

John by Rick Stark

1 - *“Like an overture to an opera,”* writes Leslie Newbigin, *“vv. 1-18 announce in brief the great themes which will be developed as the story unfolds.”* The question – Who is Jesus? – is the issue at stake, the grand theme (19-28). How would you answer? The Apostle first underscores the divine nature of Jesus (1-4): that by God’s creative, revealing and life-giving Word all things came to be; and no mere abstraction, the Word is “He” – Jesus (1-4). This One has not remained distant but has come, become flesh and dwelt among us (14, *“moved into the neighborhood”*), and in whom, as both life and light, we are to believe (7). In believing (*“receive Him,”* 12), we discover, is actually a rebirth at His initiative (13). What else do we discover about Jesus? His true glory is not by masterful exercise of power to control the world’s affairs but by humble obedience, even to the point of death. His true gift is *“grace upon grace”* (16). His true mission is as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (29). His true power is in perfect identification with *“the Holy Spirit”* (33). His true title is the *“Son of God”* (34). His true question (maybe even to you and me) is *“What are you seeking?”* (What do you want?, 38). May you and I hear Jesus say to us as He said to them, *“Come and you will see”* (39)... and *“see greater things than these”* (50).

2- In 1:50 it had just been promised to the disciples that they shall see *“greater things.”* In what way has the fulfilling of that promise – the manifestation of the glory of God – now begun? Note two major sections, (1-12) and (12-22): one about *“joy,”* the other about *“justice.”* Two scenes set in stark juxtaposition – joy at the wedding and the anguish at the Temple. Take a moment to slowly read each section... feel the tension. Both strike at the core longing and experiences of broken humanity. Both have to do with effective signs, miracles signifying the present reality (in-breaking) of the gracious rule of God in the ministry of Jesus, and all consistent with the purpose of John’s Gospel – that the reader might *“believe... have life”* (21:30-31). First, the miraculous *“sign”* at the wedding points to the real, lasting joy which comes only from Jesus’ blood (*“true vine”*) of atonement at the cross. The second, in the context of cleansing the Temple, Jesus points to the *“sign”* of real, lasting justice – Jesus’ victory over evil in the resurrection. In the words of Lesslie Newbigin, *“Things happen which authenticate themselves as ‘signs’ of Jesus’ love and power. They have His signature; manifest His glory. Many miss the signs, but those who put themselves under Jesus’ know the secret and are enabled to believe.”*

3- So far we seen the unveiling of glory and the beginnings of faith in the disciples. And the witness of God in Christ continues (note the sheer number: *“God, Son, Spirit, heaven, Moses”* 9-17; *“the Baptist, Son, Spirit, Father”* 25-35). Two long narratives: one with Nicodemus, private by night (1-21); the other of John the Baptist, public by day (22-36). The central question of Nicodemus (and for all sincere seekers) is about the manner of God’s kingship (*“kingdom,”* 3) and how one enters into it. Jesus says the

kingdom question cannot start with some structure, a “*building up*,” but rather something “*coming down*” as a gift – the gift of a new creation (1:13; 1 Pet.1:23). To experience the kingship of God as a present reality (and a future hope) is, in the first place, a result of an act of God; a miracle; a mystery; “*from above*” (5-8)... and not of reasoning (even theological) nor technique. Secondly, therefore, it is not a matter or illumination, but only regeneration. For this, “*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...*” (16). And there is no rival; only one betrothal (25-35, love the illustration of groom and groomsmen)! In fact, here we are again, the same radical dichotomy between “*from above*” and “*from below*” (31). Such is the supremacy of the Son, God in Christ: sent with the Spirit-Word of God; loved by the Father uniquely and given rule over all. To believe and to escape into the new kingdom is always *top-down, inside-out*.

