from. In verse 31, the people recognize that the miraculous signs that Jesus performed testify to where He came from. The purpose of these miracles were to direct both the people and the Jewish authorities to Scripture. The Pharisees, because of their desire to have Scripture point to their authority were unable to answer the question of the people, “where is Jesus from?” Scripture didn’t point to them as God’s final authority (Word). Therefore, their misguided hearts denied the obvious, that Jesus and His miracles came from God. The Pharisees were jealous that many were believing Jesus came from God.

Certainly, we should evaluate messengers who claim to be speaking for God in our midst. However, unlike these people, Christ followers have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings God’s truth, will to light in their minds. Also, the Holy Spirit has brought God’s Kingdom (authority) into their hearts. From this position of having His will and authority planted within, one processes the messages they receive and follows Jesus. We have no record here of how the Pharisees sought God’s will in private regarding Christ. Was it based on their strict interpretation of the Law? Was it based on their limited understanding of prophecy? Had the miracles performed been accepted by some as coming from God even though they were afraid to speak up?

Believers trust that Jesus has come from heaven into the world to deliver to them through God’s “Saving Word”. It (The Gospel) rescues them from sin through faith and resides hidden like Christ in their heart until the question is fully answered at the Resurrection. This is what I think about often as I ponder about where He came from. I think about how He came. I think about the miracles of Christ that point to God’s prophecies being fulfilled. I trust that just as Jesus came to us from God’s glory in heaven, His followers are being returned to heaven to bring the Father glory. Where He came from is where His children are being returned to, His heart of love.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming from heaven to rescue me from sin and eternal death. I pray that Your life, God's "Spirit and Truth" which is where all faith is born from continues to abound in me and draw me ever close to the heart of God. Holy Spirit continue Your work of coming to me and leading me to live to honor God. I know the greatest way that anyone can honor God and that is to receive His messenger and His message, God's fullness of "grace and truth" imparted to all who lift up the name of Jesus...

Personal Insight:

Jesus used the analogy of the wind to describe the coming and going, the moving of God's Spirit. Can you discern the movement of God's Spirit? It's coming from heaven and leading many back in that direction...

26. Streams of living water will flow from within

Reading (John 7:37-44)

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. ⁴⁰On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." ⁴¹Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? ⁴²Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" ⁴³Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. ⁴⁴Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Reflection:

On the last day of the weeklong feast, all the people had gathered for the final assembly. Typically, small groups would be formed within this special assembly with a teacher sitting in their midst. However, on this day Jesus stood up and made his announcement in a loud voice so that all the small groups could hear Him. His message of abundant life was for all and was never meant to be limited to his small group of disciples.

The image of a country stream joining into a larger river comes to mind as I reflect on this reading. The water in these country streams often looks very appealing to drink from. There are many streams that flow into the river of what we become in this life. What sort of streams have flowed into your life? The lifegiving streams of the water of Jesus has come to overtake all those unrighteous streams that flow into our life to make all the water pure.

Jesus' stream, God's lifegiving "Spirit and Truth" flows within all believers so that they will be constantly watered by the life of Christ. He desires to bring blessings and abundant life to all through these streams that flow within as they abide in Him. Jesus is inviting His religious community, the Jews to receive God's salvation for the whole world. He was sent to them first. After His death, He was sent to the whole world both the religious and non-religious communities.

The life of Jesus brings ALL believers access to the Spirit-filled, abundant (vibrant) life God has sent from heaven to earth. It's more than a life than is dependent on physical needs like a plant that depends on soil, water and light. Have you been yoked to the Holy Spirit which Christ has brought access to in this world? Through God's "Holy Spirit" eternal truth is deposited into eternal souls. Believers experience the flowing of Jesus' streams of living water within when this occurs. Think again about how appealing a vibrant country stream can look when we are thirsty. When life is overwhelming us, we can be set free of that by surrendering our situations to the greater blessing of Christ being alive in us through the Holy Spirit. His faithfulness is at work within us.

Do you regularly invite the life of Jesus to wash over you as you wake up every day? It's a spiritual experience similar to taking a refreshing shower or putting water on your face in the morning. These streams of living water flooding one's life is something that Jesus desires to impart to every soul through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth as He becomes alive in us. As one's river is fed by the streams of Christ repeatedly, the Holy Spirit affirms God's presence and love to us. This produces in us the will to persevere and a desire to be more like Jesus. Like the people who were divided in this reading about Jesus' words, at times we are divided over whether or not to let God's Spirit run its course freely within us. It's important to repeatedly thank God for His forgiveness of sin (Lamb), to let oneself be overtaken by His living streams within our souls and to follow their course of action first.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, flood my riverbanks with your streams of living water. May Your Spirit continue to “water and fertilize my soul”, the soil of my being so that Your virtuous life may sprout from within me. Lord, although I need and ask for Your daily sustenance, You will never turn me away or grow weary of refreshing me with your streams of living water. Come Holy Spirit and wash me with the freedom of Christ as You empower me to bring glory to God...

