

THE LIFE OF
JESUS



BOOK I



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BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How does one become a Christian?

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone, not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).

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■ LIFE OF JESUS

February 14, 2021 | *The Word Became Flesh*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 1:1–18

Pray that God would give you insight to understand this enormously important but difficult to comprehend passage.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus came into the world on a redemptive mission.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Since we are followers of Jesus, understanding His mission helps us understand our mission.

■ MEDITATE

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4–5)

GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.*

❓: *What three things would you tell someone about yourself if you wanted them to know you?*

Q: *How would you, in your own words, encapsulate the mission of Jesus Christ?*

We often define ourselves by what we do. Architects are known by the buildings they design. Truckers are known for adapting to a life on the road. Soldiers know their lives have been forever altered by the military way of life. This is not always a healthy mindset; nevertheless, we often find our identity in our labor.

In many ways, the same thing can be said about Jesus Christ. You can know a lot of basic facts about Jesus, such as the place of His birth, the area of the world in which He lived, His nationality, and His cause of death (we will discover each of these things as we move through this series), but if you fail to understand His mission, you have failed to understand Him. John, one of Jesus's closest companions on this earth, recognized this to be the case. Thus, when he set out to write his Gospel, he began by explaining the basics of Jesus's mission on earth.

Q: *Why is it essential for us to define Jesus by what He came to do?*

Q: *How are you defined by Jesus's mission?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is essential for us to define Jesus by His mission. It is equally essential for us to be defined by Jesus's mission. There are many ways we can define ourselves, but as Christians, none of them exceeds who we are because of what Christ has done for us. Christians can be doctors, soldiers, truck drivers, mothers, or anything else, but we are Christians first. We can fill all these roles during the week, but we cannot leave our Christian identity behind. This week make a list of the various roles that define you. Do any of them define you more than your relationship with Christ? If so, write down some steps you need to take to bring this area of your life back into balance with your relationship with Jesus.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ John begins his Gospel by referencing Jesus's divinity and then announcing His mission.

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1. CHRIST HAS BEEN SINCE ETERNITY PAST.
 2. THE TASK OF JESUS'S MISSION: SHINING LIGHT
 3. THE GOAL OF JESUS'S MISSION: MAKING US CHILDREN OF GOD
 4. THE MEANS OF JESUS'S MISSION: GRACE AND TRUTH

GOING DEEPER

+This section will investigate John 1:1–18 in more detail to understand how John described Jesus's mission.

1. CHRIST HAS BEEN SINCE ETERNITY PAST.

■ JOHN 1:1–3

Q: *Why does John call Jesus the “Word”?*

Q: *How many ways does John reference Jesus's deity in these verses?*

John begins his Gospel by describing the divinity of Jesus Christ. This is part of the doctrine of the Trinity, one of the most distinguishing beliefs of the Christian faith. Christians believe that there is one God and that He has existed eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is inherently mysterious. Human language struggles to explain it, and the human mind struggles to understand it. But this essential Christian doctrine is John's choice to begin his Gospel.

Q: *What does God's Trinitarian existence tell us about His nature?*

Q: *How does Jesus's divinity make Him the perfect Savior?*

APPLICATION POINT – Since God has existed eternally in three persons, there has been an eternal relationship

between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We serve a relational God! God's ability to relate does not stop within the Godhead but extends to us. This is made most evident in the incarnation (appearance in human form) of Jesus Christ. Many psychiatrists have noted a pandemic of loneliness sweeping across our modern world despite people being more connected with other individuals than ever before. Christians are not immune to feelings of loneliness, but we know we have a relationship with a relational God. This week consider some ways in which you can strengthen your relationship with God. How can you invite Him into your life more? Some ways to start could include prayer and fellowship with other believers.

Q: *How is it that God made the world and that all things were made through Jesus?*

Q: *How does Christ's role as Creator relate to the Christian claim that He is king?*

After describing Jesus's deity, John quickly moves on to Jesus's role within creation. Genesis 1 reveals that God created all things through His speech. John, consistent with the intent of Genesis 1, injects a Trinitarian perspective into the creation of the world by identifying Jesus with the word spoken by the Father. Thus, God the Father created all things through God the Word.

We should not let familiarity obscure how remarkable John's claim is. He is attributing the creation of the universe to a man with whom he walked, ate, and lived. Such a claim was revolutionary and had obvious implications for the importance of Jesus Christ for everyone who has lived.

Q: *How does Christ as Creator solidify His reign over your life?*

Q: *Christ not only created humanity, but the earth and the rest of the cosmos as well. What implications does this have for our relationship to the world we live in?*

APPLICATION POINT – Just as we are not the extent of Jesus's creation, we are not the extent of His redemption. Part of Jesus's mission is to redeem the very cosmos He made (Romans 8:20–21). As followers of Christ, we are entrusted with proclaiming and spreading Jesus's mission, and this responsibility includes being caretakers of the world He made and is redeeming. There are obviously climate extremists whose views cannot be reconciled to

the gospel and Jesus's mission in this world, and Christians should avoid this extremism. But we cannot abandon our role as caretakers of what our Savior created and redeemed. What simple actions can you and your Christian community take to care for creation?

2. THE TASK OF JESUS'S MISSION: SHINING LIGHT

■ JOHN 1:4-9

Q: *What does John mean by light in these verses?*

Q: *What does John mean by darkness?*

In these verses, John introduces a metaphor describing what Jesus's mission on earth entails. Jesus's life gives light to men. What John means by this metaphor is the question interpreters of Scripture must wrestle to answer. Light enables us to perform the most basic functions needed to live on earth. Apart from light, we would endlessly stumble about in darkness. Applied to our spiritual lives, this metaphor shows that apart from the light Jesus provides, we cannot even accomplish the most basic tasks needed to please God.

An interesting detail about light and darkness is that although they are contrasts, they are not complete contrasts. They are not complete counterparts. Darkness is the absence of light. You cannot have both light and darkness. Light always overcomes darkness. John draws on this dynamic within his metaphor. The darkness does not overcome the light. Every dark place is transformed where Jesus shines His light.

Q: *How has Jesus given light to your life?*

Q: *What is the eternal state of those who live apart from the light of Christ?*

APPLICATION – The light Jesus shines upon our lives is the forgiveness of our sins and the restoration of our relationship with God. But as is the case with real light, it extends far beyond its source. The gospel changes not only our relationship with God but every aspect of our lives, including our marriages, our other family relationships, our

attitudes at work, our financial habits, even our eating habits. Are you allowing the light of Jesus to infiltrate every area of your life? If you are a Christian, choose one aspect noted above and make a list of ways in which the gospel is making a difference in that area of your life and the ways in which the gospel should be making a difference but is not. If you are a non-believer, list the ways the gospel would change your relationship with God.

Q: *What is the role of John the Baptist in this passage?*

Q: *Why does John the apostle emphasize that John the Baptist was not the light himself?*

John the Baptist is an important figure in all four Gospels. His appearance here, however, in this heightened reflection about Jesus, may strike us as odd. John was an important transitional character in the Bible. Jesus called him a prophet (Matthew 11:9), linking him to the Old Testament prophets, but he was also the first person to call attention to Jesus at the start of His earthly ministry. Thus, John the Baptist spans the Old Testament and the New Testament. His role was to be a witness concerning the Light. In this way, he is an important link to us as followers of Christ. Our role, like John's, is to be witnesses for the Light. Thus, John also links us to the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament.

Q: *Some people wondered if John was the Messiah. They confused the messenger with the message. Are there ways you have failed to recognize Jesus as the true Messiah?*

Q: *How is your witness for Jesus Christ going?*

APPLICATION POINT – John was so consumed with his witness about Jesus that some people mistook him for Jesus. Unfortunately, modern believers are seldom so enthusiastic about their testimony concerning who Christ is and what He has done. Today is our time, like John and the prophets before him, we are to be witnesses for the light of Christ. Where are you neglecting your role as a witness to the Light? In your family? At your workplace? On social media? List a few potential ways you can tell others about what Christ has done for you.

3. THE GOAL OF THE MISSION: TRANSFORMING US INTO CHILDREN OF GOD

■ JOHN 1:10–13

Q: *What does it mean to receive Jesus?*

Q: *What does it mean to be a child of God?*

For a time, Jesus was an immensely popular figure among His own people and even among some of the Romans stationed in His region. By the time of His execution, however, the masses had turned their backs on Him. Thus, John noted, the world did not know Jesus, and even His own people rejected Him. It can be difficult for modern Christians to appreciate the significance of Jesus being rejected by His own people. We tend to think of His mission from a wider frame of reference, and there is a legitimate reason for this. But the Gospel writers all emphasize Jesus's mission among the Jewish people, His people. Jesus Himself states, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is a major component of the Bible's story of our salvation. It was the rejection of Jesus among His own people that led to widespread mission among the Gentiles.

Those who embrace Jesus and His mission are reborn into God's family. This is the goal of Jesus's mission. Jesus's mission on the earth was not to build an earthly kingdom. It did not revolve around a financial portfolio or political aspirations. It cannot be best described with some vague notion such as making this world a better place. Jesus's mission is to build a family. His mission transforms us from children of the world into children of God. John described this transformation as a new birth, a metaphor he incorporates again. John does not go into great detail concerning how we are transformed into children of God at this point, but what he does say is significant. We are transformed into children of God by receiving Jesus Christ, not by any great deeds on our part. It is Jesus who has accomplished all that is needed for our salvation. We only need to receive Him and what He has done. Also, our salvation is based upon God's will, not the decree of any king or the decision of any man—including us.

Q: *Why is it dangerous to find our worth in the opinion of others?*

Q: *How do you try to earn admission into God's family apart from what Christ has done?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christians must remember that Christ, our Savior, was ultimately rejected by His own people and the rest of the world. We must be wary of finding our worth in what others think of us instead of who we are as children of God. What matters most is not how many friends we have on social media, how many “likes” our posts receive, or how popular we are among our peers. What matters most is that God considers us part of His family. Are you seeking your worth from the opinion of others? Many Christians, once they begin asking this question, are surprised to see how often they pander to the praise of others. This mindset has been deeply ingrained in us to the point that it controls the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the décor of our homes, and even the type of activities we do with our families. And social media has exacerbated the problem. We can now live for the “likes” of others even when they are nowhere around us! This week consider ways you are seeking your worth from the opinion of others and how you can prioritize what Christ thinks of you. For one day, try to run each of your decisions through the grid of “will this decision show how I value Christ above all things or show that I allow the opinion of others to shape every decision I make?” I suspect that many of us will not need to go more than an hour before realizing how this grid will radically alter our lives.

4. THE MEANS OF THE MISSION: GRACE AND TRUTH

■ JOHN 1:14–18

Q: *How does the grace and truth of the Son become known within humanity?*

Q: *Why does John contrast grace and truth with the law of Moses?*

The means of Jesus’s mission is grace and truth. John mentions this couplet twice in the closing verses of this passage. On their own, these two concepts seem rather vague here. He does not delve into our need for grace and truth or what these do. He does, however, contrast this couplet with the law of Moses, which highlights the significance John is getting at. The law of Moses showed Israel how to live with God in their midst. The problem was that the Israelites, like the rest of us, were utterly incapable of keeping God’s law perfectly. To behold the glory of God, we will need grace. That grace comes to us in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ. The truth John refers to concerns the very nature of God. For Moses and the Israelites, God was always shrouded in mystery. He dwelt among the people in the desert, but His presence was confined to the inner chamber of the tabernacle, the holy of holies. Moses saw God’s glory, but only the most remote parts of it (Exodus 33:20–23). In Jesus, however, the true glory of God was made available for everyone to see. Thanks to the witness of the four Gospels, this truth about God revealed in Jesus Christ has been preserved for us as well. This is essentially what this series on the life

of Jesus is all about—seeing the glory of God as revealed to us in the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Q: *How does grace, as opposed to law, free us to seek God's glory?*

Q: *Most religions, even the ones that claim divine revelation from their god as Christianity does, still believe in a god that is shrouded in mystery. How does the incarnation, the taking on of humanity by the Son of God, alleviate this concern for followers of Jesus?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus shows us the truth about who God is and what He is like. We should not overlook the enormous implications of this claim! Devout Muslims go through their entire lives uncertain whether their god will judge them favorably, but Christians know God has sent His Son to make salvation available to all who will receive Him. Many animists are uncertain whether their god(s) values honesty above swindling, but Christians know God is just and expects us to promote justice in the world. Religions based on the idea of reincarnation are never quite sure how the scale of their lives is tipping, but Christians know Jesus has acted decisively on our behalf. These are just a few examples of the ways in which Jesus has made God known to us. But are you taking full advantage of knowing God through Jesus? This week ask yourself what you will need to do to make the most of this study on the life of Jesus Christ. When can you devote time to reading through the lessons and answering some of the questions? How can you prioritize the times you gather with others in your church to discuss these lessons? How can you hold yourself accountable to the application points you will encounter? Make the answers to these questions known at least within your family. Husbands and wives, when you know your spouse is studying a lesson, step in to take care of the needs of your children to provide some uninterrupted time for study. It is possible that being committed to meeting with your group(s) will require you to alter your children's extra-curricular activities. It will be almost impossible to keep up with your lessons if you take three months off from group meetings for baseball season. These are hard decisions, but this may be what will be required if you are going to make the most of knowing God through Jesus Christ this year.

