

22. John 13:1-17

Getting started

How would you feel about your growth group leader, or a member of staff, getting down on their knees and washing your feet?

Setting the scene

We are starting our look at the second half of John's gospel. Jesus has entered the area around Jerusalem for the last time. He has made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He has done this despite the plot to kill him, and his knowledge that his time was about to come. The second half of John's gospel (chapters 12-21) deals with the last week in Jesus' life. It must be important for John to take up so much of his gospel with the events of this week.

Observation

1. What was the purpose of the Passover Feast? What did it involve?
2. How has John prepared us for this? *[See John 1:29 and 36]*
3. Do you find anything funny in this scene? If you do, how does the writer use humour here? What effect is he seeking?
4. How did Jesus know that someone was going to betray him?
5. Who are the 'master' and the 'one who sent him' in verse 16? What point is Jesus making?

Interpretation

1. What does John's mention of the Passover add to the story, besides an historical detail? *[It is an anticipation of Jesus' own climatic Passover as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and purchases all believers out of their slavery to sin.]*
2. How do you understand the responsibility of Judas for betraying Jesus, given that Judas was prompted by the devil?

3. What role was Jesus playing when he washed his disciples' feet? [*a slave*] What does this show of the character of Jesus?
4. What does Jesus mean when he says to Peter (verse 8), 'Unless I wash you, you have no part in me'?
5. How does the foot washing anticipate Jesus' sacrificial death for them?
6. What conclusion does Jesus draw from washing their feet? [*verses 14-17*]
7. Is Jesus just an example for us, or does he do something we cannot do for ourselves?

Implications

1. How does verse 3 prepare you for what is to come in this passage and at the Cross?
2. Are you embarrassed when other Christians serve you? What does embarrassment say about us, and is there a better response?
3. Should we wash the feet of each other? [*Views differ on this. Some see it as a good way of remembering Jesus' radical humble service. Others see it as a parody or a mere rite that can mask an unbroken spirit and a haughty heart.*]
4. What does this passage mean for the way we serve at church and what we expect of our church leaders?
5. How does this story help you in your evangelism?
6. How are you personally challenged by Jesus' command to do as he has done?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks for the humble example Jesus' sets for us.
2. Ask that we will not think that Jesus is too good for us and we could never be like him.
3. Ask that the world/people known to us will see Jesus as the one who came to serve, and will be prepared to be served by him.

23. John 13:18-38

Getting started

How do you feel when someone let's you down? Think of an example and how you have dealt with it.

Observations

1. Who are 'those I have chosen'? *[Probably just the 12 apostles]*
2. Who might be the disciple Jesus loved? *[Probably the disciple who wrote this gospel. He adopts anonymity to ensure the focus is on Jesus. Views differ on whether this is John the son of Zebedee, another 'John' or someone else.]*
3. Verse 30: What is the effect of John mentioning that 'it was night'? *[John has been working with the contrasting imagery of light and dark since chapter 1. Remember that Nicodemus went to Jesus at night.]*
4. Verses 37-38 set up the wonderful story of the forgiveness and special commissioning of Peter in John 21:15-25. We know that Peter betrayed Jesus three times (see 18:15-27). However, in what way did Peter fulfil his promise to lay down his life for Jesus? *[He worked as a missionary for many years (see Acts and 1 Peter) and tradition has it that he was executed by the Romans in Rome.]*

Interpretation

1. Verse 19: In what way does Jesus' prediction that someone would betray him help his disciples to believe Jesus is 'He'? *[Jesus knew he had to die. This helps the disciples deal with Jesus' death. The death and resurrection were not accidents, but part of God's plan. Jesus both knew and consented to this plan.]*
2. Who are the ones Jesus will send? What does this mean about their authority? *[The 'sent ones' are probably just the apostles, but it does mean the apostles have special authority directly from Jesus. This is significant given their role in the formation of the New Testament and the early church.]*
3. Verse 31: How is Jesus glorified and God glorified in him?
4. Verse 33: Where did Jesus go that his disciples could not go? Why would they go there later? (See verses 36-38).

Implications

1. What are the possible implications of Jesus being troubled in spirit? *[He does not like a close follower to betray him. He does not want to die, i.e. he experiences the challenges of life as a human would, not as a 'superman'.]*
2. Verses 34 and 35 are John's way of conveying the great commandment (c.f. Matthew 22:34-40). How must we love each other? *[By passionate, sacrificial action.]*
3. If you are ever tempted to betray Jesus, what hope is there for you?

Prayer suggestions

1. Praise that God was and is glorified in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
2. Ask that God may be glorified in all that we do.
3. Ask that we may never deny Jesus.

24. John 14:1-14

Getting started (but only if your group is up for it!)

What passage of Scripture would you want read at your funeral? *[This passage is probably one of the three most chosen. The others are 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.]*

Observations

1. Why might the hearts of the disciples be troubled (verse 1)? *[See 13:33-38. Jesus had been predicting his departure.]*
2. In verse 5, do you think Thomas was just being thick, or are we too quick to read in our knowledge of how the story develops?