4- The bigger picture here is how the Spirit (“*from above*” and “*blows where he will*,” ch.3), inspires also a movement outward (Act.1:8). There is “*a theological as well as a geographical necessity implied in the statement that Jesus “had to pass through Samaria.”*” (Lesslie Newbigin) Three movements: First, Jesus toward the Samaritan woman (the “*great soul hunter*”). Humility startles the woman (and us! 6-7). Jesus’ offer of “*living water*” is provocative (10-15; Jer.2:13; Ezk.47). Note what begins to dawn on her: a much deeper gulf than that which divides Jew from Samaritan, it is the gulf between the Author of Life and a thirsty world (13-14). A seed of faith necessarily means a turning into the “*light*”: of our sin; and of need for a true “*mercy seat*,” true cleansing, true worship (16-26). But where? When? This will be (and now is) the action of the Father thru the Son by the Spirit drawing worshippers out of Jewry and out of Samaria and out of every nation. She knows... and thus a second movement, consistent with faith: “*changed lives change lives*” (28-30, 39-42). Third movement – Jesus toward the Galileans by way of another “*sign*” (43-54), albeit in provocative fashion (Matt.8:5-13; Lk.7:1-10): another discriminating lesson on what “*faith*” is, even if only emerging and undeveloped. Faith is responding (trust) in the action of God (49-50). At Cana, Jesus had show himself as the giver of joy; in the cleansing of the Temple, as the new Temple; to Nic, as the new birth from above; to the people of Samaria, as the Savior of the world; and now to the officer in Capernaum, He had become the giver of life from the dead.

5- The key to life is not a bigger me or a bigger you; it’s a bigger Jesus. That is John’s purpose in writing. The scene at Bethesda is expected: it’s name actually means “*place of healing*,” but here we find nothing but brokenness (1-3). “*A mournful spectacle*,” says John Calvin... and we add, it’s a parable of the human condition. The question Jesus asks is unexpected, almost takes your breath away (6)! Sometimes we don’t want to get well; change is romantic at a distance, but risky in reality. The power of Jesus is unexpected: one word, “*eigayra*” – “*Get up!*” (Rom.5:20) The point is not that everyone gets a miraculous healing in this life, but to point to a bigger need and to a bigger Jesus.

No coincidence this happened on the Sabbath. Why? (hint: theological significance of the Sabbath) No coincidence, either, that the question of the day is, “*Who is this man?*” (12) Hailed in John as Lamb of God, Messiah, Savior of the world, Jesus has acted consistent with these claims. Further, John will document a series of actions in which each is followed by Jesus’ use of the “I Am” (6:35, 8:12, 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1), clearly equating Himself with God (Ex.3:14) and of the unity of Father and Son in love and obedience. This is the clear implication (19-46) and the Jews knew it (17-18). Jesus simply points to the authentication by the *Father* (32); and of *The Baptist* (33-35); and of the “*works*” of Jesus (36; Lk.7:18-23); and the *witness of the Scriptures* (39). What say you? The “*glory of God*” or “*another*”? (44)

6- Jesus has a habit of asking provocative questions and two are here in the “*Bread*” narrative: first, “*Where do you find your bread?*” (5); second, “*Do you want to go away as well?*” (67). What’s more provocative, though, is how the two questions are related. In vv.1-15, Jesus gives another “*sign*” – the miraculous multiplication of bread and fish to feed 5,000+ - but a “*sign*” of what? We could simplify by saying that “*little becomes much with the touch of the Master’s hand,*” and that is true. But perhaps Jesus’ explanation in vv.22-71 teaches something much more profound. One can hear echoes of Israel’s history – God had miraculously led His people through the waters and fed them miraculously in the desert by “*the bread of heaven*” (P.78:21-25), and which God tested the reality of faith and exposed unbelief (“*man does not live by bread alone but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord,*” Deu.8:30). And now think for a moment how that Jesus’ miracle and teaching took place at Passover (4): the lambs slain, blood sprinkled, and families gathered to eat flesh and drink wine in celebration of their deliverance from bondage. Lastly, as you read the narrative, think what may have been in the Apostle John’s most immediate memories: the Last Supper, the bread and wine identified with the flesh and blood given for them and for the world (53-58), and that these actions and words were at the heart of faith and fellowship of believers. Note all the *murmuring* in the background of the narrative (41, 52, 60). Perhaps many will miss what the “*sign*” signifies. Actually, scandalous. “*Do you want to go away as well?*”