NEXT STEPS

John 1:1–18 describes Jesus's mission in terms of the task, the goal, and the means. How can you join Jesus on His mission to shine light into a dark world? Christians should yearn to know more about our Savior, what He did while He was on this earth, and what He told His closest followers. But one thing that must become apparent from the very beginning of this study is that we cannot be content with merely learning more about Him. We must go

alongside Him in His mission to make God known within our world. The best way you can do this is through the ministries of your church. At the outset of this study, commit to joining Christ in His mission by taking part in your church's ministries to a world that is in need of the light of Jesus.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Lord Jesus, all things were made through you, and you give them radiant light. Lead me in shining light into the world you have made.

God, help me to grow in my love and longing for you. Help me to prioritize my relationship with you above what others think about me.

Jesus, shine your light into every area of my life. There is no part of my life that does not need your radiance. Help me see where you can make the greatest impact on my daily routine, in how I face unexpected challenges, and in how I spend my leisure time.

■ LIFE OF JESUS

February 21, 2021 | *The Baptism of Jesus*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read Matthew 3:1–17

What is our duty as Christians as we await Christ's return?

Pray for openness to be transformed by this passage.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus's ministry begins a new age in God's plan for our world. It is the age in which, from the perspective of the Old Testament, God is re-establishing His kingdom in the world and installing His king to rule over it.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

In the age in which we live Jesus's kingdom has come into the world but not to the universal extent that it will when He returns. This means we are to anticipate His return and join His mission in extending His kingdom in the world until the day He returns.

■ MEDITATE

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.*

Q: *What are some of the most significant moments on the national and world stage that have happened during your lifetime?*

Q: *What were some of the factors that caused the biggest changes during your lifetime?*

“The world will never be the same.” This claim is reserved for the most seminal moments throughout human history. The fall of the Roman empire; the Battle of Hastings; the invention of the printing press; the discovery of the Americas; the nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg; the Treaty of Paris, which brought an end to the American revolution—these are all events that altered the course of human history. On a smaller scale, events within our own lifetimes have changed the world as we once knew it. Over the past generation, the school shooting at Columbine High School, 9/11, and the Covid-19 pandemic have all changed the world in which we lived.

John the Baptist knew such a moment was approaching in the life and ministry of Jesus. For John the Baptist, the last of a long line of prophets who anticipated the coming of the Messiah, Jesus’s ministry was not a surprise. John had seen the Messiah coming in the Scriptures of Israel. He went out into the wilderness of Judea to proclaim to all who would listen that the Messiah was coming, and the world would never be the same.

Q: *Can we believe Jesus was merely a good moral teacher and believe in the teachings of the Bible?*

Q: *How has Jesus changed everything in our world?*

APPLICATION POINT – Will your world ever be the same after meeting Jesus? If you have ever thought Jesus was merely a good moral teacher, just another voice among the pantheons of history, then John’s message is for you. You can try to minimize the importance of Jesus if you want, but not without denying the message of John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, the apostles, and, if we are to believe this passage, even the testimony of God Himself. The coming of Jesus is a dividing point in all of history. He is the one figure who changed everything. As you read this lesson and the rest of these lessons on the life of Jesus, ask yourself how the teaching of the Bible compares to the words of those who would write Jesus off as just another teacher. To claim that Jesus was just another teacher ignores the testimony of those who knew Him.

❏ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ All four Gospels recognize the importance of John the Baptist's ministry and Jesus's baptism, but many Christians may struggle to see the significance of John, his message, and the baptism of Jesus.

1. PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

2. THE COST OF DISBELIEF

3. THE SON'S PERFECT OBEDIENCE

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will investigate Matthew 3:1–17 to see how John's message and ministry continue to speak to our time.*

1. PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

❏ MATTHEW 3:1–6

Q: *What are the main points of John's message?*

Q: *To whom is John applying Isaiah 40:3? Why would this have been shocking to his audience?*

John's message is quite simple. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Those seeking the kingdom must repent of their sin. As a symbol of their repentance and in anticipation of the kingdom's coming, John baptized people in the Jordan river. John used Isaiah 40:3 to set up a scene that would have been very familiar to his audience. Isaiah 40:3 envisions a royal procession, the citizens of the kingdom departing the city to meet their returning king in the wilderness. The king, proceeded by someone heralding his arrival, appears, and the entire procession follows him into the city. In Isaiah's prophecy, the coming king is none other than God Himself. John the Baptist set up a similar scene through his ministry. He gathered the people from the city into the wilderness. He heralded the arrival of the

coming king. John, however, identified Jesus as the coming king. The implication could not be clearer to anyone familiar with Isaiah 40:3. John the Baptist identified Jesus as Israel's king, as Israel's God.

Q: *How can you, in the manner envisioned by Isaiah and John the Baptist, make straight the paths of our coming king?*

Q: *Do you live as though the kingdom of heaven is at hand?*

APPLICATION POINT – The paths of the Lord are made straight through our repentance of sin. Repentance includes confessing sins and a turning away from them, and not merely turning away from sin but turning to Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, repentance is replacing one master for another. Is there lingering sin in your life from which you need to repent? Take some time before continuing this study to confess and repent from any sin you are struggling with. Repentance is always the point from which Jesus begins changing our lives.

Q: *What do John's dress and diet indicate about him?*

Q: *Was John attempting to make a spectacle of himself with his message, dress, and diet?*

John's dress and diet were very modest. Although he was the herald of the coming king, he did not dress the part. Instead, his choice of clothing had much more in common with a poor, desert dweller. John's garments, however, have a deep significance. These were like the clothing of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), one of the most famous prophets in the Old Testament, who was a herald of the coming day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). He turned the hearts of the people toward repentance in preparation for the Lord's appearance. John the Baptist is linked with multiple Old Testament prophets. His role was to communicate to the people their need for repentance in the face of the fast-approaching appearance of the kingdom of God. In the context of Jesus's ministry, John was the forerunner of Jesus sent to prepare the way of the coming king.

Q: *Does your appearance draw attention to yourself or to your commitment to Christ as king?*

Q: *Have you joined John in being a herald of the coming king?*

APPLICATION POINT – As followers of Christ, we also proclaim our anticipation of the coming king. What course do your conversations with co-workers and other peers usually take? Some studies have suggested that if you do not mention your faith to others within the first six minutes of meeting them, the odds are astronomically against you ever sharing your faith with them. You do not have time to chat about the weather! Seek to be known, by your conversation, as someone who is committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

2. THE COST OF DISBELIEF

■ MATTHEW 3:7-12

Q: *Why was John so hostile toward the Pharisees and Sadducees?*

Q: *How is John's message to the Pharisees and Sadducees different from his message to the masses?*

A positive and enthusiastic chapter takes a sharp turn toward reservation and hostility with the appearance of the Pharisees and Sadducees. At this point in Matthew's Gospel, we have no background from which to understand John's reaction to these groups. It is not hard, however, to fill in the gaps from what we learn later in all the Gospels. These groups were the religious elites of Israel. There is little reason to wonder about their reaction to an outsider who captured the hearts of people they had previously enjoyed a monopoly over, not to mention John's bizarre appearance.

Furthermore, these religious elites were known to be hypocritical. They put on exorbitant displays of religious devotion, but their goal was not to bring glory to God but to put their own religiosity on display before others (Matthew 6). Such a mindset undercut any authenticity in their religious devotion. Could they bear fruit in keeping

with repentance? Not if they did it to draw attention to their own piety. Furthermore, if they were wary of accepting someone as unorthodox as John, how could they possibly be prepared to hear the message of Jesus? Indeed, as the Gospels progress, we see time after time that they were not prepared to hear what Jesus had to say.

❓: *Are you a religious elite on the outside looking in on the followers of Christ?*

❓: *Are your religious acts undercut by a lack of authenticity in your confession?*

APPLICATION POINT – The Pharisees and Sadducees had been at their religious game for so long that they could not stop playing. The same could be said for many people who have long filled the aisles of a church service and the seats of a Sunday school or small group meeting. This week consider ways to practice your faith that would draw zero attention to yourself. Give anonymously to a family in need in your church or to your church's missionary fund. Pray in secret for an extended time. Perform an unseen service at your church building. If this diminishes your enthusiasm for practicing your faith, you are in great need of the repentance John preaches.

❓: *What two analogies did John use to describe the judgment coming to the Pharisees and Sadducees?*

❓: *How do these analogies relate to John's statements concerning Abraham?*

Jewish people at the time of Jesus and John the Baptist (both Jews themselves) believed that the kingdom of heaven would inaugurate a new age on the earth in which God condemned the unrighteous and reestablished a kingdom among His people. This is essentially what John the Baptist was teaching as well. The difference between John and the Jewish religious elites was that the Jewish elites believed that their Jewish heritage, traceable to Abraham, guaranteed their place in the kingdom of heaven. They did not believe they needed to repent, and they had little need for Jesus.

John the Baptist, however, challenged their beliefs at every point. According to him, being a descendant of Abraham made little difference if they refused to repent of their wicked deeds. John foresaw a time of judgment even among the descendants of Abraham that would result in a thinning out among the people of God. Those who were faithful and penitent children of Abraham would remain while those who, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, eschewed

repentance would be removed from the kingdom of heaven. John used two analogies to illustrate his point. The first concerns an orchard. At the time of the harvest, the owners of the orchard cut down and remove the trees that did not produce fruit to clear the way for new trees to be planted. The second concerns a wheat harvest. When wheat is harvested, the farmers collect the seeds within their husks. The wheat crop is then thinned by separating the seeds from their husks, which is known as “chaff.” According to John, the descendants of Abraham would be sifted and thinned out by the coming judgment of God.

John placed Jesus at the very center of his message to the Pharisees and Sadducees. The coming judgment would ultimately center on their response to Him. Jesus is the harvester. If they responded to Jesus in repentance, they would bear fruit and remain with the children of Abraham. If they did not, however, they would be removed from the kingdom of heaven.

Q: *In what ways could you, like the religious elites addressed by John, be falsely assuming that your standing with God is secure?*

Q: *What are some common misconceptions in our culture concerning what it means to be a Christian?*

APPLICATION POINT – There is an endless number of ways in which people, even those who frequently attend church, falsely assume that their relationship with God is secure. Many people believe that if they try their best to live a moral life, God will work things out in their favor in the end. Some believe that by merely attending church, they will remain when God separates the wheat from the chaff. Other people believe that giving financially to the church will put them in God’s good graces. What misconceptions do you hold concerning your relationship with God and where you will stand on the day of judgment?

Sometimes faithful Christians are not confronted with these issues at the point of the final judgment but in the face of searing loss in their lives. The widow wonders if perhaps her husband might not have died if she had been more faithful. The father wonders if his children would not have rebelled against him if he had been more committed to his family. The teenager questions whether her failed relationship is tied to her disobedience to God in some matter. These are all misconceptions concerning how God relates to His people. Spend time this week identifying patterns of thought in your life that are rooted in misconceptions of how God relates to His people.