Interpretation

1. Why is it important, in the context of this part of John's gospel, for his disciples to trust Jesus?
2. We read in Revelation 21:1-4 that when Jesus returns he will bring heaven to earth. How does this fit with Jesus coming back and taking us to another place? *[Suggestion: we do not want to take every line of Scripture too literally. In the context of a metaphor of a place with many rooms it makes more sense to talk about us being taken there, than to say, 'I will come back and remake earth to be a place with many rooms'.]*
3. What does Jesus mean when he says that he is 'the way, the truth and the life'?
4. Why does Jesus say that 'if you really knew me you would know my Father as well'? *[Work your way through verses 9-11]*
5. What are the implications of the Father being in Jesus and Jesus being in the Father? *[Explore the common purpose, love and power of the Father and Son. For example, the Son could not do his 'miracles' if he did not exercise divine power.]*
6. What greater things might Jesus' followers do (verses 12-13) and why?
7. Why would it bring glory to the Father for Jesus to do whatever we ask in his name?

Comment:

The language of 'asking in someone's name' is the language of diplomacy. It was well known in the first century. When an Australian ambassador speaks at the United Nations, she does not speak in her own name. She does not express her views. She speaks in the name of Australia. She says only what she is authorised to say, or what she knows the Australian government would want her to say. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we may only ask for things that we can anticipate Jesus wanting.

For this reason, when we 'pray in Jesus' name', we are not invoking a magical incantation, like 'hocus pocus' or 'abracadabra'. We are simply invoking the right Jesus gives us to ask for things he might want, and to do so on his behalf.

Implications

1. What comfort or challenges do you get from the image of the Father's house having many rooms?
2. How do you feel about the exclusive claims Jesus makes in 14:6?
3. In what ways has Jesus revealed his Father to us?
4. What limitations should we set on the prayers that we say 'in the name of Jesus'?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks that there is room for every one of us in our Father's house.
2. Praise for Christ's revelation of the Father to us.
3. Ask that our prayers be shaped by our understanding of God's purposes, character and will.

25. John 14:15-31

Getting started

Without reference to this passage, what is the best promise for you in the Bible? *[Don't think that to mention one as 'the best' devalues the others. Just, which one most warms your heart?]*

Observation

This is a very dense section. Try to work up a list of Jesus' promises. *[Jesus will ask for his Father to send the Holy Spirit. The disciples will know the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will live in them. They will not be left as orphans. Jesus will come to them again. They will see him. They will live because Jesus lives. They will have a new revelation of the relation between Jesus and his Father. He who loves Jesus will be loved by the Father. The Father will come to dwell with believers. The Holy Spirit will teach them. Jesus promises 'peace', and assurance that there is nothing to fear. They will believe. The prince of darkness has no hold on Jesus.]*

Note:

We need to be careful to work out which promises were specifically for the immediate audience of the disciples, and which apply to all believers.

Interpretation

1. How should we read Jesus saying that a lack of obedience shows a lack of love? Are these words of judgement, or encouragement or words to explain the role of the Holy Spirit? *[Note that this issue is not only in verse 15 but also in verses 21 and 24.]*
2. In what way does Jesus not leave us as orphans? *[You may also like to link this with Paul's talk of adoption in Galatians 4:5.]*
3. What does Jesus command? *[See 13:34-35, but do you think Jesus had other things in mind?]*
4. What will the Holy Spirit do?
5. Why will the disciples 'see' Jesus?
6. How and when will the Father make his home with us?

7. What are the dimensions of the peace that Jesus gives?

8. Why can Jesus say that our hearts should not be troubled and we should not be afraid?

Note:

There are passages about not being afraid in all four gospels. I think this is often poorly explained. Jesus knows we are sentient beings. We understand cause and effect. He himself was afraid when he prayed to his Father in the garden of Gethsemane. Crucifixion is not a nice way to die. To die for the sins of the world is unimaginable. So, in my view, Jesus is not saying 'you must never be afraid' or 'you fail me and do not have sufficient faith if you are ever afraid'. He is saying, 'do not let your fear get the better of you. Do not let your fear stop you from living out your faith'. And, just as his Father helped him, God will help us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

9. What is the connection between the prince of the world coming and Jesus going?

Implications

1. When have you seen the work of the Holy Spirit by what he does in you or in other people?

2. Can you think of a greater promise than to be loved by Jesus' Father? [*I can't!*]

3. How do all these promises help you in your daily walk with Jesus?

Prayer Suggestions

1. Thanks for the breadth and number Jesus' promises.

2. Ask that we remember these promises when times get dark.

3. Thanks that Jesus has always been in such firm control of his own destiny and the destiny of the world.

26. John 15:1-17

Getting started

If your personality could be expressed in being a particular type of fruit, what would you be? *[For example, banana = happy but a bit bent, durian = regal but smelly (the durian is rightly called the 'king of fruits')]*

Observations

1. In what ways is Jesus the true vine?
2. What commands of his Father has Jesus obeyed? *[See verse 10.]*
3. Who did Jesus choose? (verse 16) *[Here Jesus is probably just referring to the disciples who were with him in the upper-room. Yet the invitation to ask in his name applies to all followers of Jesus.]*

Interpretation

1. What relationship between faith and the fruit of faith do we see in Jesus' teaching here?
2. How do we bear fruit? And what fruit might Jesus want us to bear?
3. How are Jesus' disciples cleansed by the word Jesus has spoken?
4. Jesus says the way to remain in his love is to obey his commands. What commands? *[See 15:12, but also consider whether, when Jesus mentions 'love', he may have in mind all his teaching, and Scripture's teaching about obedience to God.]*
5. In verse 13, is Jesus saying this to show his love for the disciples, or to encourage his disciples to sacrificial action (or both)?
6. How does this teaching, on 'non-fruit bearing branches' being thrown into the fire and burned, fit with Jesus not losing any of the sheep given to him by his Father? *[See 6:35-40. You may also like to think about how this sits with the teaching about 'falling-away' in Hebrews 6:46.]*
7. What might lead you to think that, in this passage, Jesus is using 'remain in' as a substitute for 'believe in'?

