

THE GOSPEL
according to
John

part 2

STUDY GUIDE

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Wonders in the Words of Christ

- John 4:39-54

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 4:43-48 – “you people...”

- Why is Jesus' reaction to the man's request shocking to us?
- How do you handle moments when Jesus / teaching of the bible shock or even offend us?
- There was a wide spread problem in Galilee in how Jesus was received - what do you perceive as equivalent problems in our society?

John 4:48-50 – “Unless... you will not believe”

- Why is prayer often treated as a last resort / a response to sickening tragedy?
- How can we be tempted to seek the miraculous signs and wonders above seeking God Himself?
- What challenges can we face when chasing after signs and wonders (*consider Deuteronomy 13:1-3*)?

John 4:50-54 – So he himself believed

- Does our portrayal of the Gospel lead friends / family to Jesus, or to the 'benefits' of Christianity?
- How can we bring a better hope, and share a greater truth to help those in need?

Sermon Overview (Wonders in the Word of Christ)

We have just read an account of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, where Jesus has convinced this woman that He is the Messiah; so much so that she, a broken woman who had been hiding from the people in the town, runs back to the town and her changed life convinces her neighbours to meet with Jesus themselves. Prior to this, Jesus had been at the festival in Jerusalem – where he has been recognised as a worker of signs and wonders. He is returning to His home town (where we are told He receives no honour), and Jesus encounters a man who is utterly desperate. This Royal Official's son is dying – and so he travels to meet with this powerful man.

Where is the Compassion?

This official has heard about Jesus – a man who works great signs. With his dying son, his last hope is to go and ask for a miracle. As a loving parent, he is trying everything – and has had to leave his son. Jesus' response is shocking to us – where we expect compassion, Jesus seems irritated. His encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus shocked the disciples – but He was living life in a new way. The disciples didn't say anything, and they learnt from His new way of interacting with people.

In this passage, we are shocked by Jesus response. This is abrupt and seems without compassion for a man who is clearly in need. We expect Jesus to want to help this

man, and His response seems offensive. Our sense of right and wrong is in opposition with how Jesus responds. Either Jesus has got this wrong, not matching with our moral compass – or, like the disciples, we need to realise there is something here that we have change in our thinking.

What is Wrong in our Thinking?

This scene puts a spotlight on our worldview, and an idol in our culture – how we believe God should relate to us, and what we expect God to do for us – which does not fit with the Gospel. We expect Jesus to drop everything and help this man, but He doesn't. Instead Jesus calls the people on their desire for signs and wonders. The way John has written this account, following the encounter with the Samaritan town, shows a stark contrast in ways people come to God.

The Samaritan town were convinced by the words of the Samaritan woman – convinced by a changed life and the words of someone. When they met with Jesus, many more believed because of what Jesus said. They have been restored to relationship with God because of what they have heard. They are not searching for miracles or after signs and wonders – but have believed on what they have heard – on the sole basis that He is the Messiah – their Saviour.

Yet so many want to see signs instead. Jesus knew that he receives no honour in his home town. The crowds gathering to Him do not want Him for who He is but for what He does – they aren't interested in 'honouring' him but taking from Him. They are not coming to Jesus in order to restore their relationship with God – instead they are after healing / blessing / a better life – coming to God to fix a problem, and not seeking Him in the good times. Jesus response to this official seems offensive, but his only reason to visit is because he wants a sign – he is not after the relationship the Gospel is offering.

What is the Answer?

We live life as if God owes us. Jesus is only good if he makes stuff happen for me – but as long as life is rosy, I don't need Him – however I'll keep a prayer up my sleeve though for when something really tragic happens. Over and over in these opening 4 chapters we find Jesus confronting men and women obsessing over 'life in this world' when they are moments away from an eternity. Jesus' words are the keys to eternal life.

The Royal Official believed that Jesus could perform miracles. He believed Jesus could go and heal his son. When Jesus sent him, the official believed in the power of Jesus and returned home. However, it wasn't until he saw the sign, that he, and his family, believed in Jesus as the Saviour. By contrast, the Samaritan believed by encountering Jesus, and invited the whole town to encounter this same man – '*Come, see... Could this be the Messiah?*'. The attraction of signs and wonders can lead us astray, but we need to want a relationship with Jesus in Him alone – knowing Him as all that we need.