7- The “*exclusivity*” of Jesus (His person and mission, ch.6) along with Peter’s confession (6:68-69) had the effect of drawing a line in the sand; opposition (tension) is now accelerating. Jesus will calculate his steps carefully (1-9); refusing to act on the instigation of others, but only divine timing and purpose in His every move (10-13). The content of Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue probes the meaning the miraculous healing (ch.5): the problem of God’s self-revelation (light) and man’s hardness toward it (14-32). The Jewish “*Feast of Booths*” (*Tabernacles*), filled with expectations as a foretaste of the ages to come, featured a water ceremony: each day was water drawn from the Pool of Siloam and carried up to the Temple in procession, while the words of Isaiah 12:3 were sung and the prophecy of Zechariah 14:8 was recalled. But at the end of the day

(end of the festival) they must pack their bags and head toward “same-ole, same-ole”... the dry, parched hearts of this life. Would the Jews miss altogether the echo of Ezk.47 in the pouring of water? With perfect timing, Jesus makes sure they don't (37-39). Foreshadowed here, and waiting upon the completion of Calvary, is the new age, the life-giving waters of the Spirit will flow from Jesus to His own (1 Cor.10:4; Ex.17:1-7; Ps.78:15) and thru His own, spilling out all over the place! As in ch.6 and the earlier part of this chapter, once again the controversial question remains: “Who is this man?” What say you?

8- The “*dragon of despair*” (from without or within) slithers about, slaying with haunting accusations: “*not good enough, scumbag, no hope, condemned.*” No doubt the woman caught in adultery was experiencing all of that. Is this story historically true and part of the original manuscripts? While scholars disagree, what can be corroborated in the Scriptures is: the law of sin and death rightly condemns and destroys (Rom.3:23; 6:23a); and evil in the world only accuses and shames without the offer of hope (Jn.8:44; 15:19; Rev.12:10); but Jesus forgives and liberates (Rom.8:1-2). And don't miss the significance of 1) “*Mount of Olives*” (Acts.1:12) and 2) “*early in the morning*” (new hope). The trap of the accusers is not about the woman, but who? The person and “*light*” of Jesus (12). By now we're familiar with the mounting tension. “*Darkness*” exposed and threatened punches back: (13, “*you lie*”; 19, “*you're illegitimate*”; 22, “*you're crazy suicidal*”; 41, “*illegitimate child*”; etc...). “*Who do you think you are?*” (25) That's the theme of John's Gospel and this chapter: “*I Am*” (12, 58), “*from above*” (23), declaring “*truth*” (31) in divine relationship and perfect harmony with “*the Father*” (13-47). Yet Jesus consistently rejects any claim of self-glory; His hour is not yet come; but in beautiful humility waits only upon the Father's pleasure, glory, and validation (48-56). When will we “*know it is He?*” When we really see the cross, and the cross opens our eyes! (28-29)

9- Why was this man blind? Whose fault? (1) Don't be too hard on the disciples. Why? Because the struggle to make sense of our experiences, of suffering and death, is not only a consequence of the Fall, “*it is also contains more of a seed of hope in it than the resignation to fate or karma.*” (*Newbiggin*) But the only thing which can make sense of a dark world is the coming of light. In ch.8, the darkness seeks to destroy the light; now we see, by contrast, the “*true light*” destroying the darkness (1:9). Only Jesus as the light can “*make sense*” of all our experiences in the world (3-5). At this, Jesus takes action (6-7). Why does John tell us that “*Siloam*” means “*Sent*”? (hint: 5x's in ch.8 alone) First question that arises is expected – “*Who is this man?*” (8-17) And the significance that this miracle occurred “*on the Sabbath*”? (14) Besides the humor in the interrogation of this man's parents (18-23) and this man's interrogating the interrogators (27-34, his theology is not half bad), note the hymnody embedded in his testimony – “*I was blind but now I see*” (25) One has to love the way this story ends (38, “*Lord, I*

*believe, and he worshiped Him.*”) That the blind receive sight (representative of the entire human condition) is one of the promises belonging to the messianic age (Isa.29:18; 35:5), to which now the Gospel record points (Lk.7:18-23). The distinction is not between the blind and those who see; it is between those who know they are blind and those who claim they see. But this distinction cannot come to light except when the light comes (39).