8. How does this passage contribute to John's twin goals of explaining who Jesus is and the nature of life for a believer in Jesus?
9. Why do you think Jesus repeated his command to love? *[See verses 12 and 17.]*

Implications

1. What fruit do you try to produce, drawing on the life giving and cleansing power of Jesus?
2. Do you think of Jesus as a friend, and, if you do, in what ways do you enjoy his friendship?
3. Don Carson defines eternal security as, 'a believer's confidence that he or she is already in right standing with God, and this will issue in ultimate salvation.' The keys to this are the belief that one is currently living a transformed life that has the two essential and related attributes of right standing with God and salvation to eternal life. This definition permits no lasting doubts and no conditionality. How do you feel about your 'eternal security'? How does this passage help you? What other passages help you?

Prayer suggestions

1. Ask to know what to ask in Jesus' name.
2. Ask that Jesus help you to bear good fruit, and thus bring glory to God.
3. Pray for those you know who have fallen away or may be falling away.

27. John 15:18-27

Getting started

What do you think about when you hear the phrase, 'the persecuted church'?

Observations

1. Where is Jesus when he speaks these words and who is he with?
2. What happens next? [*he prays (chapter 17) and then he is arrested, tried and killed.*]

Interpretation

1. When did the world start hating Jesus? [*Genesis 3, Herod's persecution of Jewish male babies, or when Jesus started teaching?*]
2. Why does it help to know that Jesus was persecuted first?
3. What does 'belonging to the world' involve? [*Keep this in mind for when we get to chapter 17*]
4. We may expect persecution, because our Lord was persecuted, but do you expect people to obey your teaching because people believed Jesus' teaching (or is Jesus only talking to the first disciples and not us)?
5. What would people have to know about the one who sent Jesus, for them not to persecute Jesus' followers? [*They would not only have to know that 'One' is God Almighty, creator and judge of the world, but 'know' here probably includes a sense of 'trusting' or 'believing' God.*]
6. Why do those who oppose Jesus no longer have an excuse? [*Because Jesus has revealed who he is and who has sent him. Ignorance is not an available excuse.*]
7. Do you think that those who opposed Jesus had 'no reason' for doing so, or 'no good reason'? [*They had lots of reasons (e.g. concerns about blaspheme and self-interest) but none of them stand up to the revelations of Jesus.*]

8. What role does Jesus say the Counsellor (the Holy Spirit) will have in testifying? *[Make sure you know what it means to 'testify'? It is usually used in a law court setting, but here it probably means giving evidence or proof that something exists or is the case.]* How does the Counsellor do this?

9. Does the statement in verse 27, that 'you must also testify', apply only to the first disciples, or to all believers? Why?

Implications

1. Have you been persecuted for your faith? How, when, what did you do? What helped?
2. How do you face the future knowing that you can expect persecution for your faith?
3. Do you ever find it difficult to judge whether you or others are seeking persecution to prove a point?
4. Is it OK to avoid persecution, as long as that does not involve betraying Jesus?

Prayer suggestions

1. That God will sustain all Christians through whatever persecution they face? *[Here you might like to broaden things out to consider the specific suffering Christians face around the world]*
2. That people will listen to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and believe.

28. John 16

Getting started

Who keeps you going to church? *[Don't accept one or two word answers, e.g. 'the Holy Spirit. Try and explore the experience of thinking about going to church each week.]*

Observations

1. As a reminder of the last study, what has Jesus just told his disciples?
2. What is the role of the Counsellor/the Holy Spirit? *[See not only verses 8-11, but also verses 13-15]*
3. Why does the Father love Jesus' disciples?

Interpretation

1. When did the disciples weep and mourn and when did the world rejoice?
2. In verse 4, why did it matter that Jesus was with the disciples 'at first'? *[Because he could give them protection]*
3. Why is it good that Jesus was going away?
4. Does the Holy Spirit still have the role Jesus describes here? How does he 'convict the world of guilt'?
5. Why was the prince of the world 'condemned' when Jesus spoke the words in verse 11? *[Jesus had resolved to go to the Cross, and there was nothing Satan could do about it.]*
6. How does the Holy Spirit bring glory to Jesus?
7. How can Jesus say that he has overcome the world, when the Cross still lay ahead of him?

Implications

1. Jesus appears to be saying there will be a day when his disciples will need to know no more, and their joy will be great? Do you feel you need to know more for your joy to be great? *[Note: there is a difference between knowing that there is more that we can know, and needing to know more.]*
2. How should we honour the work of the Holy Spirit?
3. How does it help you to know that Jesus was totally confident that he had overcome the world?
4. How have chapters 13-16 (the 'Upper Room Discourse') contributed to John's stated purpose in 20:31?

Prayer suggestions

1. Ask that our joy never diminish our dependence on the love of Jesus, and that our awareness of Jesus' sacrifice never diminish our joy.
2. Ask that we take confidence from Jesus' words of assurance here.