Defying the Laws of Nature and Man

- John 5:1-17

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 5:1-3 – *Jesus went up to Jerusalem*

- Many times, Jesus' actions appear strange, but hindsight shows more purpose. What examples do you have of times when God has arranged things that seemed unusual at the time, but looking back make sense?
- How can we ensure we focus on Jesus and His plan for our lives, before our immediate needs?

John 5:5-7 – “*Do you want to get well?*”

- What solutions can friends / family rely on to meet their personal needs – not realising the need to ‘*get well*’ with God?
- How can people attempt to use the Church as a means ‘*get well*’ – and not see Jesus?
- “*Do you want to get well?*” – Do you want to live fully surrendered to Jesus? What holds you back?

John 5:8-17 – “*Pick up your mat and walk*”

- What prayers or struggles have you been tempted to give up on? Are you prepared for God to break in instantly?
- How can we fall back into old routines? What actions can you take to ‘*pick up your mat and walk*’ away from sin?

Sermon Overview (Defying the Laws of Nature and Man)

Throughout John's Gospel, there have been glimpses of who John says that Jesus is, and what He was really here to do. Jesus has been called '*the Word become flesh*' and '*the lamb of God*'. He has regularly pointed to a plan that He is walking to – as His '*hour has not yet come*'. Jesus used purification jars for the miracle at the wedding in Cana, He spoke of being born again to Nicodemus, and claimed to be the Messiah the Samaritan woman was waiting for. There are many things Jesus has shared, and His followers have seen and heard that they don't fully understand yet. This encounter may seem like a straight forward healing miracle – but as usual, there is more to the story.

Jesus Enters through the Sheep Gate.

There are a number of gates around Jerusalem, each with a different purpose. Jesus entered through the Sheep Gate – which may seem like a small, insignificant detail, but this gate is important. The Sheep Gate was the first gate to be built (***Nehemiah 3***) – built by the High Priest – and was used to bring the offerings into the temple for sacrifice. As at the wedding in Cana - where Jesus pointed to His purpose in purification by using the jars, here He is talking about His sacrifice – where he would take upon himself the punishment for our sin.

This is one of those events which is clear in hindsight. At the time, it may have appeared strange. As fishermen, many of Jesus' disciples would be used to entering through the Fish Gate – the main entrance for many – but this is not the entrance that Jesus chose to use. Going through an area filled with sick and disabled – this was not a desirable area. Those closest with Jesus have stopped questioning Him and are trusting His actions. Jesus' choice to use the entrance for the temple sacrifices provided an opportunity to meet this disabled man and show the miraculous healing – and points again towards Jesus' real purpose – the atoning sacrifice, *'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'* (**John 1:29**).

The Man at the Pool.

Around the pool of Bethesda there was a large number of disabled people – and Jesus spots this one man who has been there a long time. There was a belief that an angel would stir the waters of the pool, and the first one in would be healed. This man, who had been disabled for 38 years, was there to try to get to the water – but he could never get there quick enough (**verse 7**). Jesus asks an odd question – a question that seems to have an obvious answer (**verse 6**). This is even more unusual considering that Jesus realised / knew that he had been there a long time. However, unlike the crowds around that may have provided a community, shown charity, taken pity on this man, Jesus knew everything about this man – and was able to really help.

The man's response shows what he believes will help. Jesus asks if he wants to get well, and the response shows what he is looking for – trying to get into the pool. Jesus question is far more than the physical healing the man was trying to get. Jesus knows the depths of our hearts and knows what we are searching for – but His offer goes far beyond our immediate needs.

Healing in an Instant.

In a moment, everything changes for this man. This isn't the case in every account in the Bible – we are called to be continually transformed and there are examples of lives being transformed over time. In this story, Jesus heals in an instant. A disability that had lasted longer than the average life expectancy. A hope of healing in a pool, where chances diminished each time people rushed past him. This man was not looking for Jesus, but he was restored to God.