3. THE SON'S PERFECT OBEDIENCE

❏ MATTHEW 3:13-17

Q: *If John was administering a baptism of repentance, why did Jesus request baptism?*

Q: *How does Jesus's baptism fulfill all righteousness?*

One of the central tenants of the Christian faith is that Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). This is crucial for the logic behind the gospel. The gospel claims that Jesus, being without sin, was therefore able to take on the sins of others. If Jesus were also under the reign of sin, there would be no hope for us.

If Jesus was without sin, why did He request John's baptism of repentance? This same issue appears to be the root of John's objection to baptizing Him. Surely, He must be mistaken! But Jesus insisted on being baptized by John and even seemed to indicate that this baptism would be essential to His mission. What can account for Jesus's desire to take part in a baptism of repentance? The best explanation appears to be that Jesus's baptism was done on our behalf. Sin has corrupted every part of our lives, including, so it would appear, our ability to repent of sin. Thus, Jesus, as our substitute, repented fully on our behalf through submitting to a baptism of repentance.

Q: *In what areas of your life do you feel sin's intrusive presence the most?*

Q: *Why are humans resistant to repentance?*

APPLICATION POINT – Repentance is perhaps the most challenging discipline Christians face. It is not in our nature to admit to doing anything wrong. When confronted with wrongdoing, we instinctually either deny it or seek to explain away our guilt. This reaction to the reality of our fallen nature could not bring us further from the gospel. If Christ died to save lost sinners, then we place ourselves in grave danger if we attempt to deny our own sin. Instead of denying your sin and your need for repentance, attempt to be proactive about repenting this week. Be willing to admit that you may have erred in deed or judgment and confess your shortcomings and sins to others. You are never closer to Jesus than when you are ready to confess your need for Him.

Q: *How are all three members of the Godhead present at Jesus's baptism?*

Q: *What is the significance of the words spoken by the voice from heaven?*

When Jesus emerged from the waters of baptism, Matthew reports that a voice was heard affirming what the reader already knows to be true. Jesus is the beloved Son of God, and God has delighted in Him. We began by noting that John was anticipating the arrival of a new age with the appearance of the kingdom of heaven. This anticipation was affirmed by the voice heard from heaven. God identified Jesus as His beloved Son. The words spoken are an echo of Psalm 2:7. In this psalm, the One who sits in heaven decrees that His Anointed will demand the obedience of the nations. The kingdoms of the earth will be subjected to the reign of the obedient Son of God.

Q: *In Psalm 2, the Father declares that the Son will demand the obedience of the nations. How are you actively obeying the Son in all your life's situations?*

Q: *Psalm 2 ends by claiming that everyone who takes refuge in the Son will be blessed. From where are you looking for blessings?*

APPLICATION POINT – Psalm 2 offers the reader two ways, and only two ways, of living. The kings of the earth can either submit to the rule of the Son and be blessed, or they can conspire against the Son and be dashed to pieces. The same options lie before us. We can submit to the rule of the Son and prosper under His reign, or we can conspire against His rule and suffer judgment. Although our salvation is a one-time event, choosing to submit to the Son demands a daily denial of self in favor of Christ. This week, begin each day by reminding yourself that you are submitting to the rule of the Son. This is a wonderful reminder of the gospel and of Jesus's reign at the start of every day.

NEXT STEPS

After we encounter Jesus, our world should never be the same. This is often true when we initially turn to Christ for salvation, but as time wears on, the initial feelings of affection, thankfulness, and devotion often begin to wane. This week, take a trip down the gospel's memory lane. Write out the story of your conversion to Jesus Christ. What was your life like before? What sins did you struggle with? What were your habits? What led you to Christ as Savior? How has your life been changed since? Reliving your testimony can often help you see past your current circumstances and appreciate where God has brought you since committing to Christ's lordship. If there is time, consider sharing your testimonies during your group time. Your testimonies can be encouraging to one another.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Lord Jesus, the world will never be the same after your life, your death, your resurrection, and your ascension. May I always stand in awe of your work in my life and in the world.

Father, your kingdom has come now upon the earth. Direct my steps to join your mission in making your kingdom pervasive over every square inch of this world.

Jesus, thank you for obeying the Father perfectly on my behalf. I cannot obey God's will perfectly. I cannot even repent perfectly of disobeying God's will. I am in utter need of your substitution on my behalf.

■ LIFE OF JESUS

February 28, 2021 | Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 3:1–21

Pray that God would help you see what habits of the mind may be keeping you from knowing Him as you ought.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God is at work to bring His kingdom into our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

We often inhibit the work of the Holy Spirit through our false theories of how God works in the world. We need to see the light that Jesus shines in these dark places. .

■ MEDITATE

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage’s main point to your own life.

❓: *Before you heard the gospel, how would you have explained Christianity?*

Q: *How did your understanding of Jesus and God change after you became a Christian?*

A common principle in nature and in life is that sometimes that which is old or dead must be cleared out for there to be new growth. Gardeners must “deadhead” their rose bushes so the plant’s energy can be devoted to new buds. Cities must tear down old buildings to make way for new, modern projects. A home remodel usually requires “gutting” the existing structure to prepare the way for new appliances and fixtures. Parents must purge their children’s toys and clothes to make room for the onslaught of new gifts at birthdays and Christmas.

A similar process must happen at the start of our lives as Christians if we are to grow in our faith, and it must continue throughout our lives. We must be continually replacing the old, sinful vestiges of our lives with the truth of the gospel and a delight in the holiness of God. As John 3:1–21 makes clear, this is not merely a thought exercise but the result of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work in our lives. Being saved is a work of God, not just the replacement of one thought with a better one.

Nicodemus was interested in Jesus’s ministry. It is unclear why he approached Jesus on this occasion. Perhaps he wanted to learn from the teacher who had come from God and had performed the miraculous signs that Jesus had. Or perhaps he wanted to simply express his solidarity with Jesus. Whatever the case, Jesus showed Nicodemus that he could not retain his old ways of thinking about God, Israel, and the Messiah if he wanted to become a disciple of Jesus. To be Jesus’s disciple, Nicodemus must be prepared to purge his old beliefs to follow Christ. The same is true for us.

Q: *What beliefs are you holding on to that are incompatible with the gospel?*

Q: *What will it cost you to jettison these beliefs?*

APPLICATION POINT – Habits of the mind are difficult to break. Even after we accept Christ as Savior, we often find it hard to give up many of the ways we formerly thought about God and about life. Sin can root itself so deeply into our being that it continues to influence our thought patterns and actions. The legalism and moralism that once characterized our understanding of Christianity can linger and influence how we think about God, the gospel, and our fellow Christians. Take time this week to pinpoint these lingering influences in your life.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ In John 3:1–21, Jesus seeks to transform Nicodemus’s understanding of the kingdom of God. It is not through family heritage that one enters the kingdom but through the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. WHAT KEEPS US FROM GOD?

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

3. MARKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will investigate John 3:1–21 to understand Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus about the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit.*

1. WHAT KEEPS US FROM GOD?

■ JOHN 3:1–7

Q: *What do we know about Nicodemus from John 3:1–21?*

Q: *Based on his own words and Jesus’s remarks, what did Nicodemus get wrong in their conversation?*

Nicodemus was seeking. Jesus must have seemed quite radical to him. He disrupted the business at the temple by driving people out with a whip (John 2:13–22). He associated with John the Baptist, who was a polarizing figure in Palestine at this time. And most of Nicodemus’s peers had likely written Jesus off as another idealist or, worse, condemned Him as an unorthodox radical. But there were the signs Jesus had performed. Unlike most of His contemporaries, Nicodemus must have thought Jesus’s ministry was ultimately positive. What he heard from Jesus this night would challenge him in ways he never thought possible.

The Jewish people are descendants of Abraham. In the Old Testament, God established a covenant with Abraham in which He promised him a land, a people, and a special relationship with Him. God also made a special covenant

with Abraham's offspring in which He declared the Israelites to be His special people. Thus, the Jews of Jesus's day believed they were part of the kingdom of God simply because of their physical ancestry. Jesus challenged a belief that would have been basic or fundamental to any Jewish person such as Nicodemus. It is not Jewish ancestry that makes people part of God's kingdom but the work of the Holy Spirit that transforms them into a part of God's kingdom. Jesus compared this work of the Holy Spirit to a new birth. Nicodemus was unprepared for this metaphor, but it vividly captures the point Jesus was making. Nicodemus had always depended on his ancestry as his access into God's kingdom, but Jesus confronted this belief by saying a fleshly birth (Nicodemus's ancestry) does not guarantee access into a spiritual kingdom.

Q: *What strongly held beliefs do your peers, coworkers, and neighbors hold that you must challenge in order to lead them to Christ?*

Q: *How can you challenge these beliefs in sincere but delicate ways?*

APPLICATION POINT – In a secular culture, people are depending more, not less, on personal beliefs. Interestingly, the belief in one's identity, a concept remarkably similar to Nicodemus's belief in his Jewish birth, has become the center of how people understand themselves within a destabilizing world. People define their identity by their gender, race, nationality, socio-economic status, political affiliation, career choice, education, height, weight, and an endless number of other aspects. It is the combination of these factors, they believe, that makes you uniquely you and helps guide you along in life. From a Christian worldview perspective, there are a lot of difficulties with this approach, but the primary difficulty is that, like Nicodemus's ancestry, identity will never save. People who place their hope in their own identity rather than the work of the Holy Spirit, will never enter the kingdom of God. As you go into your workplaces, your neighborhood gatherings, and your extended family, listen for those who are seeking fulfillment in their identity and be prepared to challenge them with the truths of the gospel.

Q: *How did Nicodemus conceive of Jesus and His mission on the earth?*

Q: *What attracted Nicodemus to Jesus?*

Nicodemus was attracted to Jesus because of the signs He performed. He was correct to recognize that these signs were an indication of the presence of God. Nicodemus underestimated, however, the implications of these signs. He called Jesus a teacher, which is not incorrect, but we know from earlier in John's Gospel that Jesus was much more than just a teacher. He is the Son of God (John 1:14). Nicodemus's confession was part of the reason he could not enter the kingdom of God. When the Spirit is at work in our lives, we can see clearly who Jesus is.

Q: *What are some common misconceptions about who Jesus is and what He came to do?*

Q: *Why are these misconceptions so common in our culture?*

APPLICATION POINT – Nicodemus called Jesus a teacher. Jesus was, of course, a teacher, but his conversation with Jesus revealed that Nicodemus had an incomplete understanding of who Jesus was. The same problem is prevalent today. Many people are willing to confess Jesus as a teacher, philosopher, religious leader, and even as an all-around good person. But Jesus demands that we know Him as Lord and Savior. This week, prepare yourself to challenge those who would give an incomplete explanation of who Jesus is and what He came to do. Memorize one or two Bible verses that acknowledge Jesus's divinity (John 1:1; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1). Also, memorize one or two verses that identify Jesus as Savior (2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 3:2). These are small but essential steps in challenging our culture's insufficient misconceptions about who Jesus is.

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES THROUGH THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

■ JOHN 3:8-17

Q: *What analogy did Jesus offer to help us understand the work of the Holy Spirit?*

Q: *What is the meaning of Jesus's analogy?*

Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. This new birth, however, comes from the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual rebirth. Jesus compared the work of the Holy Spirit to the wind. We can see the effects of the wind, but we cannot see the wind itself. Furthermore, we do not make the wind blow. It is out of our control. The same can be said of the Holy Spirit. We can see the effects of the Holy Spirit's work, but we cannot see the Holy Spirit itself working upon someone. Furthermore, we cannot manipulate the Holy Spirit.

Q: *If the kingdom of God comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is beyond our control, what is our responsibility in leading others to salvation?*

Q: *The modern mind is quite critical of God in general and the Holy Spirit in particular. Skeptics have little room for the non-material universe. How can you respond to them?*

APPLICATION POINT – Salvation is ultimately out of our control. Many faithful Christians have prayed for friends and loved ones to confess Christ as Savior and Lord to no avail. We cannot force the Holy Spirit to work in the life of another. What then is our role in bringing someone else to Christ? Our role is to remain faithful. We are to remain faithful to the Bible's command to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are to remain faithful in prayer. We are to remain faithful in trusting the wisdom of God to move in the lives of others. If you are not already, begin praying for the salvation of two or three people you know.