**10-** The false shepherds of Israel don't love the sheep (9:34), and are continually exposed as “blind guides” (9:40). But the purpose of Jesus' coming is not to judge, but to give life abundantly (3:16-21; 10:10). All through the Old Testament, the Lord is described as the shepherd of His people (Ps.23; 80; 100; Isa.40:11). He promised to one day remove the false shepherds (Ezk.34). In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus has compassion on the crowds because they are “*like sheep without a shepherd*” (Mk.6:34), and he goes to all lengths for the sake of even one of His flock (Mtt.18:10-14; Lk.15:3-7). Ultimately, the length that the *Good Shepherd* (11) will go to in order to secure His sheep, the cost of the gift of “*abundant life,*” is to lay down His life (15), and that of His own doing (17-18). The result of the light cast upon the “*true shepherd?*” Questions... lines drawn in the sand (19-21). But maybe the better question for us is not “*Who is the true shepherd?*” but rather “*Am I one of His sheep?*” If ever one needed assurance, there's hardly a better text following here – vv.25 – 30. But as darkness hates the light (3:19-20), the One who does the works of God is accused of usurping the place of God (31-39). The appeal of Jesus is that the exact opposite is true. Jesus is one with the Father – perfect mutual love and indwelling; His works, gifts that God alone gives, are evidence. Fitting is the end the story (42). May that be true of you and me.

**11-** Here, the last of seven “*signs*” – what He is and what He has come to give man – but no sign more closely approaches the reality than in this gift of life to Lazarus. More importantly, this miraculous sign shows that Jesus gives life on by giving His life (25), for the raising of Lazarus becomes the decisive cause of offense leading to His death (53). This is the *glory* (4), the ultimate glory of God in His Son (17:1-5), and the reason for His intentional delay to Bethany. Contrasts in this story abound and tease-out rich meaning: places of fear and darkness vs. the “*light of life*” (9-11); what the disciples knew vs. what Jesus knew; Martha's response (17-27, 38-40) vs. Mary's response (28-32); one set of tears (33) vs. *Another's* (33, 38); the power of death vs. the power of life (38-44). Believing in a universal resurrection on the last day won't do; Jesus must show Martha (and Mary) that the last day has already dawned. “*Resurrection is no longer a mere doctrine; it has a living face and a name – Jesus.*” (Newbigin) Jesus' emotional response testifies to the fact that His conflict with “*the prince of this world*” (12:31) was an infinitely costly one (Heb.5:7). Note how Jesus kept front and center the purpose of this event (41-42; here we could learn something about prayer); and then, with but one word – “*eigayra*” – Jesus, with all power and authority, commands life, a foretaste of the

ages to come (5:25). The supreme sign has been given, and now is the moment: final decisions – faith or turning from the light and life to darkness and death (45-57).

**12-** Ch.12 occurs as Passover begins, marking a definitive turning point: “*signs*” cease, and with them a sense of *light*, now the narrative takes a darker, “*troubling*” (27) turn. It opens with the “*anointing*,” foreshadowing His death (1-8) and Judas Iscariot tipping his sinister hand. But what a prophetic picture – Lazarus sitting with Jesus at the table (2). Darker still is the plot to kill Lazarus and any evidence of the divine (9-11). Yet even as the shadows fall, Jesus deliberately rides on triumphantly as King in fulfillment of the prophets – “*Hosanna! Blessed is He...*” The cynical exaggerations (19) and the coming of the Greeks (20-22) seemed to signal to Jesus that the shades are now drawn – “*the hour has come... Now is My soul troubled*” (23, 27). Failure? Depair? Hardly. Jesus has only one objective – “*glory*” – and out of the darkness the Father shouts His affirmation – “*glory!*” (27-28) Glory in death? “Lifted up” the cross (32)? The Father’s voice assures us “*post tenebras lux*” (out of darkness, light) and the wisdom and power of the cross is the justice and mercy our hearts long for (30-32). For this purpose, Jesus says He came (44-50). To Him one must respond in faith – delivered from illusion and to live in the light of truth. Both now and in the end (48), it is by this reality – the revelation of God – that we must all stand or fall.