Jesus told this man to *'not sin anymore'* – and makes a link between his sin and suffering. This is not a general instruction on the route of suffering. Not all disability, suffering or situations are a result of our sin, but we can get caught up in situations because of our own actions - feeling trapped in a lifestyle / mindset / behaviour that you don't feel you can stop. Jesus can break in a moment. No more 'this is just the way it is'. The stronghold, the fear, the doubt the lie – all broken as we are invited to pick up our mat and walk – and to sin no more.

The Key to Eternity

- John 5:17-29

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 5:17-23 – “My Father is still working, and I am working also”

- How do Jesus' words in these verses confirm equality with God – and prevent us viewing Him only as a good teacher?
- What qualities of the “God of the Old Testament” do you struggle to see in Jesus? How should you reconcile this?
- How do you respond to Jesus' challenges in Scripture? Have you ever sought assurance or affirmation from the Father / Holy Spirit while avoiding engaging with Christ / the Word?

John 5:24 – “...anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life...”

- How can we be tempted to run when confronted with opposition to the Gospel?
- How can we attempt to earn our eternal life? How does Jesus invitation release us from this?
- Are you living in the light of your eternal destiny, won for you by His death, or are you stuck living in the moment?

John 5:25-29 – “...an hour is coming, and is now here...”

- Why is it important to recognise the judgement that is coming? What challenge – and comfort – can this provide?
- How has the love of Christ led you to good works? How has your life been transformed by this good news?

Sermon Overview (The Key to Eternity)

This is the first time in John's gospel that Jesus goes truly public with the Jews about His true identity. At the wedding banquet, Jesus declares His hour has not come (*John 2*). He has been to the temple in Jerusalem before, throwing over the tables of the money changers and the merchants, yet doesn't disclose who He is. He first discloses His purpose to Nicodemus in private (*John 3:16*). Then He goes to a Samaritan woman and her village (*John 4*). We read about Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath day who had been lame for 38 years. Not only was He breaking the Sabbath - He was claiming to have equality with God. Now, back in the temple, Jesus finally goes public amongst the Jews.

The God-ness of Christ.

The Jews thought they knew God - that they were the authority on God. Jesus makes four statements, two relating to His unity with God and two relating to His authority as God - to establish His divine nature as the Son of God. Jesus is not a maverick – changing the nature of God, but only does what He sees the Father doing (*verse 19*). The relationship between Father and Son speaks of an intimacy in working together (*verse 20*); not hindered by fear of replacement, but all for the purpose of completing

their purpose – to fulfil the Father’s will on the earth. Giving life was a divine act - only God could give life. For Jesus to give life - and demonstrate His autonomy in doing this as He pleases - confirms His divine nature (*verse 21*). We frequently see the judgement of God in the Old Testament; in the garden of Eden, in the flood, at Babel. Jesus’ claim to be judge would have been understood to be a clear claim to his divine nature (*verse 22*).

These four statements are deliberate, to confirm Jesus is of God, and is God. If the Jews want to honour God, they need to honour the Son. If they don’t honour Jesus, they are not honouring God. God has now come among them in Jesus, and they trying to kill Him for healing a man on the Sabbath day. This shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the heart of the God whom they supposedly worship. We cannot honour the Father by ignoring the Son (*verse 23*). We will not get a ‘better’ answer from the Good Father, or the comforting Holy Spirit, when challenged by the words of Jesus.

The Goodness of Christ.

Consider being in Jesus’ place. Having completed a miracle, every eye is on Him – out to kill Him. Threatened and persecuted – we may have been tempted to run – yet Jesus stays to answer their accusations and extends an invitation. This is the goodness of Christ, giving life to those seeking His death. Christ has been granted the authority to give life, He can and will give life to all who believe in Him because he defeated death through His death on the cross. This is an invitation not on the basis of achievement, of merit – which the Jews were working towards - but while we were sinners.

This eternal life is not just something that happens once we die. Everyone who believes **has** eternal life - not will have. For they **have** passed from death to life. Jesus is not talking about physical life, but a spiritual life. Jesus imparts a new eternal spiritual life and identity in Him at the moment you put your faith and trust in Him.

The Goal of Christ.

Christ did not come just for this hour, but for a coming hour, when Christ will return. On the last day He will take up His role as Judge. Jesus’ hour has come to defeat death so that all who believe will have spiritual life in Him, yet there is a coming time when Christ will return and all who have physically died, including you and I, will be judged according to our deeds.