Q: *What was Jesus's response to Nicodemus's questions?*

Q: *What are the two ways that God reveals Himself to us?*

Jesus seemed disappointed and amazed that Nicodemus would be so oblivious to the dynamics of the kingdom of God. The primary reason was that He believed this to be revealed truth. He pointed to two modes of revealed truth. The first is Himself. Jesus descended from the Father to dwell among us. Thus, He is able to perfectly reveal God the Father to us, including how the kingdom of God will come among us. The second mode of revealed truth is the Bible. Jesus pointed Nicodemus to a passage in the Old Testament (Numbers 21:4–9). The Israelites had

been complaining of their circumstances, and God sent an infestation of snakes into their camp. When the people repented, Moses was instructed to construct a bronze snake at the top of a long pole which was erected high over the camp. When the people looked at the image of the serpent, they were healed from their snake bites. According to Jesus, this story is a testimony to how the kingdom of God is at work in the world. Instead of a bronze serpent, it would be Jesus who was lifted up for all to look upon in faith. Thus, Jesus was amazed that Nicodemus was so unaware of the kingdom of God.

Q: *Is God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ and the inspired Word shaping your understanding of the world, or are you resisting living in accordance with revealed truth as Nicodemus was?*

Q: *One of the ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives is through simple acts of faith, such as when the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent. Are you willing to seek God through simple acts of faith, or do you demand that every detail be figured out and every risk absolved before following the Holy Spirit's lead?*

APPLICATION POINT – Modern people are becoming more and more skeptical of the Bible, but for Christians, the Bible is the standard for how we live and believe in the world. If the Bible is the Word of God, then it should confront us at some point in our lives because we are finite, fallible human beings. Does the Bible ever teach anything you do not like? Does the Bible ever change how you would approach a certain situation? Or, have you become adept at explaining away the parts of the Bible that infringe upon how you think the world should be? Make a list of the ways the Bible changes how you make decisions in the following categories: money, sex, politics, time management. If the Bible does not radically alter your life, you are either super holy or resisting what it teaches.

3. MARKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

■ JOHN 3:18–21

Q: *Who will be condemned by the life and ministry of Jesus?*

Q: *Why did God send the Son into the world?*

Entering the kingdom of God is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot see the Holy Spirit working but we can see the effects of His work. What are some of those effects? One of the primary effects or indicators that the Holy Spirit is working is belief. When followers of Christ believe in Him and in His mission on this earth, it is a mark of the work of the Spirit. When Christians believe the Bible and follow its teachings, it is a mark of the work of the Spirit.

Q: *Are you consistently believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ?*

Q: *Are you embodying that belief through action?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus’s remarks about belief are a wonderful reminder of the His gospel. The forgiveness of our sins is not based on our good works or righteous deeds. We must merely believe in the gospel. That belief will transform our hearts so that we pursue righteousness in life and deed, but our good works are the result of our salvation, not the cause. The freedom we have in the gospel will also spur us on to worship. During your next church-wide worship service, allow your freedom in Christ to elevate your heart to God in worship.

Q: *Why do people fail to believe in Jesus Christ?*

Q: *How did Jesus describe those who do not believe in Him?*

The mark of the Holy Spirit’s work is belief, but Jesus did not choose to describe the absence of the Holy Spirit’s work as unbelief. Instead, Jesus described it as loving darkness and hating the light. Unbelievers love what is evil and hate what is good. This does not have to cover every arena of good and evil. Unbelievers can and often do good things. Unbelievers can live moral lives. But in the arena of who Jesus Christ is and what He came to do, unbelievers

cannot help but do the evil of denying the person and work of Jesus Christ and love any other explanation of what is good and true.

Q: *How do you define good and evil?*

Q: *In what ways does our culture love the darkness (anything that is contrary to the perfect will of God)?*

APPLICATION POINT – Goodness is that which corresponds to God’s moral character and will. To know what is good demands that we seek to know and understand God. Humans, however, often attempt to offer their own explanations for what is good and evil. They depart from using God as the standard for what is good and evil, right and wrong. As a result, their morality will always fall short of what God demands. Christians also can fall into the trap of devising our own standards of good and evil. This attempt to redefine good and evil underlies the health and wealth gospel. Good is a life of ease and luxury. Evil is illness and poverty. One will look in vain for this explanation of good and evil from the Bible, however. What other standards of good and evil are Christians tempted to adopt? This week identify some of your top vocational, financial, and family goals. You would naturally believe these goals to be good, but how do they compare with God’s standard for goodness? How easily can you trace a line from these goals to God being glorified in your life and in this world?

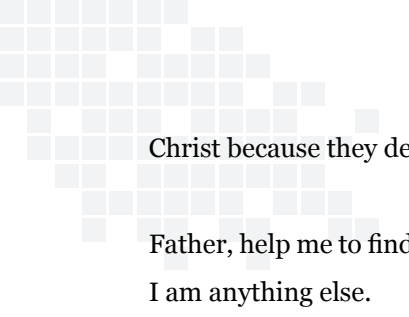
NEXT STEPS

Many of the applications in this lesson involve self-reflection. It is good to reflect often about your Christian faith. The problem, however, is that we usually have blind spots when examining ourselves. It is helpful to have an accountability partner to help you examine your Christian walk. This should be someone you know and trust, at least to a large degree, and someone who is able to address instances when you do not live according to God’s will. This week, consider who in your group you could start an accountability partnership with.

PRAY

+*Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

God, help me to identify the ways in which I misunderstand the gospel. Help me to confront others who deny Jesus



Christ because they deny He is the Savior of the world.

Father, help me to find my identity in Jesus Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection. I am a Christian before I am anything else.

Lord, the salvation of others is beyond my control. Help me to be faithful to share and let me be content with however your Holy Spirit moves.

Lord, help me to believe and not to love the darkness.

■ LIFE OF JESUS

March 7, 2021 | *Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 4:1–42

Pray that God would help you see where the harvest is ready in your community.

Pray that God would help you see the implications of this passage for the harvest in your community.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus's mission was to transform lives through personal interaction.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus came to transform lives, lives of individuals and lives of whole communities. As His followers, we carry on the missional work He began during His time on earth.

■ MEDITATE

“Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.” (John 4:35b)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to introduce the main idea of this lesson and apply this main idea to your life.

❓: *Why do you believe Jesus included us in the proclamation of His mission to the world?*

Q: *What is your role in the mission of Jesus?*

The construction of a house is divided among several different crews, each of which accomplishes a specific task. One crew lays the foundation. Another frames the structure. Another installs the plumbing, or drywall, or electrical wiring, or flooring, and so on. Before any of this work begins, someone else designs the house and makes a building plan. Each crew performs an essential operation in the construction of the house. By working in different crews, the house is completed much more efficiently because each crew can specialize in one aspect of homebuilding.

In some ways, Jesus's mission on earth is carried out by different crews. Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection from the grave accomplished all that was needed for our salvation. The Holy Spirit is the internal witness in everyone who believes. Our role is to give voice to the gospel in whatever context we find ourselves. The difference, of course, is the reason for the division of labor. In building a house, construction crews are governed by efficiency. Jesus's mission is not governed by efficiency but by necessity. Only the incarnate Son of God could accomplish what is needed for our salvation. For our part, we need to be included within Jesus's mission for our own sanctification.

In John 4:1–42, Jesus confronted a Samaritan woman with the truth of who He was and what He had come to do. When she returned with the rest of her village, Jesus took the opportunity to teach the disciples that they would “reap” the harvest He and the Holy Spirit would “sow.” This passage shows us that we are an extension of Jesus's ministry and mission on the earth. Just as the disciples were to reap the harvest Jesus prepared, we too, even after all these years, are commanded to harvest the fields that have been sown for us.

Q: *How are we connected to the ministry of the disciples and ultimately to the ministry of Jesus?*

Q: *How does Jesus's work provide us with the confidence we need to carry out His mission?*

APPLICATION POINT – The wonderful thing about taking part in Jesus's mission is that we can never do more than what He has prepared in advance for us to do. Jesus is the one who has planted the field. Our job is merely to harvest what He has sown. It is fine to have evangelism and baptism goals, but even with these goals in mind,

we have to remember that it is never our duty to save anyone, nor are we even capable of saving anyone. Our responsibility is to be faithful in sharing the good news of what Christ has done. Whether a person accepts the good news we share is not up to us. As you prepare to read and interact with this lesson, express in prayer your belief that Jesus has “sown the fields” in advance. Pray that God will keep you faithful to pursuing the harvest He began.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ In John 4:1–42, Jesus engaged a woman with claims that He was the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus’s interaction with this woman and His disciples is filled with insights into how we can best approach sharing our faith in our day.

1. MAKING CONNECTIONS

2. DEALING WITH DIVERSIONS

3. THE CHRISTIAN’S PRIORITY

4. AN UNEXPECTED MODEL FOR MINISTRY

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will examine John 4:1–42 in more detail to understand our role within Jesus’s mission.*

1. MAKING CONNECTIONS

■ JOHN 4:1–15

Q: *What were the circumstances of Jesus’s journey through Samaria?*

Q: *Where did Jesus encounter the Samaritan woman?*

There is nothing extraordinary about Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman. Jesus was not on a mission trip or an evangelistic crusade. He was simply traveling from Judea to Galilee. He was leaving Judea because He was beginning to draw attention away from the ministry of John the Baptist. We cannot know for sure why this was a

problem. Perhaps Jesus knew John's ministry needed to come before His own in God's plan, or perhaps He did not want the kind of attention John's ministry entailed. Whatever the case, Jesus was not going to this Samaritan town, Sychar, to start an evangelistic movement. He met this woman at a well near the town, a common meeting place in that time. Most households probably made several trips to the well during the day, but it was not the place where you would expect to conduct business or have a substantial religious conversation. Nothing about the details of this encounter makes us think Jesus was looking to have a religious conversation with someone. He simply took the opportunity that was provided to Him.

We are given opportunities every day to share our faith in Jesus Christ with the people we encounter. The problem is, unlike Jesus on this occasion, we often do a poor job of taking advantage of those opportunities. Many of us have become adept at separating our evangelistic witness from our everyday lives. Evangelism is something we do on mission trips or when there is a special emphasis at church. We let opportunities to share our faith with others pass without even realizing it. This was not the case with Jesus. He was not on a special mission trip. He was not in a place where religious conversation would have been expected. He simply took the opportunity which God had provided.

Q: *What are some ways you can connect the people you encounter doing normal, every-day activities with the gospel of Jesus?*

Q: *In a world that increasingly de-emphasizes personal interaction, how can you continue to interact personally with people for the sake of the gospel?*

APPLICATION POINT – Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our society was already devising ways to limit personal interaction. It is more convenient to arrive at a store and have your groceries loaded into your trunk than to get out of your vehicle, enter the store, and shop for the things you need, but you have not interacted with anyone. It is easier and quicker to shop online, but it cuts out all personal interaction. Working from home is often far more convenient than driving to the office every day, but personal encounters are limited to online meetings. Many of these cultural developments are more financially viable as well.

Christians, however, cannot think of life only in terms of convenience and finances. We are gospel people, and the spread of the gospel typically demands personal interaction. Christians may need to consider whether we need to resist some or all of the structures our society is creating to de-personalize our lives. Nevertheless, many of the cultural developments noted above will not go away. Christians are going to have to develop new ways of interacting with people, especially after a pandemic that has dissolved many of the ways we used to interact with others. Within your group, brainstorm about how we can continue to create personal interactions with people who need to hear the gospel we hold so dear.

Q: *How does Jesus initiate a gospel-centered conversation with the Samaritan woman?*

Q: *How would you explain Jesus's analogy comparing the gospel and water?*

When He entered Samaria, Jesus entered hostile territory. Although the Samaritans were descendants of Abraham, Jewish people at the time of Jesus shunned them as an aberration from Judaism. Many of the Samaritans were the offspring of intermarriages between the Israelites who remained in the land after the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the exiles from other nations the Assyrians brought to repopulate the area. When the Jewish people returned from their exile in Babylon, they held the Samaritans at arm's length. This space created even further differences between the two peoples, including the religious differences alluded to in this passage. Thus, Jesus could assume very little common ground between Himself and the Samaritan woman. The Samaritan woman's background also suggests that she was placed firmly on the fringes of even her own society.