29. John 17

Getting started

Perhaps ask the members of your group to think about what they would pray for the group if they were leaving. Then give them 5 minutes to actually pray that pray to themselves. Then ask people to share what they prayed.

Note:

There is much gold in this prayer. I think it merits a line-by-line exploration. However, you may find your group works best with 'big picture' approach. So, you could just ask, what are the main points that come out of the three sections of this prayer, (verses 1-5, 6-19 and 20-25)? Or you may use the 'big picture' approach, and supplement that with a few questions from below. I often take 2-3 weeks to explore the depth of this prayer.

Observations and Interpretation

1. What is the context for this prayer? *[Jesus had entered Jerusalem for the last time. We have seen in him in Jerusalem at least 3 times, and he probably went to Jerusalem 2 or 3 times each year for special Jewish festivals. Jesus had shared his last meal with his closed friends. There had been a long discussion in chapters 13-16. Now Jesus prays his longest recorded pray, and also his last sustained prayer. He will then be arrested, tried and killed.]*
2. What are your first impressions of this prayer?
3. What does Jesus pray for himself in verses 1-5?
4. What is Jesus actually asking in verse 1? *[Here 'glorify' probably means 'to clothe in splendour'. Jesus prays that the horror and humiliation of the cross will be reversed. He prays that God will be glorified in what his Son does on the Cross.]*
5. In verse 2, what authority has God given Jesus?
6. How does Jesus **give** eternal life? *[We get eternal life by trusting Jesus, but focus here on Jesus' use of the word 'give'.]*
7. Who are the 'all you have given me'? *[Looking back to 3:16, it is probably all those who trust Jesus.]*

8. How would you describe eternal life? How does Jesus describe eternal life? *[To 'know' is to have a relationship that lasts for ever. The essential thing about eternal life is not how long it goes but how good it is, because it is most importantly a life in a relationship with God.]*
9. What is Jesus asking in verse 5? *[Jesus is asking that his obedience to his Father's will that he come to earth, be embodied and die, will be vindicated. And, Jesus is asking that through this, and the reconciliation of God's creation to himself, God will be glorified by having his creation the way he wants it, in perfect relation with its creator.]*
10. What shift of focus occurs as verse 6?
11. Verse 8: what happens when people receive the words of God from Jesus?
12. Verse 9: why might Jesus not pray for the whole world at this time?
13. Verse 10: what glory to God comes from Jesus' disciples?
14. Verse 11: Why might Jesus now address his prayer to 'Holy Father'? *[This phrase captures transcendence, perfection and familiarity. God has supremely revealed himself in Jesus, and this power protects them. They are kept safe in his sonship, a sonship in which God is revealed as he is.]*
15. What is the purpose or goal of the protection?
16. Verse 13: what do you think Jesus' joy may be?
17. Verse 14: what does it mean to be in the world but not of this world? *[There is a question below about what this mean for us, but you may ask it here.]*
18. Verse 17: What does 'sanctify' mean? *[Set apart for a special purpose or make perfect or holy.]*
19. How does the sanctification of Jesus make it possible for us to be sanctified? *[This is deep and multi-layered. But it at least means that Jesus' obedience in coming to earth and dying for the sins of the world is a perfect expression of his love, and that love makes it possible for us to be holy and acceptable to God.]*
20. What shift in focus occurs at verse 20? *[In verse 6-19 Jesus was praying for his disciples, although those prayers also have some direct relevance for us. Now he shifts his focus to all people who become Christians.]*

21. What picture of unity do we see in verse 21-23?
22. In what ways are our effectiveness linked to our unity? What are the implications of this?
23. In verse 24, what does it mean to be where Jesus is? *[There are probably several aspects of this. We are united with Christ as he sits in heaven. We live with Christ in us. We will live in the Kingdom of God, with Christ as our King, when Jesus returns.]*
24. How does Jesus continue to make the Father known?

Implications

1. Do you feel protected by Jesus? How?
2. What does it mean for you personally to be in this world but not of it?
3. How is our ability to do good is linked to our closeness to Jesus? *[See verse 19.]*
4. To what extent does Jesus teach and encourage in this prayer? What does this say about Jesus' commitment to us, despite what he was about to face?
5. How do you feel after being let into the prayers of Jesus to his Father, and being included in them?

Prayer Suggestions

1. Pray that God may be glorified in Jesus and in his church.
2. Pray that we may know the love of Jesus poured out in this prayer.
3. Pray that we may be united in the sense Jesus envisions here?
4. Ask that the world would know the Jesus revealed in this prayer.

30. John 18:1-14

Getting started

Get a map of ancient Jerusalem and look at where the events of the last day in Jesus' life took place. Look for the location of the house with the upper room, the Temple, Kidron Valley, the Mount of Olives, and the suggestions for where Calvary/Golgotha/The Place of the Skull was, e.g. <http://www.israelhebrew.com/map-of-ancient-jerusalem/>

Observations

1. Where was Jesus arrested?
2. Who authorised the arrest?
3. How well known was Jesus? *[It was night, but it does not seem that the arresting party knew what Jesus looked like.]*

Note:

A question that is often asked is how historically accurate is each gospel. There is no doubt that each writer arranges the material for his particular purpose. Some have questioned the historicity of John's gospel. However, John records Jesus in Jerusalem on a number of occasions in the three years of his public ministry (e.g. 2:12-3:21; 5; 7; 8; 9; 12:12-20). The other gospels have a trajectory towards Jerusalem. It is likely that, as an observant Jew, Jesus would have gone to Jerusalem for the major festivals each year, as John records. This would include Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles (chapter 7). We can have confidence in the historicity of this gospel (and the others!).