**13-** How does Jesus prepare His disciples for the mission to the world (1-11)? He goes the way of the cross carrying a love that knows no limits. What better picture (a prophetic action) of the mission than the washing of feet (4-5)? As the Master, so his disciples (12-17). More than a lesson in humility (6-9), it is a sign of the scandalous subversion of all human power and authority that takes place at the cross (Col.2:15). No way anyone understands apart from a radical U-turn in conversion (*cleansed*) and revelation by the Spirit. Nothing is to be added to the finished work of the cross, Jesus warns (9-11; Gal.5:4). What else must they (the church) be warned of (21-30; *hint: strange paradox of the church*)? The moment Judas leaves the room (30) and by the words of Jesus (31-35), the “*tectonic plates*” of redemption seem to shift (Ps.40; Heb.10:10). It is the “*new covenant*” of which Jeremiah had spoken; the supreme manifestation of future glory already present; and it’s a “*new commandment*” predicated upon a new gift – the love of Christ operative in the life of the church. Finally, why the stunning rebuke of Peter (36-38)? The way is not opened yet; only Jesus can open it. Peter’s very human and eager determination to follow Jesus in the only way that he understands will mean that he will find himself lost, off the track.

**14-** Transitioning from ch.13, how could the disciples not be troubled (1)? In times of separation and death, we wilt. But Jesus gives them a command – “*Be strong and of good courage*” (Josh.1:6, 7, 9, 18). But where is the “*promise land*,” the place where we dwell with God and He with us? Is it only in another world beyond death? Well, yes and no. The promise here is much fuller and more comforting. While Jesus is coming back

as the bridegroom for his bride to lead us into an “*abiding*” place with the Father (3), it is also a place now, a present “*abiding*” with the Father and Son in the Spirit, which is constituted by the resurrection of Jesus (2:19-22; 15:4, 7; Eph.2:19-22). More than a mere destination or a map (5), He himself is the way (6; Heb.10:20), the way of faith in Him who leads us through the dark waters as “*pioneer and perfecter of our faith*” (Heb.12:2). That is the heart of the matter: to know Jesus is to know the Father, and He has left a trail of witness along the way (10-11), including the glory of the mission (12-14; Acts 1:6-8). Our assurance? Note the promises: the coming of the Spirit (15-17); the coming of Jesus (18-20); and the abiding presence of the Father and Son (23)... all in the context of reciprocated love and obedience (21). But the Christian’s ultimate assurance and peace is found in the Word of God revealed, inscribed, interpreted and illuminated to us by the Spirit (25-31).

**15-** The departure of Jesus (ch.13-14) was unsettling, but the promise (1-11) is that they will still know His presence and purpose for their lives. How so? Spiritually, by “*abiding in Him*” as “*branches to the true vine.*” Israel had forgotten (Ps.80:8-11; Isa.5, 27; Jer.2:21; Ezk.19:10; Hos.10:1; Lk.20); the vine planted did not exist for itself. The gracious indwelling of God with His people was never about settling down; it is a summons for mission in the world. Now from the stump has sprung forth the new branch (Isa.11:1): the true vine in whom the Gardener find the fruit He desired. What kind of fruit? (9-17; 13:34,35) Simply, the life of Jesus made visible in the world. The production of fruit is not the responsibility of the branches, but the “*true vine*” and the Gardener (“*vinedresser*”). Our responsibility is to “*abide in the vine*” (4-8; drinking deeply of His Word; praying His Word to be actualized “*on earth as it is in heaven*”). Jesus calls His chosen ones to “*go and bear fruit*” in the world (5, 16), emphasizing that they “*abide*” in Him only as they go with Him. Anything less will be carefully, lovingly pruned (possibly painfully) for greater fruitfulness (2). And what might that look like? Four things that follow: answered prayer, glory to the Father, abundant fruit, recognition as disciples of Jesus by obedience and yes, even suffering “*on account of My name*” (18-25).