This cultural distance did not, however, dissuade Jesus from engaging her in a spiritual conversation. Instead, Jesus found a point of conversation with the woman and an analogy with which to explain the good news concerning who He is. Their conversation did not immediately revolve around the intricacies of the gospel or theology. Instead, Jesus requested a drink of water and then made a comparison between the water and His own ministry. The analogy Jesus offered flew straight over the Samaritan woman's head. This does not mean that she was unintelligent. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, no one can understand and accept the truth of the gospel. Notice that Jesus did not get discouraged or give up. Instead, He used the common ground established between them to continue the conversation.

Q: *What analogies do you use to illustrate the gospel to unbelievers?*

Q: *How have you responded in the past when people have failed to understand your presentation of the gospel?*

APPLICATION POINT – Since no two conversations are ever the same, no two conversations surrounding the gospel are the same. That is why it is good to have a number of tools or methods for sharing your faith with non-

believers. Sometimes, you will be able to have an extended discussion. At other times, however, you may only have a minute or two to share your faith. How will you approach these conversations? Sometimes you will be sharing with people a lot older or a lot younger than you are. You may be sharing with someone who grew up in a church context or someone who is completely unfamiliar with anything related to the church. How will you be prepared for these challenges? Consider starting an evangelism journal. This can be a place to record the conversations you have with others about the gospel. You can write down what was said, what went well, and what did not go so well. Evaluating your conversations can help you create a strategy for sharing your faith with this person in the future. An evangelism journal simply gives you a place to record and reflect on the conversations you have about the gospel so that you can be better prepared to share your faith.

2. DEALING WITH DIVERSIONS

■ JOHN 4:16–26

Q: *How would you explain the abruptness of how Jesus shifted their conversation?*

Q: *Why do you think Jesus addressed this woman's relationship issues?*

As John records the conversation, Jesus's command that the woman get her husband seems to come out of nowhere. We have to remember that we are not necessarily given the entire conversation between Jesus and the woman. It is likely that there was some additional dialogue leading up to Jesus's statement. Whatever the case, Jesus was aware of the woman's marital background and current relationship. When sharing the gospel, we are going to encounter people who are entangled in sin. When confronted with her past, the woman acknowledged Jesus as a prophet. We often think of prophets as predicting the future, but Old Testament prophets just as often confronted sin in their contemporary cultures. Thus, Jesus was speaking prophetically to the woman in confronting her past sins.

What is our responsibility when we encounter people who need the gospel but are entangled in sin? First, we must never give the impression that sinners have to get their lives straightened out before they can accept the gospel. If that were the case, none of us would ever be able to accept the gospel because none of us will ever be able to completely rid our lives of sin (1 John 1:8). Second, we are obligated to confront sin in the lives of others when we share the gospel with them. They cannot save themselves by getting rid of their sin, but the power of the gospel is what delivers them from sin, both the eternal consequences and the present bondage. If we fail to address sin, we fail to fully explain the gospel of Christ.

Q: *When sharing our faith, we do need to confront sin, but we cannot address every sin in a person's life. How do we decide what sin to address?*

Q: *Why would we be tempted to compromise our beliefs about sin when sharing the gospel?*

APPLICATION – Although conversion is ultimately not up to us, there is a temptation to try to “sell” someone on the gospel when we are sharing. If we were selling something, we would want to focus on the features of the product that would make that person want to buy it. The gospel is the most wonderful news a person can hear, and we want to present the gospel in an attractive way. We cannot, however, try to appease the person we are sharing with by ignoring the need for repentance of sin. To do so would compromise the very faith we are sharing. We obviously cannot address every sin in a person's life, and we do not need to. But if we are aware of sin that is deeply engrained in a person's life or if we know a person is committed to a particular sin, we must tell them that the gospel demands repentance, a turning away from sin. As Christians seeking to share our faith with others, we need to be aware of the major sins within our own culture and be committed to confronting them when sharing our faith. In the group time this week, identify some of these sinful patterns within our culture.

Q: *How did the Samaritan woman respond when Jesus confronted her with her past?*

Q: *How did Jesus respond to the woman's diversion?*

When Jesus confronted the Samaritan woman with her sin, she immediately tried to change the subject. She brought up a point of contention between Jewish and Samaritan religious practices. The temple was in Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem became the central place for worship and religious affairs, at least when the people were serving God instead of pagan idols. Jerusalem, however, was in Jewish territory, and the Samaritans loathed the idea of having to travel to Jerusalem. They built their own temple at a location that also had religious significance in their ancestral past.

When sharing your faith with others, we will often find the conversation steering off the course that we anticipated. Sometimes, the person we are sharing with intentionally tries to divert the conversation to something they are more

comfortable with. On other occasions, our conversation partner is just moving to what seems to them to be the next natural topic. Whatever the case, we have to be ready to respond. Sometimes, we may need to recognize the diversion and get the conversation back on the intended track. At other times, we will have to try to create a bridge to the gospel from where the person is wanting to go. Notice that this is the path Jesus took with the Samaritan woman. He did not dismiss her diversion and return to her marital problems. Instead, He introduced her to the spiritual truth she needed from the topic she wanted to discuss. That is the marvelous thing about the gospel. The gospel is central to all of life, so we can lead people to a conversation about the gospel from almost anything.

Q: *What are some ways that you can prepare yourself to lead others to the gospel when the conversation does not go the way you planned or expected?*

Q: *What are some of the most likely diversions you may encounter when trying to have gospel conversations today?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is unlikely that you will be as adept at leading people to the gospel as Jesus was. It can be challenging to think “on your feet” when you are in the midst of sharing with others. This is another reason that keeping an evangelism journal can be helpful. This will be a way to reflect on how your conversations went and think about better possible routes to the gospel that you could have taken. When you are in similar situations in the future, you will have a better plan for how to move forward from wherever the conversation goes.

3. THE CHRISTIAN’S PRIORITY

■ JOHN 4:27, 31–38

Q: *What did the disciples try to get Jesus to do?*

Q: *What was Jesus’s response?*

Upon returning from the town, the disciples were initially concerned that Jesus was speaking with a woman. They were more concerned with cultural mandates than they were for this woman’s need for Jesus. After she was gone,

the disciples urged Jesus to eat. Jesus responded by trying to help them see the enormous opportunity for ministry that was coming their way. In Jesus's mind, this was no time to be thinking about food! Instead, He was seeking to nourish His soul through reaping the spiritual harvest that was approaching Him. Jesus also encouraged the disciples to quit thinking about what they considered a pressing physical matter to focus on the spiritual opportunity at hand. Jesus compared the Samaritan crowds coming to seek Him to a field that had already been sown and was ready for harvesting. The hard work had been done. The disciples merely needed to take part in the joyful labor of helping others believe.

❖: *What are you prioritizing in your life at the expense of making Jesus known?*

❖: *How can you transform what you typically do for fun and leisure into opportunities to make Christ known?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus offered the disciples a new set of priorities. Where they were concerned with Jesus's physical needs, Jesus turned their attention to the people's spiritual needs. This same process needs to happen for us. The physical needs of life can often be overwhelming to figure out, and they tend to multiply. We have to take steps to provide food, water, and shelter for ourselves and for those we love. In our current moment, however, it is often not physical needs that take our attention away from sharing Jesus with the lost but our love for leisure and entertainment. We live in the most abundant time in human history. We have luxuries, both in time and matter, that previous generations could not have dreamed. But this excess has not increased our witness to our Savior. If anything, it has diminished it! American Christians need to rethink how we spend our leisure time. This does not necessarily entail a dramatic shift in the things we do. Perhaps instead of watching the big game alone this weekend, you could consider hosting others, both believers and non-believers. Perhaps instead of being entirely consumed with your own goals when you leave your home, you could also go with the gospel on your heart. When people with the gospel ready on their minds meet people who need what Christ has to offer, the harvest will be taken in.

4. AN UNEXPECTED MODEL FOR MINISTRY

❑ **JOHN 4:28–30, 39–42**

Q: *What was the woman's response to meeting Jesus?*

Q: *What was the initial catalyst for this Jesus-movement among the Samaritan village?*

Again, as readers of John's Gospel, we have to remember that we are likely only seeing snippets of Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman. There was more said between them than John included in the story, and he intended for his readers to fill in some of the gaps in conversation. In this case, the woman was receptive to Jesus's claim to be Israel's Messiah. She immediately returned to the town and shared her encounter with Jesus. Notice that her background, which would have once been a source of embarrassment and shame for her, now became the focal point of her joyful message in the town, and this transformation is evidently a validation of Jesus's message for the townspeople. In many ways, the Samaritan woman is the faithful witness the disciples should have been. They entered the town and came back by themselves because they were preoccupied with their physical needs. She went back into the town as a transformed person and inspired droves of people to seek Jesus. When people who have been transformed by the power of the gospel are unleashed in the world, they cannot help but be an attractive witness to the goodness of knowing Christ.

Q: *How has Jesus transformed your life in a way that others need to hear?*

Q: *Are you making Christ attractive to those who need Him?*

APPLICATION POINT – If you are a Christian, then Jesus has changed your life. Sometimes that change is obvious, as in the case with the Samaritan woman. For others, especially those who grew up in Christian homes, that change can be hard to see, but it is there. In your evangelism journal, write down how Christ has changed your life. Be ready to share this testimony with others who need to be changed by the gospel of Jesus.

NEXT STEPS

Several of the application points in this lesson suggest creating an evangelism journal. This journal can serve as a record of what you are doing to spread the gospel and as a think-tank where you can plan how to be more successful in sharing your faith. The next step is to move forward with this journal. If you already have a prayer journal or some other type of journal you keep to help you grow in your faith, you do not have to start a new journal. You can combine evangelism entries into what you have. The thought of sharing the gospel with others may make you uncomfortable. You are not alone, but your discomfort is not a reason to forego taking part in the great harvest that has been sown for you to reap. Perhaps the first entry in your journal should just be a candid admission of your timid nature in this area. Then challenge yourself to move past this nervousness.

PRAY

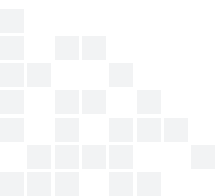
+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

My Lord, help make me aware of the harvest you have sown in my community.

Lord Jesus, I pray that my love for you would overflow from me to the point that the whole world would know what you have done for me.

God, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be at work preparing a harvest in my family, in my neighborhood, and in my country.

Father, start a movement for the growth of the gospel in my town. Overwhelm believers with the need to share the gospel and reap the harvest. Make the people who need the gospel receptive to it.



■ LIFE OF JESUS

March 14, 2021 | *The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 5:1–17

Pray that God would help you meet Jesus in this passage.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The lame man and the Jewish leaders failed to encounter Jesus. The Jewish leaders missed encountering Him because they could not see past their own view of God's Messiah. The lame man missed Him because he simply was not looking for Him.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

This week, we will examine how others have missed encountering Jesus. Their negative example will help us ensure we meet Jesus and are better able to lead others to Him.

■ MEDITATE

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working’” (John 5:17).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *Have you ever missed something significant (i.e., a celebrity or a major spectacle) because you were not looking for it?*

Q: *Why is it difficult to recognize someone you have not seen for a long time?*

The phrase “hidden in plain sight” is used to refer to objects that, even though they are not actually hidden, are easily overlooked. Often, they are missed because they defy expectations. The person seeking the object overlooks it because they are anticipating something else. Sometimes, however, objects “hidden in plain sight” can be missed simply because people are just not looking for them.

In this week’s passage, it appears as though Jesus the Messiah is hidden in plain sight. On two occasions, Jesus was overlooked by those who should have been seeking Him. He did not match the expectations of the Jewish elites who were looking for the Messiah. And the lame man did not see Him simply because he was not expecting to encounter Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. In both cases, Jesus should have been recognized by the sign He performed, but nevertheless, the Savior of the world was missed by those who needed Him the most.

Q: *What measures would you put into place to ensure that you did not miss something you were expecting?*

Q: *How can Jesus continue to work in our lives even after we are saved?*

APPLICATION POINT – This lesson focuses on two negative examples of missing Jesus Christ. The passage shows us what not to do, but what positive steps can we take to ensure we encounter Jesus Christ in a life-changing way? The best way to recognize what you are looking for is to be intimately familiar with it. Agents who are employed to spot counterfeit money do not attempt to keep track of every possible variance between a counterfeit bill and an authentic one. Instead, they focus their energy on becoming so acquainted with the real thing that they can spot the fake one immediately. The same principle works in the Christian life. The best way to encounter Christ and not miss Him is to be so acquainted with Him and how He works that you will automatically recognize His work in your life.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ John 5:1–17 shows us the tragedy of missing Jesus. We can miss Jesus by failing to see Him work or by simply not looking for Him.