Interpretation

1. Why would the arresting power be the chief priests and Pharisees (aided by Roman soldiers) rather than Roman officials? *[Probably because Pilate and his officials did not see Jesus and his followers as a threat. It was the Jewish authorities who wanted to get rid of Jesus.]*
2. Why might the arresting party draw back and fall to the ground?
3. What purpose is served by verses 8-9? *[There are many ways that Jesus' last days on earth fulfil and connect with passages in the Old Testament. This is another connection, and it shows that God is still in control, fulfilling his plans to rescue his people.]*
4. Why did Peter carry a sword? *[He did not realise what type of Messiah Jesus was.]*

5. Why mention the name of the servant who lost his ear? *[So early readers could check the accuracy of John's report.]*
6. How do Jesus' words to Peter in verse 11 fit with the accounts in the three other gospels of Jesus' passionate prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane? There Jesus had asked his Father to take the cup of wrath from him. *[Here Jesus is reminding Peter that Jesus had already decided to take the cup of his Father's wrath.]*
7. What are the possible interpretations of verse 14? *[Caiaphas almost certainly did not mean that someone needed to die for the sins of the world. He probably meant that killing Jesus would quieten the opposition to the Chief Priests, and let them get on with helping the Romans 'keep the peace'.]*
8. What is the dramatic effect of John's account here?

Implications

1. In what ways does the account here fulfil Jesus' earlier predictions?
2. What do you think you would have thought if you were one of Jesus' disciples?
3. What impact does this account have on you? How does it make you feel about Jesus?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks that Jesus was prepared to take the cup'
2. Praise for the type of Messiah Jesus proved to be.
3. Ask that we may honour Jesus for what he did.

31. John 18:15-27

Getting started

Have you ever been scared to give an account of your faith?

Observations

1. What is happening in this section? *[John develops two themes and also progresses the story. The two themes are the betrayal by Peter, and the question of what is the truth.]*
2. Does Jesus answer the question in verse 19? Is Jesus being deliberately evasive, or what is he trying to do? *[Jesus doesn't accept that the Jewish authorities should be questioning him. He knows they have corrupt motives. He also knows his testimony would not be admissible as evidence, as under Jewish law it is witnesses, not the accused, who should be questioned. So he is challenging the legitimacy of their questioning.]*

Interpretation

1. Why does John mention who was with Jesus? *[The mention of Peter is important for the theme of betrayal, and the mention of the unnamed disciple helps us believe that this account is given by a witness who was there and saw these things.]*
2. What impression is conveyed by John mentioning that a 'girl' asked Jesus if he was one of Jesus' disciples? *[Peter, who had boldly said he would die for Jesus (13:37), is now scared of a young child.]*
3. Why do you think Jesus was questioned? Was the High Priest interested in the answer?
4. What is implied in Jesus' answer? *[He has nothing to hide and if the High Priest wants to convict him, he will have to get the evidence. There is also an implicit accusation in the questioning by the Chief Priest. False prophets were thought to do their evil work in private, and Jesus is keen to challenge this implied accusation that he is a false prophet. He says that they already know his teaching. He has been speaking boldly and openly.]*
5. It appears that the High Priest did not reply to Jesus' question in verse 23. Can you think why? *[John is showing that the answer would be inconsistent with the way he was being treated. It helps build the sense of the injustice of Jesus' trial and death.]*

6. Why mention the relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off? *[One reason would be so the truth of the story could be later verified.]*
7. Who do you think is the original source of this part of the story? *[Probably the unnamed disciple in verse 15.]*
8. Why does the fire figure so prominently in the story? Is it just an insignificant detail? *[Hardly anything is insignificant in John's gospel! Look at the story of Peter's restoration by Jesus in chapter 21. There is a fire there. The fire links the betrayal with Jesus' providing fish in abundance. It would trigger memories in Peter of his betrayal of Jesus. Yet, Jesus shows there is nothing to fear from the one who forgives.]*
9. How does this story help develop an answer to John's central question, who is Jesus?

Implications

1. Did Jesus get justice from the High Priests? If not, what does that mean for us? Should we expect justice?
2. Consider what you have learnt so far about Jesus in John's gospel. How does this fit with the way the Priests treat him?
3. Is it OK to ask questions about Jesus? *[Jesus says it is, as long as we look at the evidence. He is also saying that this revelation of the Word is now given into the hands of human witnesses, like you and me. Jesus entrusts into our hands his work of teaching, of proclamation, of answering questions about who Jesus is and what he has done, and what he means for us today.]*
4. Do you know people who ask questions about Jesus but are not really interested in finding out who Jesus really is? People who use questions to avoid the reality of who Jesus is? How should we help them?

Prayer suggestions

1. That we never betray Jesus.
2. That many people ask genuine questions about who Jesus is, and we can help them find true answers.
3. That legal systems around the world act for true purposes, and do justice.

32. John 18:28-19:6a

Getting started

Have you ever been to court? What happened?