Jesus hasn’t come to condemn the world but to save it (*John 3:17*). Jesus’ goal is to bring life and not judgement, Jesus didn’t preach judgement to those who knew they weren’t worthy. The Jews thought they could save themselves by righteous living, obeying every letter of the law. They needed to understand their works would not help them avoid judgement. Our works will be judged - and that should be a sobering thought. But our righteousness comes from Christ, and faith in Christ will not fail to result in good works in us.

Feeding the 5,000

- John 6:1-15

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 6:1-7 - "Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?"

- How can we rest on the comfort of our lives, and neglect our dependency on God?
- What challenges can we be confronted with - where there doesn't appear to be a practical solution?
- What reasons can we give to excuse us losing faith in God providing our needs in difficult situations?

John 6:8-10 - "five barley loaves and two fish - but what are they for so many?"

- What is the 'little thing' that you are embarrassed to offer to God - feeling it too inadequate for him to use?
- What are you willing to offer to God for Him to use? How can you use your gifts to serve God's bigger purpose?

John 6:11-15 - When they were full...

- How has God used your small offering to achieve greater things? Have you seen God multiply what you have given?
- Where are you tempted to stop believing the power of the Gospel? How can you remember God's abundant power?
- 'To see *lives and communities in, around, and beyond Portsmouth...*' - who are you reaching next, or have you stopped?

Sermon Overview (Feeding the 5,000)

This is an account of a true event that happened in the life of Jesus. This miracle is perhaps the most famous of Jesus' miracles - recorded in all four Gospels. John's recording of this moment draws out the major theological significance of the miracle as he proceeds to include Jesus subsequent teaching in which he himself uses the miracle to illustrate the greater gospel work He came to do. Like with so many of the accounts of Jesus' life, we are taken on a journey, of lows and highs, of uncertainty and revelation, of mystery and majesty. He is wanting us to grow in faith, which is to know His power and presence in all aspects of life and thus to thrive and flourish.

An Impossible Task (verses 1-7).

Jesus has spent His days and weeks ministering to people - performing miracles and healing people - and a huge crowd has gathered. Jesus sought some peace and quiet - climbing a mountain to get away from them; but the crowd - 5,000 men, so likely 20,000-25,000 people in total - followed Him. In conditions like these the masses come to Jesus out of desperation (medical or otherwise) and miracles happen. God works through the pain of poverty to lead men and women to be spiritually rich, and the deception of worldly wealth in countries like ours perpetuates a spiritual poverty.

This is the second reference to Passover which John has included – and the third and final reference is shortly before His crucifixion. The miracle here - and Jesus' subsequent teaching that He is the bread of life, His flesh must be eaten, and His blood must be drunk - are set against the backdrop of Passover, the Salvation story of God's people. At no point during this Gospel will John allow us to forget that this is all about the cross – Jesus' ultimate mission on earth.

Jesus asks Philip how they can feed these people – an impossible task. Jesus' question gives Philip opportunity to see Jesus as greater than the problem before them. The problem appears impossible – Philip did not have the money (nearly eight months' wages) and there was no bread wholesaler that could provide that much bread. Jesus' question did not have a practical solution - it required a faith-filled response.

An Absurd Solution (verses 8-10).

Andrew comes forward with an answer – a boy's lunch of five loaves and two small fish. When considering the needs of 20,000 people, this is a laughable solution - a ridiculous suggestion. While the Disciples saw 20,000 people and a tiny lunch - Jesus knew what He was going to do. For the Disciples, seeing the problem, there is no adequate solution. Jesus called for faith in Him – uncertain of the plan, there is certainty that comes by faith in Him.

Jesus could have called manna from heaven - but in order to communicate a bigger message, He takes the little offering and decides He can - and will - work with it. God uses what is foolish, what is weak, what is insignificant and despised. (*1 Corinthians 1:27-28*). It's so easy to be preoccupied and obsessed by our lack of resources, our inability to find a solution to our problems, instead of going to Jesus with them. There is no problem or trial common to man which faith does not help us resolve. Jesus would simply ask you 'bring to me what you have, let me work the miracle'.

An Astonishing Miracle (verses 11-15).