1. ENCOUNTERING JESUS

2. OVERLOOKING JESUS'S WORK

3. OVERLOOKING JESUS HIMSELF

GOING DEEPER

+ This section will investigate John 5:1–17 to see how these verses encourage us to lay aside our idols and pursue Jesus.

1. ENCOUNTERING JESUS

■ JOHN 5:1–9

Q: *Why was this man lying by the pool at Bethesda?*

Q: *Whose power was this man relying on to solve his need?*

“God helps those who help themselves.” This once popular phrase seems to be declining in use, but it still resonates with the ideals of determination and independence. It encourages us to act when we might otherwise be driven to idleness. While it may be a successful slogan for much of life, it does not appear in the Bible and can be quite misleading in terms of the gospel. And it is the gospel that takes center stage in this man’s encounter with Jesus. This man had struggled with an unspecified illness for thirty-eight years. His main reprieve was lying in a pool named Bethesda. When the waters of this pool were stirred, it had a therapeutic effect. This man had been relying on his own power to cope with his infirmity, but his ability to cope had run out because he was no longer able to gain access to the pool.

These verses have remarkable parallels with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel teaches us that Jesus took on our sin debt, a debt we could never pay. Our best laid plans to cope with our sins always fall flat. Like the man in this story, we simply cannot help ourselves when the issue is our sin in the face of an infinite God. Jesus, on the other hand, is able to take the full penalty of our sin upon Himself. The only thing we need to do is to confess our need for Him and turn from our sins.

Q: *In what ways have you tried to help yourself out of the penalty of your sins?*

Q: *How has your own power failed you in addressing your sin?*

APPLICATION POINT – Many people believe that the answer to their sin problem lies within them. Like the man in this story, they rely on their own strength to address an issue that can only be resolved by the transforming power of Jesus Christ. If this describes you, turn your focus away from yourself and to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. No matter how much you try to help yourself, you will never be able to overcome your enslavement to sin and the condemnation you deserve because of it. Jesus Christ, however, lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death on your behalf. You can never have the power to cope with sin, but His resurrection from the grave is a demonstration of His abundant power to cope with the sin of the world, including yours.

Q: *Is verse 4 missing in your Bible? If so, why?*

Q: *How can variations in the Bible give you confidence in how the Bible has been preserved throughout the centuries?*

If you are a careful reader of the Bible and use a modern translation, you will notice that occasionally the Bible skips a numerical verse. This occurs at verse 4 of this week's passage. At other points, you may see a note in the margins of your Bible giving another wording for what appears in the text. These are often indicators of a variation in the manuscripts used to produce our Bibles today. The Bible was originally written down by hand by an author. This original handwritten document was then copied multiple times before becoming lost to history. To produce more Bibles, copies were made from the copies of the original, and then even more copies were made from those copies, and so on. When documents are copied by human hands, there are inevitable errors in the copying process. Sometimes, the scribes copying a manuscript added a sentence or a phrase in their copy to help explain something in the text. This appears to have been the case in the passage for this week's lesson. In an effort to explain why the pool of Bethesda was stirred up, a scribe included a note that an angel descended to stir up the waters. This note somehow became part of the biblical text and was enumerated as verse four. When this scribe's manuscript was compared to other manuscripts, modern biblical scholars were able to determine that it is unlikely that verse 4 was originally part of the Gospel written by John.

Q: *What precautions should you take when encountering variations within the Bible?*

Q: *How would you respond to someone who denied the veracity of the Bible because of variations such as the omission of verse 4?*

APPLICATION POINT – Variations in the Bible should never cause us great concern for the veracity of the Bible. In fact, the presence of these variations should give us more confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible because you would expect for variations to have occurred as the Bible was copied over the course of several centuries. The absence of variants in this case would lead us to conclude that someone threw away all the manuscripts that did not agree with their favorite manuscript. In taking these variations into account, it is often helpful to read more than one translation of the Bible. This will help you see the variations in the Bible’s manuscripts. Another good principle is to avoid drawing theological conclusions from statements which may or may not have been part of the original text of the Bible. For example, verse 4 in this passage describes an angel descending to stir up the waters in the pool of Bethesda. It would be wrong to draw conclusions about how angels work in the Bible based on what we read in this verse.

2. OVERLOOKING JESUS’S WORK

■ JOHN 5:10–12

Q: *What drew the attention of the Pharisees in this passage?*

Q: *Why is the response of the Pharisees so callous?*

Although they had witnessed the healing of a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, the Jewish leaders were more concerned with the breaking of the Sabbath law. The Sabbath law was a part of the covenant God made with Moses. Thus, the Sabbath law certainly was an important concern among the Jewish people, but the Jewish leaders appear to have elevated it above even the health and wellness of their own people. This healing performed by Jesus should have been an obvious indication that God had worked supernaturally in the man’s life, but the Jewish leaders overlooked the obvious work of God because they were more concerned with their traditions. By their rigidity in keeping the Sabbath law, they effectively placed God in a box where they could put limits upon

how He would act in any situation. But God will never stay within the limits we place upon Him, and we are in danger of overlooking how God is at work in our lives and in the world if we persist in making tradition a binding authority over Him.

Q: *How can you avoid placing God in a box?*

Q: *How can you balance prioritizing people over traditions?*

APPLICATION – God has a way of busting out of the artificial limits we place on Him. At the same time, we can always depend on Him to act in a manner that is consistent with His character. The key is for our view of God to be shaped by Scripture, because Scripture is where God has revealed Himself to us most fully. If the Jewish leaders had questioned their understanding of Sabbath and sought to ground it in the Old Testament rather than their tradition, they would have seen that the Bible does not prohibit picking up one's mat on the Sabbath. That prohibition came from their own traditions. This week identify some of your basic beliefs about God and how He has ordered His creation. Tie these beliefs to Scripture so that you can defend what you believe about God to others. In our current context, one of the most important areas we need to focus on is Christian morality because this is the area our culture finds most abrasive and challenges us on most frequently. If you struggle to defend your beliefs with Scripture, then it is possible that you are boxing God in with tradition and personal preferences rather than allowing Him to act in accordance with His own character.

3. OVERLOOKING JESUS HIMSELF

■ JOHN 5:13–17

Q: *How did the man respond to being healed by Jesus?*

Q: *What was the man's response when he learned it was Jesus who healed him?*

As tragic as it would be to miss Jesus's work in the lives of others, it is even more tragic to miss Jesus Himself. But that is what happens to the man in this passage, a development not expected by the reader. We expect the

person receiving healing to receive Christ as well, but that does not appear to be the case in this instance. If we are anticipating the man would become an ardent follower of Christ, we may tend to give him the benefit of the doubt when reading his actions, but the text gives little warrant for this approach. He never thanked Jesus for healing him. He apparently made no attempt to even form a casual acquaintance with the man who had healed him. Furthermore, upon learning Jesus's identity, he callously turned over the information to the Jewish opposition. When the story of this man is compared to the story of the blind man in John 9, there is a clear contrast between their respective relationships to Jesus.

Since we are not told explicitly that the man had little interest in becoming a follower of Christ, we are also not told why that appears to have been the case. Based on what we do know of him, it is possible that he was overcome with worldly interests. He was initially consumed with being healed from his infirmity. After he was healed, his interests did not transfer to Jesus but to the additional worldly interests that were now open to him because he could move freely. Love of the world, whether in a sick person or a healthy person, leaves no room for the love of Christ.

Q: *Why are you praying for God to heal you from the illness you are suffering?*

Q: *If God did heal you, how could you glorify Him the most after being freed from that disease?*

APPLICATION POINT – Whether in times of sickness or times of health, becoming consumed with physical and/or worldly concerns diminishes the value of Christ. Do not misunderstand the point being made here. God is concerned about the trials and hardships we face, both spiritual and physical. It is right for us to take physical health concerns to God in prayer. But if our goal in being healed is the freedom to pursue worldly matters that would pull us away from God, we are no better off if God heals us than if He does not. If you are sick and praying for healing, ask yourself the hard question concerning what you would use your health for if God were to grant it. If you are well and praying for continued health, ask yourself how you will continue to glorify God in both wellness and sickness.

Q: *What did Jesus say when reengaging the healed man in the temple?*

Q: *How are Jesus's words consistent with the claim that Jesus has paid the penalty for all our sin?*

Jesus's words to the man are challenging to understand, for several reasons. They appear to be aimed solely at the man's sense of self-preservation rather than any sense of accountability toward God. They could also suggest that we bear the judgment of our sins through earthly turmoil rather than Him bearing the penalty of our sins on the cross. Finally, Jesus's words insinuate that suffering is the result of sin, but there are certainly instances in which suffering does not stem from sin and others in which sin does not lead to suffering. How can Jesus justify making this correlation?

The difficulty posed by these words, however, is due to Jesus addressing sin in a manner less familiar to us rather than any inherent theological difficulty. Both the Old and the New Testaments provide examples of people suffering as a direct result of their sin (Numbers 12:10; Acts 5:5, 10). Our sins certainly continue to adversely affect us regardless of how those sins are wrapped up in Jesus's atoning death. We need not take Jesus's words as an absolute in this instance. Finally, it is possible that the words "nothing worse" may not be pointing to further ailments but to the final judgment.

❓: *How do Jesus's words deter us from continuing in sin?*

❓: *How do Jesus's words encourage us to pursue holiness?*

APPLICATION POINT – In His death and resurrection, Jesus paid the full penalty of our sins and credited us with the full extent of His righteousness. The Bible never suggests, however, that our justification from sin means we should no longer be concerned about the continuation of sin in our lives and in the world around us. Personal holiness glorifies God and frees us to serve God and others. Commit yourself this week to rooting out a sin you frequently struggle with. Begin with God's grace. Ask Him to convict you of the sin you need to fight and give you the power to fight against it. Consider enlisting others in your fight against sin. Accountability partners can help you through prayer and words of encouragement.

NEXT STEPS

We are often our own biggest obstacle to seeing God work in our lives and in the world around us. We tend to get wrapped up with our own challenges and traditions to the point that we are blind to what God is doing in the world. This week commit to taking actions to step beyond yourself to see God working. Read a short biography of a Christian figure from the past to see how God was at work in their lives. Consider reserving some time to volunteer

at a ministry addressing the needs of others such as a shelter or a crisis pregnancy center. Seeing God work often requires us to move beyond our normal routines and the things we have grown comfortable doing.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, you are at work every day in my life and in the world around me. Make me aware of how you are at work in our world.

Father, I have become consumed with worldliness to the point that I cannot see how you are working. Help me to step out of myself so that I can see beyond my current circumstances to what you are doing.

Father, forgive me for making tradition more important than you.

Lord, keep me from the sins that are ruining my life.



■ LIFE OF JESUS

March 21, 2021 | *The Authority of the Son*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read John 5:16–30

Read John 5:1–15 for context

Pray God would help you to hear Jesus’s message and believe.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus’s ministry will be authenticated when He judges between those who will receive eternal life and those who will receive eternal judgment.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus’s ministry is authenticated by the authority the Father gives Him to judge, but our fate will be determined before this authentication because Jesus will judge based on our response to His ministry. Thus, we must respond to Jesus with belief.

■ MEDITATE

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage’s main point to your own life.

Q: *Have you ever had to make a decision before you knew all the facts? How did you make it?*

Q: *How would you define belief?*

The standard approach to medical care is that a doctor diagnoses the illness and then decides on a course of treatment. Occasionally, however, when someone is deteriorating too quickly, in an effort to save the person's life, doctors must decide upon a course of treatment before a diagnosis can be determined. Otherwise, the patient would pass away. The doctors have to look at the symptoms and information they have and determine the best course of action to save a life.