Observation

Note:

John records far more detail of the trial before Pilate than all the other gospels.

1. Who was Pontius Pilate? *[The Roman governor of Judea appointed by Emperor Tiberius in AD 26.]*
2. Which 'Jews' lead Jesus to Pilate? *[Not 'all Jews' but the Jewish leaders.]*
3. Where had Jesus predicted what type of death he would die? *[See 12:32-33]*

Interpretation

1. John uses a lot of irony in telling this story. What is ironic about the Jewish leaders being concerned about ceremonial uncleanness? *[Seeking the death of an innocent man, the Messiah, God's chosen king, and manipulating the legal system were much greater sins. Also, Jesus had come to replace the law the Jewish leaders were vainly trying to keep.]*
2. How does the statement in verse 30 sit with the questioning of the High Priest in verse 19-23?
3. What was the (implied) charge against Jesus? *[He was/claimed to be the King of Jews. This would be blaspheme to the Jews and possibly a threat to the Romans.]*
4. Do you think Pilate knew why the Jews had handed Jesus over to him (other than so he could be killed)? Did he really understand why the Jewish leaders objected to Jesus? In what ways does Pilate show contempt for the Jewish leaders?
5. What does Jesus disclose about himself and his kingdom? *[This is arguably the most important part of this exchange for us, so take your time with it. Note that Jesus is careful to not claim he is a threat to the Roman Empire.]*

6. What here suggests that Pilate was not interested in the answer to the question of 'what is truth'?
7. Verse 38, is there any truth in Pilate's initial judgement on Jesus? *[Yes, Pilate does seem to realise that Jesus is not a threat to the Empire. To the extent he is a 'king', he is not a king of this world.]*
8. If there was no basis for the claim against Jesus, why would Pilate consider releasing a prisoner in accordance with the Passover custom, when he should have released Jesus anyway? And if Jesus was innocent, why did Pilate order that he be flogged? *[Perhaps to get the Jews off his back.]*
9. What irony is there in the release of Barabbas? *[Barabbas was a threat to Roman rule, and Jesus was not. Yet Barabbas was released and Jesus was killed as an insurrectionist.]*
10. Why did they clothe Jesus in a purple robe and a crown of thorns, and why is this ironic?
11. Looking back, why is it ironic that Pilate should say, 'Here is the man'? *[Pilate did not know he had God in his hands.]*
12. Do you think Pilate is a tragic character?
13. What should we make of the Jews' demand that Jesus be crucified? What does this show of justice and the truth about Jesus?

Implications

1. What 'truth' do we learn about King Jesus and the Kingdom of Jesus?
2. What does this passage show us about how should we respond to Jesus as King?

Prayer Suggestions

1. Praise for the nobility shown by Jesus in this mock trial, and praise for Jesus sticking to his commitment to be the King who saves the world.
2. Ask for God to always make sure we see the truth.

33. John 19:6b-42

Getting started

When you think of Jesus, what picture comes to mind? *[People have all sorts of images. Some see him on the cross. Some see him healing or teaching. Some see him risen. Some see him sitting at the right hand of his Father in heaven.]*

Observation

1. How do we know Pilate was tired of the Jews, and thought little of them? *[He sends them away to do something they were not allowed to do.]*
2. Is Pilate interested in justice or power?
3. How do the Jews increase the pressure on Pilate?
4. Why should the Jews have been convicted of blasphemy, not Jesus? *[They said they had no king but Caesar, whereas God was supposed to be their king.]*

Interpretation

1. What do you think Jesus means when he says to Pilate that, 'the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin'?
2. Why do you think the details of the crucifixion are so sparse, little more than 'here they crucified him'? *[The immediate audience of the gospel knew the horrors crucifixion.]*
3. What irony is there in the sign that hung above Jesus' head? What is the purpose of mentioning the sign in this way?
4. What Scriptures are fulfilled in the details John gives us of Jesus' death?
5. What is the point of John mentioning that Scripture was being fulfilled? *[Both to link to the specific passages in the Old Testament and to show that God was, and had always been, in control. This was not a 'drive-by' crucifixion.]*
6. How would you paraphrase Jesus' request at verse 27? *[Something like, 'Hey, please look after my mum!']* What does this show? *[Among other things, that even as he was dying Jesus could still think of others, and he fulfilled the law in honouring his mother.]*

7. In verse 30, what was 'finished'? *[Not just Jesus' life and the ordeal of crucifixion, but God's whole plan that he would save humanity through Jesus. The Greek word that is translated 'finished' captures the idea of completion. Jesus had completed his mission on earth. He had taught all he needed to teach. He had shown the way to the Father, and now he could die as the supreme and final sacrifice for the sins of the world he had come to save. This also picks up the words that introduce the foot washing back in chapter 13. Jesus had loved to the end. Finished. Accomplished. Ended. It's the same Greek word, telos. Jesus had done what he had come to do. And from that flows forgiveness, and the offer of eternal life to all who believe.]*
8. Why the details in verse 31-37? Is there any symbolic significance in the flow of blood and water? *[A number of suggestions are made by commentators. For me, the best explanation is that these are signs of the life and cleansing that flows from Jesus' death. The blood of Jesus, the symbol of his sacrificial and redemptive death, cleanses us from every sin, while the water is symbolic of cleansing, new life and the Spirit.]*
9. What is the significance of Nicodemus turing up at verse 39? *[Look back at chapter 3. He met Jesus in the dark. Now he is serving Jesus in the light. He has been born again.]*
10. Why mention the 34 kilograms of myrrh and aloes? *[Jesus was really dead. He was about to start stinking! Better cover the smell quickly.]*
11. What is the significance of Jesus being buried in a garden? *[It could just be a detail to add to testimony of his death. But it could also link back to the garden in Genesis 1&2.]*