Having thanked God for the provision of this meal Jesus breaks the bread and fish, and the Disciples begin to distribute the pieces, over and over and over again. It was a miracle to feed five people with this lunch – to feed one hundred hungry people was astounding - let alone feeding 20,000. The first mouths were as miraculously fed as the last. The point is, that this miracle went beyond even what might have been imagined – from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

The twelve baskets left over are significant – enough for everyone there – and so much more. God's provision doesn't stop with one, five, one hundred or 20,000 – but overflows. This abundance points to God's blessing going much further than we can expect. His power is greater than we can imagine, and the Gospel is more powerful than we can ever know.

A Shocking Meal All Must Eat

– John 6:16-71

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 6:25-27a – “Don’t work for the food that perishes...”

- What are some of the desires / goals in our lives that are at risk of become ultimate / idols?
- How can the Church (global, and ChristCentral) be tempted to portray a gospel that only satisfies our immediate needs?
- How can we keep a check on our present desires – preventing them become an ultimate goal / idol?

John 6:27b-36 – “but for the food that lasts for eternal life”

- How do you respond to the question: ‘What can we do to perform the works of God?’?
- How can we focus our desires with the promise of eternity? What hope does eternity provide against our present trials?

John 6:47-51 – “Does this offend you?”

- Where can we be tempted to ignore / forget / walk away from Jesus’ teaching when it offends / upsets / confuses us?
- How does the image of Jesus’ flesh and blood affect your view of His sacrifice upon the cross for each us?
- How can we hold onto the importance of Jesus sacrifice in our remembrance of communion? ... baptism?

Sermon Overview (A Shocking Meal All Must Eat)

As we read through John’s Gospel, we know that Jesus wasn’t worried about causing offence. He regularly called the Pharisees out for their behaviour, and confronted attitudes of the time. His words can challenge our attitudes and beliefs – and when Jesus’ words offend us, we need to pay close attention because these words are vital to us.

Following the feeding of the 5,000 (likely in excess of 20,000), Jesus sends His disciples on. Jesus stayed behind to dismiss the crowd, and He made priority to spend time with His Heavenly Father in prayer until the early hours. Meanwhile, the disciples are caught in a storm on the boat. Jesus walks on the water to catch up with His disciples. The once on-board, Jesus, the disciples and the boat suddenly appear at the shore. This all points to the fact that Jesus is God – a God who loves people and desires to meet their needs. The crowd who had been with Jesus try to find Him and are surprised to find He has arrived before them. They have brought along others, and this is probably the largest gathering Jesus has addressed – and this is the message that Jesus decides to share with them – the important message for the largest gathering.

Food that Perishes (verses 25-27a).

Jesus responds to the crowd that has gathered around Him. Jesus has miraculously provided food, performing great miracles, and the crowd are hungry for more. Jesus challenges them - particularly in their pursuit of His miracles. The Bible encourages us to have a healthy hunger: to want marriage, children, to use spiritual gifts, to provide for our families – the list goes on. But when these things become our ultimate goal – an idol in our life – they take away from God and become unhealthy. The crowd who were following Jesus were seeking the miracle - hungry for the signs and wonders - and were missing the ultimate thing.

Food that Lasts (verses 27b-36).

Rather than giving another miracle - the food they were after - Jesus expands on the food that we should desire after – the food that lasts for eternal life. Jesus' challenge led the crowd to wonder how they can honour, work for and deserve the food from God (*verse 28*). Jesus asks for one thing – that they believe (*verse 29*). Despite the wonderous miracles that Jesus has performed – in the past 12 hours – they search for even more signs to believe. They remember God's provision for the Israelites – a miracle that fed the people for 40 years. However, they have missed the provision that is right in front of them – a food that lasts forever. Jesus is the Bread of Life – and though they had seen Him, they did not believe (*verse 36*).

Jesus promises an eternal salvation to those who believe in Him. There is a day of resurrection, and Jesus promises to raise us up to eternal life – to see Him face-to-face. Our focus is too often drawn to our immediate needs – the food that we need to satisfy us now. Yet Jesus' promise here is for a food that will not perish and will not fail. Rather than worrying about the hunger we have now and the needs before us in our life - our ultimate satisfaction and ultimate hope come from the eternal life that is before us – the life that Jesus has provided for us.