A similar situation arises in the context of Jesus's ministry. Jesus made radical claims that upset the Jewish leaders. When they demanded that Jesus substantiate His claims, He told them His ministry would be authenticated after the resurrection of the dead by God, and Jesus Himself would judge whether they would enter eternal life or eternal judgment. The problem was that Jesus's judgment would be based on their reception of His ministry, the very thing they were challenging. Thus, the Pharisees had to choose. Would they believe in and accept Jesus's ministry or not?

Q: *What can confirm our belief in Jesus's claims before we face the final judgment?*

Q: *Do you think it is fair for Jesus to judge humanity before we can authenticate His ministry?*

APPLICATION POINT – We face the same situation as the Jewish leaders. We too will be judged based on how we receive Jesus before His ministry can be authenticated. Is there any way for us to be confident in our decision to believe in Jesus's ministry? The Bible offers us two ways. First, Jesus performed numerous signs during His ministry. The purpose of a sign is to point to something else. Jesus's signs pointed to His divinity, which, if true, authenticate His ministry. These signs have been preserved for us in the Gospels, especially in the book of John. Second, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to confirm what Jesus says and what the Bible says about Him. These signs and the work of the Holy Spirit do not authenticate Jesus's ministry in themselves, but they do support His claims and give us confidence in our decision to believe Jesus's ministry.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ In John 5:16–30, Jesus countered the claims of the Jewish leaders who questioned His teaching and sought to kill Him for blasphemy.

1. THE UNITY OF THE FATHER AND THE SON
2. RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT, PART 1
3. THE BASIS OF JUDGMENT
4. RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT, PART 2

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will go step-by-step through this passage in order to understand Jesus's response to the opposition from His own countrymen.*

1. THE UNITY OF THE FATHER AND THE SON

■ READ JOHN 5:16–19

Q: *Why were the Jews persecuting Jesus?*

Q: *Why was breaking the Sabbath a serious offense among the Jews?*

The context of this passage was addressed last week. Jesus had healed a lame man by the pool of Bethesda. The problem was that this healing took place on a Sabbath. The Jewish people had been exiled from their country because they had broken God's Law. Upon returning to their land, they struggled to maintain any semblance of control. They were consistently under the rule of foreign powers. To oppose their overlords and maintain a sense of identity in the land, the Jewish leaders emphasized keeping the law, including the Sabbath regulations. The Jews felt that Jesus's actions endangered their sense of national identity and their commitment to God's Law. In Jewish life, these were capital offenses.

From the perspective of John, however, this Jewish opposition to Jesus's ministry was persecution. John himself and the Christian communities he influenced were accustomed to persecution. By defining the Jewish opposition to Jesus's ministry as persecution, John created a measure of solidarity between them and Jesus.

Q: *What concerns do you see elevated above the continuation of Jesus's ministry in your church? Neighborhood? Country?*

Q: *How could Jesus have avoided this persecution?*

APPLICATION POINT – It would have been easy for Jesus to avoid the hardships He faced from the Jewish authorities. Just heal on a day other than the Sabbath. How hard is that? But to yield to these demands would undercut the nature of Jesus's transforming ministry. It is natural for us to want to avoid persecution. In many ways, we have been spared persecution in our modern Western context, but that is not guaranteed to continue. It is important for Christians to prepare themselves for persecution no matter what context they find themselves in. The best way to prepare for persecution is to learn how to hold loosely our possessions and even our lives. Learn to sacrifice for the spread of the gospel.

Q: *How was Jesus limited in His actions and ministry?*

Q: *How would you describe the relationship between the Father and the Son?*

In our scientific and technological age, we typically see limitations as a negative. Jesus, however, pointed to His limitations to defend His ministry from those who questioned His validity. Jesus asserted that He was limited to what the Father does. We do not often think of the limitations of Jesus's ministry, but this is an important claim concerning its validity. As the Jewish leaders criticized Jesus for breaking the Sabbath law, He responded by saying that if God had not allowed Him, He would not have been able to challenge their teaching on the Sabbath. Jesus pushed His point further by claiming that He was obligated to follow what the Father does. Thus, Jesus was claiming that His ministry could be perfectly identified with God's will.

Q: *How do you respond to assertions of absolute authority like Jesus was making?*

Q: *How is your ministry limited by what God wills?*

APPLICATION POINT – In an autonomous age, we recoil from the idea of limitations or outside control. As Christians, however, we are called to engage the world for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not get to determine the scope of our ministry or the direction it will go. There are numerous examples of people in our society who claim to be ministering for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ but are not limited by the parameters God, through His Word, has placed on authentic gospel ministry. Those who claim to minister for the cause of Christ but advocate practices that contradict the teachings of God’s Word are imposters. Just because something (or someone) claims to be Christian does not mean it is. This week evaluate any ministry you are involved in or donate to. Make sure they can make the same sort of claims Jesus made in this passage. If their ministry is not limited by the will of the Father, then you do not want anything to do with it.

2. RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT, PART 1

■ JOHN 5:20–23

Q: *What are the “greater works” Jesus was referring to?*

Q: *What is the responsibility the Father delegates to the Son?*

The Jewish leaders marveled that Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. Jesus told them to anticipate works more marvelous than this at the end of the age. According to Jesus, God will raise the dead at the end of the age, an idea that would have been controversial on its own in a Jewish context. God the Father will not take part in the judgment of humanity, however. He will delegate this responsibility to the Son. Since humanity will be judged on the basis of how they respond to the Son’s earthly ministry, it is appropriate for the Son to be the one who judges humanity. The Father’s delegation of the role of judge to the Son is also appropriate because it is a delegation of the honor due that role. Thus, the Father and Son share in equal honor.

Q: *What concerns or works draw your attention away from the “greater works” to come?*

Q: *What simple tasks can you do on a regular basis to remind yourself to live for eternity?*

APPLICATION – Most of what we do in life is directed toward our daily existence. We eat to give ourselves the strength to live for that day. We work to acquire the money we need to meet pay our bills. We sleep so we will be rested well enough for the next day. This is completely natural and necessary, but, since we spend so much energy focused on our lives now, even Christians can be lulled into acting as though our daily existence is all there is. We can counteract this mentality through Scripture reading and prayer, but it can also be helpful to adopt small habits that are not directly related to these spiritual disciplines. One man has committed to taking special care of a garden at his home. He believes that when Christ returns, he will renew the heavens and the earth. This man does not have the time to keep his entire lawn in immaculate condition, but he takes special care of a small part as a reminder to himself that this world is not all there is to live for. This week consider some small activity you can do regularly as a reminder that one day Jesus will return and usher in new heavens and a new earth that will last forever.

3. THE BASIS OF JUDGMENT

■ JOHN 5:24

Q: *What two activities did Jesus say determine whether He would judge someone favorably?*

Q: *What does it mean to pass from death to life?*

In verse 24, Jesus, who has been given the duty to judge all humanity, told His listeners what factors determine whether they would face death or eternal life in judgment. Those who hear His words and believe in the Father who sent Him to give those words will have eternal life.

Jesus's words reveal an important truth about humanity. In what could be described as our natural condition after the fall (Genesis 3), we are in a condemned state that warrants judgment and death. If nothing changes, we would deserve God's wrath. If, however, we hear the words of Jesus and are receptive of His ministry, we move from a condemned state to a redeemed state.

Q: *What difference does it make for evangelism that our natural state is not neutral but condemned?*

Q: *What does it mean to "believe" in the Father and in Jesus's words?*

APPLICATION POINT – As Christians, we do not have the luxury of accepting the status quo when it comes to the final judgment of humanity. We also cannot hope that maybe things will fall the right way for unbelievers. If they do not hear and believe the gospel, they will be condemned for eternity. Two weeks ago, you were encouraged to start an evangelism journal to encourage you to share your faith. This verse should affirm to you the need to diligently share the gospel and reflect upon your evangelistic encounters. If you did not start an evangelism journal two weeks ago, consider doing it now.

4. RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT, PART 2

■ JOHN 5:25–29

Q: *How is the word "life" as it is used in verse 25 different from how it is used in verses 24 and 26?*

Q: *What does it mean for the Father to have light in Himself?*

The use of the word "life" can be hard to track in these verses. God will raise the dead to life at an appointed time in the future. Not everyone, however, who is raised from the dead passes from death to life. In this sense, "life" refers to more than just physical life or self-awareness. It refers to a relationship with God gained through belief in the gospel. According to Jesus in these verses, everyone will be raised from the dead, meaning they will be self-aware

again or physically alive. But only those who believed in the Lord Jesus during their natural lives will then receive an eternal relationship with God.

Q: *How should our eternal life influence our lives now?*

Q: *How should the future resurrection influence how we treat our bodies?*


APPLICATION POINT – Jesus’s statements show that there is more to living than simply being alive. That is true of eternal life and of our lives now. As believers, our lives now should be lived in light of the life to come. Our culture is consumed with entertainment. Entertainment is not necessarily a negative thing, but much of our entertainment today has little impact on our lives beyond the time we spend being entertained. Given our obsession with it, entertainment becomes problematic because it leaves little time for personal and spiritual growth. Make a list of your usual activities during your leisure time. How much time do you spend on things that could be considered pure entertainment? How much time do you spend on personal and spiritual growth? If there is a significant imbalance toward entertainment, consider taking steps to emphasize activities that will have a greater impact on eternity. Read a book on theology or one that addresses our culture from a Christian world view. Write a poem or a song. Even playing a game with your children could influence their lives and their faith.

NEXT STEPS

Jesus was asked to authenticate His ministry. Are you able to authenticate your faith in Jesus? Your authentication should be in both word and deed. Write out your understanding of the gospel. Write out any other core commitments you have as a Christian as well as some key ways in which these beliefs have changed your life. If someone were to ask you to prove you were a Christian, you should be able to authenticate your claims.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.



Lord Jesus, thank you for convicting me of sin and verifying your ministry in my life.

Father, help me to live in light of the resurrection, judgment, and eternal life.

Father, make me instrumental in someone else hearing Jesus's message and believing in His work on our behalf.

Father, help me to focus on things that will have an eternal impact on my life and the lives of others.



■ LIFE OF JESUS

March 28, 2021 | *The Burial and Resurrection of Jesus*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Read Matthew 27:57–28:10

Pray that this text will help you prepare to worship Christ as the risen Savior this Easter.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Gospels verify the resurrection of Jesus Christ both historically and supernaturally.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus's resurrection is the central tenant of the Christian faith. The truth of the resurrection assures us that Christ is our Savior, our sins can be forgiven, and death has been defeated.

■ MEDITATE

“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28:6).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.

🔍: *To verify that Jesus rose from the dead, what proof or testimony would you want?*

Q: *If the resurrection is verified by historical sources, why do people continue to doubt it?*

In a criminal trial, the jury considers various types of evidence to arrive at a verdict. They consider forensic evidence that reconstructs the crime. They consider eyewitness testimony to hear various perspectives on the crime. They consider physical evidence found at the crime scene. After weighing all the evidence at hand, the jury votes to convict or acquit the defendant. The gathering and presentation of the evidence can give the jury warrant to convict the defendant of the crime. The process is similar for other forms of historical verification. If you want to prove something happened historically, you gather evidence proving that the event took place. The nature of the event in question can alter the types of evidence produced and how they are weighted. Forensic evidence is crucial for criminal trials, but it does not play much of a role in historical verification. Instead, eyewitness testimony takes more precedence.

Matthew approached Jesus's resurrection in this fashion. He gathered evidence showing the authenticity of the resurrection for his readers. He expected his readers to look at the evidence and believe that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the defining tenant of Christianity. According to the apostle Paul, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:17–19). Matthew also recognized the importance of Jesus's resurrection and included supporting evidence within his presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Q: *What does Matthew's approach to proclaiming the resurrection tell you about his belief in the resurrection?*

Q: *How does Matthew's Gospel help us verify the resurrection even though the eyewitnesses are gone, and we have lost the exact location of the physical evidence?*

APPLICATION POINT – As Matthew and Paul knew, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has vast implications. The fact that Matthew takes this approach to verifying the resurrection means he believed the resurrection could be verified historically and that his readers could investigate the truth behind the claims made in his Gospel. His original audience could speak with Joseph of Arimathea to verify that Jesus was truly dead and was sealed in

a tomb. They could ask the civil leaders if they guarded Jesus's tomb. They could speak with the two Marys to hear for themselves whether an angel told them Jesus has risen from the dead and determine if Jesus appeared to them as they ran to tell His disciples. Although we cannot verify this evidence ourselves, the early readers of Matthew's gospel could, and the evidentiary claims he presented in his Gospel remained uncontested even by those who refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead. We have solid evidence from which to conclude that Jesus did rise from the dead.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ Matthew 27:57–28:10 centers on the actions of four characters—Joseph of Arimathea, the chief priests and Pharisees (as a collective whole), the angel who rolled away the stone, and Jesus Himself. Two other characters, the two Marys, link these four together.

1. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

2. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND PHARISEES

3. THE ANGEL

4. JESUS

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will examine each of the four characters above to understand the evidence they provide for the resurrection of Jesus and to consider what additional applications these verses may have for our lives.*

1. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

■ MATTHEW 27:57–61

Q: *How do these verses verify what happened to Jesus's body after the crucifixion?*

Q: *Who could have verified the claims made in these verses?*

After the resurrection, Jesus's body was received by a man known as Joseph of Arimathea, who received permission to bury Jesus's body from Pilate, the Roman governor over Jerusalem. After preparing the body for burial, Joseph placed Jesus in his own tomb. The tombs of this period would have been a simple passage or hall with several niches cut along the sides where the bodies of the deceased could be placed. The fact that Joseph's tomb was new indicates that no other bodies had been placed inside the tomb.

All this information could have been verified by Joseph and Pilate. If the Roman authorities had thrown the body of Jesus into a shallow grave outside Jerusalem after the crucifixion, Pilate and his soldiers could have denied that Joseph received Jesus's body. If Joseph's tomb were previously occupied, he, and likely others, could have contested Matthew's point that it was "new." As far as we can tell historically, Matthew's claims remained unchallenged by those who could have called the facts into question.

❓: *Was it risky for Joseph to approach Pilate for the body of Jesus?*

❓: *In what ways are you called to risk your place in society or work for the cause of Christ?*

APPLICATION POINT – The underlying point of the whole passage is that we should believe in the resurrection. That being said, a number of other points should draw our attention because of their relevance to our lives. For instance, Joseph of Arimathea was willing to be a witness for Jesus in the public square at great risk to himself. Joseph was a wealthy man. He had access to the elite in society. Jesus had just been executed as a criminal. This did not dissuade him, however, from interceding on Jesus's behalf with Pilate at great risk to himself. Followers of Christ need to represent Christ in public and even in our private conversations about public life. We need to look at how our Christian faith should influence our views on the issues facing our nation, and we need to vote from these convictions. Do not listen to claims that we should leave our Christian faith out of the public arena or politics. No one can live as though their beliefs about the most important things in life do not matter, turned on and off as the occasion demands. Those who reject Christ have made an idol of their sins, and they do not leave those idols behind when they enter the public square or political discourse. Christians must be ready to represent Christ at whatever cost and in whatever season. Joseph of Arimathea modeled this for us when he approached Pilate to care for Jesus's body.

❓: *Who could the readers of Matthew's Gospel have appealed to for verification that Jesus had died?*

Q: *What measure did Joseph take to protect Jesus's body?*

Joseph of Arimathea received Jesus's body and prepared it for burial. This was a tedious process, requiring up-close contact with the deceased. If Jesus were merely passed out from exhaustion and not really dead, Joseph would have known. The claim that Jesus never died and thus never rose from the dead is unsubstantiated from Matthew's Gospel. Joseph's testimony would refute this claim.

Q: *What does Jesus's death mean for us beyond the forgiveness of our sins?*

Q: *What do you do when you feel as though you do not have an advocate?*

APPLICATION POINT – We can be certain that Christ died on our behalf. In this life, we can often feel alone and as though we have no advocate. This can be especially true in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the common resulting search for employment. After being turned down for numerous posts, it can be easy to feel as though no one will ever act on your behalf. The digital nature of the application process these days reinforces these fears. Christians, however, can always know that Jesus Christ has acted on our behalf, even at the cost of His own life. We need not despair in times of need but should instead dwell on what Christ has done for us.

2. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND PHARISEES

■ MATTHEW 27:62–66

Q: *How did the priests and Pharisees refer to Jesus?*

Q: *What claim were these leaders seeking to refute?*

The Pharisees approached Pilate and referred to Jesus as an imposter and fraud. In their minds, Jesus's death was the last word in their struggle with this troublemaker. His radical claims and disregard for their traditions had come to nothing. In reality, Jesus's message and ministry were about to be authenticated by His resurrection. It was the priests and Pharisees who were the real imposters. It was their traditions that were fraudulent. This is one of history's greatest reversals, and it is based in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

❓: *Who understood Jesus's claims better, His disciples or the priests and Pharisees?*

❓: *Since the priests and Pharisees were aware of Jesus's claims, why did they oppose Him?*

APPLICATION – Unlike the disciples, the priests and Pharisees seem to have perfectly understood Jesus's claim that He would die and rise from the grave three days later. They even took action on this claim. They went to Pilate and asked for permission to falsify Jesus's claim. But they were the ones outside looking in after the resurrection. This shows us that following Jesus requires more than just knowing what He said or a few details about His life. Following Jesus demands that we believe in His message and confess Him as Lord of our lives. On most Easters, churches are filled with people who know a few things about Jesus. For whatever reason, they feel obligated to appear at a church service, but like the priests and Pharisees, they are far from being followers of Jesus. This year commit to having challenging conversations with people about the meaning of Easter. This is the one time of year when they come to you, and you have their attention. Commit to making the gospel of Jesus Christ known to those who are on the outside looking in.

❓: *Why did the priests and Pharisees request for Pilate to have the tomb guarded?*

❓: *How has their request worked against them for nearly two thousand years?*

Although, in their minds, the threat had passed, the priests and Pharisees were still afraid Jesus's disciples would steal His body and perpetuate His claims. Their solution was to have the tomb guarded by soldiers to ensure the

disciples would not be able to falsely claim He had risen. Then they could put Jesus and His disciples to rest.

Their plan did not go as intended. Instead, when Jesus arose from the grave, it provided extra witnesses who could affirm Jesus was risen from the dead. Furthermore, by ensuring that the disciples could not steal the body, the priests and Pharisees ruled out one explanation that they could have used to explain the empty tomb. Their plan backfired and worked against them. (Of course, in Matthew 28:13, they came up with a ruse to perpetuate the very idea they had worked to discredit.)

Q: *Do you ever fear the plans of those who conspire against God?*

Q: *How has God disrupted the plans of those who would challenge His rule?*

APPLICATION POINT – God is able to bring to nothing the plans of those who rebel against Him. We need not fear the plans of those who oppose Him. Many Christians in America become anxious when the opposing political party comes into power. It is not uncommon to hear laments that the end of America or the end of freedom has arrived or something such as this. They could be right. If God has determined the decline of any nation, then that nation will surely fall. But Christians need never worry that God will be caught off guard or overcome by the plans of the wicked. As with the plans of the priests and Pharisees, He can bring the plans of the wicked to nothing if He chooses. We need not ever fear.

3. THE ANGEL

■ MATTHEW 28:1–7

Q: *Who opened Jesus's tomb on the day of the resurrection?*

Q: *Why did Matthew describe the appearance of the angel?*

The resurrection was a supernatural act. Thus, it is fitting that it would be substantiated by supernatural evidence. These verses are filled with descriptions of the supernatural quality of the angel. He descended from heaven. He appeared and was dressed as an angel. He frightened everyone who saw him. By opening the tomb and sitting on the stone, the angel served as a supernatural witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Q: *What is your belief in the supernatural like?*

Q: *Do you think most Christians over- or underemphasize the work of supernatural beings on the earth?*

APPLICATION POINT – In a quickly secularizing culture, Christians are going to be challenged more and more concerning their belief in the supernatural. But the Bible clearly presents an active supernatural world at work within the world we see. Christians are not at liberty to abandon belief in the supernatural. Not only would it deny Scripture, but it would also deny one of the ways in which the Bible authenticates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This does not warrant finding supernatural causes behind every development. Belief in the work of the supernatural is especially troubling when used as a cover for unchecked human sin (i.e., a demon is making him do that). But the Bible affirms the supernatural, and Jesus's resurrection is verified by a supernatural source. We dare not deny this.

Q: *What other evidence does the angel reveal?*

Q: *After showing the evidence for the resurrection, what does the angel tell the women to do?*

The angel was a supernatural evidence of the resurrection, but he pointed to the physical evidence of the resurrection. He rolled away the stone of the empty tomb. He announced that Jesus was not in the tomb because He rose from the dead. He invited the women to enter the tomb to see where Jesus lay. These are all physical indications of what had happened.

After inviting the women to examine the evidence for themselves, the angel instructed them to go report to the disciples what had happened. They were to become witnesses.

Q: *What is your response to the evidence of the risen Lord Jesus?*

Q: *Since this evidence has been preserved in literary form in Matthew's Gospel, it has become secondary evidence. We do not see the evidence itself but read a report about it. How does this influence our faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Our access to the evidence of Jesus's birth comes from the Gospels and the other New Testament documents as well as extrabiblical sources. We only have secondary access to the evidence for the resurrection. Our confidence in the resurrection can be only as high as our confidence in the Bible. This is one reason belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is crucial to a confident and growing faith in Christ. The Bible is God's Word. We can trust God's Word, including what it has to say concerning the resurrection.

4. JESUS

■ MATTHEW 28:8–10

Q: *What was the women's response to the risen Lord Jesus?*

Q: *What did Jesus instruct the two Marys to do after they encountered Him?*

The events already described are extraordinary. The angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone. The typically terrifying Roman guard was terrified to the point of immobilization. The angel spoke to the two women and offered to show them proof of the most wonderful event in all of human history. But the most amazing moment of that Easter morning had to be when the women came face to face with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow, Jesus's appearance almost seems like an afterthought to all that the women had witnessed thus far. They were not seeking Him. They were on their way to His disciples when He seemed to suddenly appear out of nowhere.

The women responded to Jesus with worship, which Jesus accepted. Worship is an expression of one's dependence and submission to a worthy figure. Jesus's resurrection from the dead affirms that He is worthy of worship. The resurrection is the first piece of the new creation, which Jesus launched on that first Easter morning. And worshipping Jesus will be the centerpiece of this new creation.

Q: *What actions do you take to worship Jesus?*

Q: *Is worship a public or private activity or both?*

APPLICATION POINT – Worship can often feel uncomfortable in our culture. We are not used to expressing adoration or extreme allegiance. When singing, we can sometimes feel like all eyes are on us or that everyone can hear us drone on out of tune. This is a sign, however, that we are not completely given to worship. When we truly worship, we leave ourselves behind and focus completely on Jesus. As you worship in your corporate setting over the next few weeks, strain to move the focus from yourself to your Savior, Jesus Christ.

NEXT STEPS

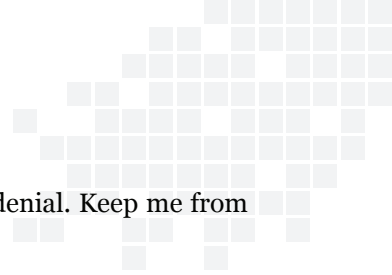

It is important for us to know why we believe in the resurrection and be able to make a case for believing in it. Matthew presents physical, supernatural, and eyewitness evidence of the resurrection. This evidence depends upon the reliability of Scripture. Write out some of the key details and verses for each type of evidence in summary form. Take your argument a step further by explaining why we believe Scripture is inspired and inerrant (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

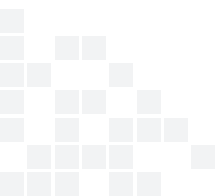
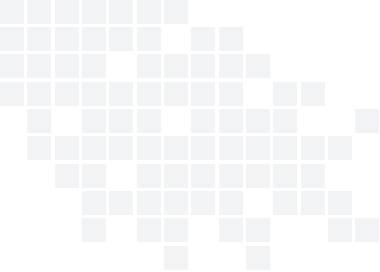
Resurrected Lord Jesus, my heart seeks to worship and adore you.

Father, help me to be able to defend my belief in the resurrection to others.



Lord, make me aware of how the supernatural world is at work around me. Keep me from denial. Keep me from fanciful obsession.

Lord, bring the wicked plans of the rulers and influencers of this world to nothing.







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