Implications

1. What is this story makes you sad?
2. What in this story gives you hope? *[Scripture was fulfilled. Even on this darkest of days, God's promises were still being fulfilled. The sharing of the clothes connects the removal of the clothes and the foot-washing John records in chapter 13, and points to the more complete cleansing on the cross. Jesus' words, 'It is finished' are not words of defeat but words of total victory.]*

Prayer suggestions

1. Praise God for what he has done for us.
2. Thanks that we get to share in Christ's victory.
3. Request that everyone will see what God has done for us, and believe.

34. John 20:1-23

Getting started

What have you seen that you would not have believed if you had not seen it?

Observation

1. Who was the first person to see that the stone had been rolled away from the front of the tomb?
2. What was the order of events after that? *[Take care. A lot happens.]*
3. How many people saw the risen Jesus, according to John?

Interpretation

1. Like the other three gospels, the resurrection is said to occur on 'the first day of the week'. Why describe it this way, rather than as the 'third day' after the crucifixion? *[To show that something new had started.]*
2. What do you think Mary was thinking when she reported that Jesus' body had been taken? *[Probably not that Jesus had risen but that his body had been stolen.]*
3. What is the significance of the details about burial clothes being folded? *[Jesus' resurrection was ordered, as you would expect from the God of order. It also suggests this was not the work of grave robbers.]*
4. What thoughts are conveyed in verse 9? *[We need Jesus to help us understand God's plan of salvation and restoration.]* What do you make of verse 10?
5. How would you describe the emotional flow within Mary from verse 10 to verse 16? *[At the least, anguish and despair replaced by astonishment and delight.]*
6. What is the significance of Jesus calling out 'Mary'? *[See 10:3-4, the Good shepherd calls his own sheep by name.]*
7. What is meant by Jesus saying don't hold onto me? *[Various suggestions are given by commentators. Probably the simplest is right. That is that now was not a time for Mary to cling to Jesus but to go and share the good news with the other disciples.]*

8. Can we read verse 17 as Jesus commissioning Mary Magdalene to preach the first Christian sermon? *[The terms 'preach' and 'sermon' are anachronistic and inflammatory. Yet, it is hard to think that Jesus was just asking Mary to pass on some information. In my view, Jesus commissioned Mary to be the first person to preach the gospel after the Cross. Some argue Jesus was just 'giving them a message', but anyone who thinks she would have just passed on the words in John 20:17 without comment has not thought much about Mary or the circumstances in which she found herself. It would be far more reasonable to expect her to have said something like, 'He's ALIVE, He's ALIVE. All that he ever said is true. He has defeated death. There is hope etc.']*

9. Verses 19-20, what does Jesus' appearance say about his physical body? What conclusions can we draw from Jesus showing his hands and side?

10. What are the implications of Jesus' greeting of peace? *[It is hard to see it only as a formal greeting. It is more a blessing from the one who had conquered death and evil so that peace was now assured.]*

11. Does verse 23 apply only to the disciples or to all followers of Jesus? What does it mean?

Note:

A question arises how Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into them fits with the account in Acts 2. Various suggestions are given by commentators. They are too numerous to mention here. As Don Carson says, we should not make John's account captive to the account in Acts 2. I think it is most likely that this was a private conferral of the Holy Spirit, followed by the public outpouring at Pentecost.

Implications

1. Do you find this account of the resurrection believable?

2. If you find this account believable, what more do you need to do to get eternal life? *[Believe that Jesus died for you. No one is saved by historical facts. They are saved by a personal commitment to the Lord who died for them.]*

3. For further reflection, look at 1 Corinthians 15:1-33 *[or just 15:1-11, if you are short for time]*. How important does Paul say the resurrection is?

Prayer suggestions

1. Praise that the Father honoured the Son by raising him from the dead.
2. Ask for confidence in the historical truth of this account of the resurrection.
3. Ask that those who doubt Jesus or doubt his resurrection examine the evidence.

35. John 20:24-31

Getting started

What does it mean to you for Jesus to be divine?

Observation

1. Did Thomas put his finger in Jesus' wounds? *[It does not say so, and the implication is that seeing Jesus was enough to remove Thomas' doubts.]*
2. How does Jesus respond to Thomas' doubts?
3. How does Jesus respond to Thomas' declaration in verse 28? *[Jesus does not disclaim Thomas' confession of his divinity.]*

Interpretation

1. Why mention both the nail holes and hole in Jesus' side? *[The nails speak of crucifixion, the piercing of the side connects with Scripture being fulfilled and the blood and water that flowed.]*
2. Do you think John intends us to believe that Jesus can walk through walls, or that Jesus cannot be locked out, (or both)?
3. How are we to interpret Thomas' conclusion that Jesus is his Lord and his God? How does this sit with suggestions made by more contemporary doubters that the divinity of Jesus was made up in later generations?
4. What does it mean to have life in the name of Jesus? *[We have life because we believe that he dies for us. Also, remember we can pray in his name for things we would think he would want his Father to grant.]*
5. Who do you think Jesus had in mind in verse 29 as being blessed?