**16-** In 15:18-31, Jesus began and now He continues (16:1-4) to describe the world into which the church is sent: self-fulfillment and self-assertion must necessarily hate and reject self-denial – of Christ and His disciples. We are not to be surprised (1 Pet.4:12-19): “*the rejection of Jesus is in fact the rejection of the One who sent Him, as the rejection of the missionaries of Jesus is the rejection of Jesus*” (Newbigin). Glory as the world understands is only acquisition and achievement, but the glory of God is surrender (and the sign of the cross will be the mark of the true friends of Jesus). But it is at this point the disciple is assured that he is not left unaided (1-4), but rather helped and strengthened by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit (15:26-27; 7-11; 14:15-31). The words, works, and the sufferings of the Christian community will be the means by which the living Spirit’s witness of the victory of Jesus (which they could not understand

at the moment, 5-11) is borne. It will be the ministry of the Spirit to lead and guide them (and us) “*into all the truth*” and for the glory of Christ (2 Pet.1:20-21; Acts 10-11). The ministry of the Spirit and the promise of “*seeing*” Jesus (16-24; post-resurrection appearances and His ultimate return) is now the dawning of the ages to come and the experience of the fullness of hope and “*joy*” previously unknown.

**17-** The prayer of Jesus takes us into the very heart of the ministry and message of Jesus. The context is the farewell discourse (1); the setting is the last supper (ch.13). The central theme is captured at the outset: “*glory*” – a reciprocal divine glory (1). Jesus manifested the glory of the Father by a life of total love and obedience (4). And now as he approaches the cross, He prays the Father may honor Him, enabling Him to offer the perfect sacrifice of love; and in so doing, making it possible for those whom the Father has given to share in this glory (1-5; 22; Heb.2:10; Jn.1:12; 6:44). In the second section (6-19), Jesus affirms the Name and the Word of God as that which creates and constitutes the people of God – the church. Think for a moment about God’s name(s), how they reveal His nature and work and purposes... what confidence we shall have! Second, note how Jesus prays for the missional church – that by the name and Word of God the church will be led and kept in unity (as the Father and Son) in this world of hostility. In this third section (20-26), Jesus knows that the sending of the church into the world is not an empty gesture, and so the prayer extends beyond the first generation to whom? To you and to me (20-21)! And for what purpose? The prayer looks toward the end: a oneness which does not merely reflect but actually participates in the unity (“*glory*”) of God– the unity of love and obedience which binds the Son to the Father (22-26).

**18-** The Passion (1-19:42). John makes it clear from the beginning of his Gospel that everything leads up to and is consummated in the passion (18:1-19:42); and for one theological intention (20:31). We should be absorbed in the details of the five movements in this narrative. First, the arrest (1-11). You cannot miss the “*power encounter*”: they call him *Jesus of Nazareth* but He has another name in referring to Himself – “*I AM*” (3x’s) – and He alone is in command of the situation. Second, the two interrogations (12-27): Jesus and Peter; one of fidelity, the other of flesh (Isa.40:7-8; 1 Pet.1:24)... the rooster knows the difference and the dawn of a new day. Third, Jesus and Pilate “*outside*” (28-32). If they only knew on this *day of preparation*, they were indeed preparing the Pascal Lamb! They are on the “*outside*” more than they know; their intentions are clear – death. In the fourth movement (33-38), the great Trial begins – but a different kind of Kingship is at stake for which Pilate has no clue. Fifth, “*give us Barabbas*” (38-40). The zeal for national security is exposed as a farce. The world hates the truth and now Pilate is trapped. “*Having failed to acknowledge the truth, Pilate is in the power of the lie.*” (Newbigin)



**19-** From 18:40 to 19:1-8... Barabbas' freedom, Jesus' flogging... the injustice! But God's plan moves forward with majestic certainty, even if now by the mock coronation for the "*king of the Jews*." A cruel and savage scene, it reminds one of the suffering "*servant of the Lord*" (Isa.50:6; 53:5-7), and all because our sin is really that bad. But Pilate and all are blinded in cynicism ("*Behold, the man*") to the truth that "*the stricken lamb is also the King*" (Newbigin). Now the scene shifts (8-12); Pilate is spooked. Face to face with Jesus, he must realize it is not Jesus on trial but Pilate. The trial concludes (13-16): denying the kingship of Jesus they deny the kingship of God and the claims of both religion and state have been unmasked. John would have us imagine the Via Doloroso ("*Way of Suffering*") unvarnished (17-22). At the cross, the title written in three languages has Pilate as the unwitting witness of the truth – on the cross, Jesus is enthroned and reigns! Who ever wears a "*seamless*" tunic (23; Ps.22:18)? Only the high priest (Josephus; Heb.10:19-25). Umm... details matter. Women had always been among the faithful of Jesus, and so it's fitting they are with Him at the end. Three "*Mary's*" and a disciple (25-27) – the family is redefined (1:12-13) and a new community is born. "*It is finished*" (28, *tetelestai*) may be the greatest word uttered in all of history! The mighty, atoning work of love and obedience is done. His death is not defeat but victory. Here (31-37), in the fulfillment of many Old Testament scriptures, John is asserting three things: it really happened; it is the truth of God; and that this witness is intended to create faith (20:31). In the piercing ("*came out blood and water*," 34; Zech.12:10), the thoughtless act of a Roman soldier points to the deepest truth: "*the dying of Jesus is the means by which the life-giving and cleansing power of God is released into the life of the world*" (Newbigin). The noble work of Nic and partner must be done before the Sabbath (38-42), yet they do not know what we know: that it will be the last Sabbath of the old creation; on the first day of the week a totally new creation will begin. May we respond accordingly (20:28).