Personal Insight:

Can you envision drinking a cool, refreshing drink of water directly from a stream fed by a powerful flowing spring? Have you taken hold of the truth that the Lord joins believers to a similar spiritual stream to drink from daily to refresh one's soul?

27. No one ever spoke the way this man does

Reading (John 7:45-52)

Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" ⁴⁶"No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. ⁴⁷"You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸"Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them." ⁵⁰Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" ⁵²They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." ⁵³Then each went to his own home.

Reflection:

There was a Clint Eastwood movie "In the Line of Fire" about a secret service agent (Clint) who was assigned the task of being a body guard for the president. He had this assignment for many years and through many administrations. I would imagine like Clint, the temple guards in this reading had heard many leaders (both Pharisees and non-Pharisees) speak over their many years of service. Some of the temple guards might have even heard John the Baptist speak, as they accompanied some of the Pharisees who visited John by the Jordan river. This should help us to better appreciate the words recorded in verse 46. Have you ever heard a speech from a world or business leader that really caught your attention and left a lasting impression?

The Pharisees appeared to have heard enough from Jesus as His words challenged their roles and authority as keepers of the Law. Unlike the temple guards who follow orders, the zeal to control has closed the ears of many of the Pharisees.

Unbridled zeal has caused them to lose the ability to listen unlike the temple guards who must ALWAYS be ready to follow the next order issued. In verse 51, Nicodemus makes a statement related to how close minded the Pharisees had become. Their idea of leadership sprung from their belief that no matter what obedience to God flows from “The Letter of the Law” coming first. Their description of the people given to the temple guards indicates that not only was their leadership out of touch with God but also it was out of touch with the people. Their zeal left no grid (space) in their hearts for the “Living God” to speak into this most important time in their lives.

If you were in Nicodemus’ position, a Pharisee open to evaluate Christ who represents the “Spirit of the Law”, how might you further investigate His Word? We know from chapter 3 that Nicodemus had previously met with Jesus. Wouldn’t you further investigate and discuss the Prophetic writings in Scripture? After all God’s counsel has come through both the books of the Law and the Prophets. Would you send someone to Jesus’ hometown to interview some of the people he grew up with? Would you send someone to talk with his mother Mary? Would you send someone to talk with the people who witnessed Jesus’ miracles? Would you interview some of His disciples rather than just try to manipulate them (Judas)? Would you try to connect recent events such as the ministry of John the Baptist with Jesus’ ministry in Scripture? Would you discuss how the words of Christ might be helpful in their current political situation with the Romans? Lastly, if you had substantial proof that Jesus was the Messiah would you approach other Pharisees with what you had discovered? For many Jews, it appears that just hearing His Spirit-led teachings about how to obey God was enough proof to dismiss Him from being relevant to their community. There were no miracles recorded in Scripture for us while Jesus was with the Samaritans. Yet, they heard His words and believed (John 4:41). Here, the hardness of heart found in most of the Pharisees made them unwilling to seriously investigate answers for any of the questions above.

Like the temple guards do you believe that “no one ever spoke the way this man does” as you compare the words of Christ to the many speeches of others you have heard? Ultimately, our hearing must be joined with a response from our hearts that declares that His testimony and teachings are having a life changing impact on us. Verse 53 implies that the chief priests and Pharisees went home dismissing all Jesus was saying. If we truly believe that “no one has ever spoken like Jesus”, we should not repeat the mistakes of the Pharisees. They dismissed Jesus’ words rather than investigating them. They didn’t take His words with them or bring them home. His words about the “Spirit of the Law” brought the Prophetic Word into alignment with the “Letter of the Law”. As we approach God, we must approach Him in both “truth and love”, “love and truth”. In Christ, God approaches us in the perfection of both and in whatever order is required to reconcile us to Himself.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I have never heard words like yours spoken before. Your words are accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit manifesting Your “truth and love”. Let me not be like the pharisees who dismissed your words or the temple guards who heard Your words but became pawns used to turn against you. I confess that when I question Your words, I miss out on the life they bring. May Your words impact me by drawing me closer to You. Help me Jesus to listen to Your words, submit to Your words and live out my life in response to Your words...

Personal Insight:

Have you ever sensed Jesus himself speaking to you as His teachings were shared with you during a sermon or conversation with a follower of Christ? Do you expect to hear God speaking to you through His “love and truth”?

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