Implications

1. Do you think John was aware of the type of doubts people have when they are told unlikely stories?
2. Has John shown enough that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name?
3. How can we help people who have doubts?
4. In what ways has John, in his gospel, shown that Jesus is the Christ, and in what ways has he shown that Jesus is the Son of God? What do we know about Jesus as the Son of God?

Prayer Suggestions

1. Praise that God would be aware of our doubts and address them in his Bible.
2. Ask that we may always have confidence in Jesus as our Lord and our God.
3. Ask that the whole world fall to its knees and declare that Jesus is Lord and God.
4. Ask that we may live out the consequences that Jesus is our Lord and God.

36. John 21:1-17

Getting started

Try and get some pictures of the Galilee region today, particularly in Springtime. It is beautiful.



[Photo taken by Mark Wormell on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, at dawn, in April 2014.]

Observation

1. Where did this happen? *[The Sea of Tiberius is another name for the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are back in their home country.]*
2. Who appears to be leading the disciples? *[Peter.]*
3. Peter was naked or next to naked. Why might he put on an 'outer garment' to go swimming? *[He may have got away with nakedness on a boat, but not on shore. In other words, he was complying with standards of propriety.]*

Interpretation

1. Why might the disciples have gone back to Galilee after seeing Jesus in Jerusalem? Does this suggest they had given up their commission to spread the gospel? *[Views differ. There was no church infrastructure and they needed to eat. There is nothing that suggests they had given up on Jesus.]*
2. What is the significance of John mentioning they went fishing at night? *[The symbolic movement from emptiness in darkness to abundance when Jesus, the light of the world, comes in the morning. Good things happen when Jesus is about.]*
3. Why might the disciples not recognise Jesus? *[Poor light and perhaps also that they had last seen him 150 kms away in Jerusalem.]*
4. What suggests that Peter and Jesus were already reconciled by this time, even though Peter had betrayed Jesus three times? *[Peter's excitement that Jesus was there and his impetuous swim to shore.]*
5. What do you think lies behind Jesus helping them catch fish? *[Jesus does not prove he is a knowledgeable fisherman. Rather, we should read this as a miracle, or sign, and also as God's gracious abundance]*
6. What is the significance of the burning fire? *[It links back to Peter's betrayal when he was warming himself by a fire.]*
7. Why mention the number of fish? *[To show abundance. Many have tried to read some deep theological or biblical significance into the number, but none is convincing.]*

Implications

1. What do you like about this story?
2. Do you find it encouraging that when Jesus comes back he has a fish barbecue with his mates, rather than seeking justice against the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities that gave him a false trial and tortured and killed him? What does this teach us about Jesus and his ways?

3. What else do we learn from this story? *[Many things. For example, there is further evidence of the physicality of Jesus' resurrected body. He was still friends with his disciples. Good things happen when we follow his instructions. The sighting of the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem cannot be put down to the emotional responses of the disciples to the crucifixion.]*

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks for the further evidence of the resurrection.
2. Ask for us to follow Jesus' advice in all things.
3. Ask that the whole world fall in love with a God who enjoys a fish barbecue with his mates.

Note:

In these Bible studies we have not spent much time talking about the structure of John's gospel. It appears here that there are two endings, one ending at 20:30, and then chapter 21. Chapter 21 has been called an epilogue. Some have suggested that chapter 21 is written by someone else. There are good reasons to doubt this. For example, the loose end of Jesus' relationship with Peter is resolved in chapter 21. Jesus' leadership after the resurrection is confirmed. The role of the church is set out (see the next study). There is no textual evidence that chapter 21 was added later, and did not form part of the original.

37. John 21:18-25

Getting started

Where has the gospel of John taken you as we have studied it?

Observations

1. Where else has Jesus spoken about sheep or lambs in John's gospel?
2. What type of death was Jesus' predicting for Peter?
3. Read 20:30-31 and 21:25. Does anything here suggest we have two endings.

Interpretation

1. What is the point of Jesus asking Peter three times? *[To mimic the three-fold rejection of Jesus by Peter and , in a sense, to give Peter an opportunity to 'unwind' those rejections.]*
2. What do you think Jesus meant when he asked Peter to feed his lambs/take care of his sheep?
3. Was this a special commissioning of Peter (alone or with the other disciples who shared the fish breakfast) or does this apply to all followers of Jesus?
4. How do you interpret the enigmatic conversation in verses 22-23?
5. Who do you think the 'disciple who Jesus loved' is? *[John the son of Zebedee? Another John, e.g. John the elder? Lazarus?]* Does it matter if we do not know?
6. John started with the most exalted, poetic writing in the New Testament (John 1), and ends with a simple story of reconciliation and new purpose. What effect does this have?

Implications

1. How do Jesus' commands to Peter fit with the role of the church?
2. How can we 'feed the sheep'?

3. What do you think about the gospel of John now? What is distinctive about it?
4. How does the gospel of John help you in your walk with Jesus?
5. How do you like the gospel of John compared to the other gospels?

Prayer Suggestions

1. Thanks for John writing this gospel.
2. Ask that John's gospel will help you in your devotion to Jesus.
3. Ask that churches everywhere care for God's sheep.