**20-** Three distinct parts of the chapter: First, the empty tomb (1-10; the first and fundamental witness from which the Good News begins); Second, the morning appearance to Mary Magdalene (11-18; the supernatural hints at a fundamental change in relationship to be mediated by the Spirit); Third, the evening and later appearances to the disciples (19-28; *peace*... His gift becomes the one of the fundamental marks of the new age, a first-fruit of saving faith). If one compares the other Gospels to John's account, there's a different feel altogether. Theologian Lesslie Newbigin explains the difference, which makes perfect sense and lines up with John's particular intent (30-31). "*Whereas the others speak of dazzling apparitions, of an earthquake, and of fear and amazement among the witnesses, John's account is calm and unspectacular. The emphasis is upon the restoration of the personal relationships broken by the events of Friday, upon the way in which Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas are brought into a new and deeply intimate relationship with Jesus. Because John sees the lifting up of Jesus on the cross as the supreme manifestation of the divine glory, he see the*

*resurrection not as the reversal of the passion, not as the bringing of glory out of defeat, but rather as the enabling of the disciples to believe and so to be brought into a relationship with Him whom death cannot destroy – in other words, to have “life in His name.” The promises of ch. 14 are here fulfilled: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

**21-** OK... so who is the “you” referring to (20:31)? The epilogue here is just in case we didn’t understand the boundless extent of the purpose of his Gospel account. Maybe Peter didn’t; fear seems to drive him back to “*same ole, same ole*” – fishing and failure... and misery loves company (1-14). Nothing that a “*Sonrise*” can’t fix (4), right? Note the tenderness and tangible mercy Jesus demonstrates... just no boundaries. And there’s something familiar about fish and bread... “*It is the Lord!*” One has to love the passion of a half-naked Peter, for such is the earnestness of repentance and faith. And the overflowing nets? A perfect set-up for Peter’s (the church’s) commission (15-19). Did not Jesus promise, “*I will make you fishers of men*”? (6:44; 12:32; Matt.4:19). But first, repentance has to do its liberating work. As on the night of threefold apostasy, Jesus looks at Peter across a charcoal fire. Three times Jesus presses the painful question – “*Do you love me?*” Three times Peter answers with an affirmation of love, but maybe “*now resting not on the strength of his own love but on the sureness of Jesus – “Lord, you know everything”*” (Newbigin). Three times Jesus gives to the grieved and humble disciple the commission to shepherd the flock of Jesus. A fisher and shepherd; Peter can do both but only as he is first a disciple – “*Follow Me! Never forget the flock belongs to Me!*” From the beginning, Peter understood that fundamental to “*following*” was the question, “*What do you want?*” (1:38-41) Since then, Peter has learned that “*following*” will mean for him the way of the cross (18-19). *But, but, but...*(20-23) Sound familiar? Discipleship means a single-mindedness: no reserve, no regret, no retreat. At the end is a picture of two disciples; both follow. One will glorify God by death, and to him is entrusted the pastoral care of the church. The other will glorify God bearing witness in another way, entrusted with recording the true meaning of the Master’s words and deeds. What about you? Will you follow? What has He entrusted you with?

Reflecting on John-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in John. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish John before we move forward?

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3.16*