A Shocking Meal All Must Eat (verses 47-51).

So Jesus has self-identified as the Bread of Life – the food that lasts for eternal life. This is an extraordinary claim, which Jesus explains further – to eat this bread means to eat Jesus' flesh and drinks His blood (*verses 47-51*). The bread metaphor is interpreted by saying emphatically: 'the bread – the food that will ultimately satisfy you - is my flesh; it is my death'. This is an offensive image – to eat a man's flesh and drink blood. This is even more offensive for the committed Jews – whose laws prohibited them from even touching blood. This was not (and is not) a popular message, but it is a vital one.

At the moment Jesus had the largest crowd before Him, He chose a message that disgusted them. They had been happy to eat the bread and fish that Jesus had provided - but this meal of flesh and blood caused many to leave Him. Without the cross, this is an extremely odd statement, so it is little surprise many left – yet the twelve stayed with Him. They didn't receive a special revelation of the meal Jesus has promised, but their faith in Him was enough to keep them. Eventually they would see Jesus on the cross - and see the flesh and blood which made a way for the eternal promise.

Preaching Like Jesus

- John 7:1-24

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 7:1-5 – *The Jewish Festival of Shelters was near*

- How often do you take time to remember the blessings God has provided?
- What are the biggest challenges to the belief that God wants to provide feasts for us?

John 7:6-13 – *“My time has not yet arrived”*

- How can we lose focus of the big picture, and expect God to respond in the way / at the time we feel is best?
- What encouragement can we take from Jesus' obedience to, and confidence in, God's bigger plan?

John 7:14-18 – *“My teaching isn't mine but is from the one who sent me.”*

- Do your friends / family allow anyone to correct / instruct them? What qualification is needed to allow this authority?
- How is this authority to challenge / correct / instruct others viewed by others in society?

John 7:19-24 – *“Stop judging according to outward appearances; rather judge according to righteous judgment”*

- What behaviours do we try to justify - skewing the law and ignoring the purpose and message behind them?
- How can we risk missing out on blessings and feasts from God by mis-reading His laws?

Sermon Overview (Preaching Like Jesus)

This passage continues through John's Gospel, following the healing on the Sabbath day, feeding of the 5,000, the calming of the storm, a miraculous transportation of a boat across a lake – all culminating in Jesus' sermon which offends the crowds. Jesus' following has dropped significantly from the 60,000 followers, as people did not like His message. The Jews – not all of them, but the religious leaders in Judea – were trying to kill Jesus, and so He remained in Galilee.

God of the Festival (verses 1-5).

This encounter takes place during the Festival of Shelters (also known as Feast of Booths or Tabernacles). This is an instruction given by God, which can be read in Leviticus 23 – a chapter filled with God's guidance for numerous feasts for His people. The Festival of Shelters is a celebration of their exodus from Egypt - and God's provision for His people as they journeyed through the wilderness. Once the Israelites were settled, God mandates that they celebrate and remember this provision – building a shelter and feasting in that shelter for seven days. During Jesus' time, it was common for Israelites to travel to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, where the priests –

or the King every seven years – would speak to the assembled people. Jesus' brothers were taking this pilgrimage - and encouraged Jesus to join them.

Jesus' Time Has Not Fully Come (verses 6-13).

Jesus turns down the invite from His brothers – stating His time has not come. This is something we have heard before – and John's Gospel records many times where Jesus is refers to a purpose and plan that is unfolding for Him. Jesus' words here speak into that purpose, speaking of the works of evil in the world. Jesus is on a rescue mission from these evil works. Like the Israelites in Egypt who were freed from slavery in Egypt - Jesus has a plan to free people from their slavery to sin.

Jesus did head into Jerusalem - in secret. With so many plotting to kill Him, Jesus did not want to die at this point, but only when His time has come. There was still a lot of discussion about Him – with some calling Him a good man, while others accuse Him of deceiving people. There was a debate about Him, and whether the people should listen.

Jesus Reveals the Source of His Authority (verses 14-18).

Jesus answers the question of who He thinks He is - by His actions. Jesus starts speaking in the temple during the festival of shelters. In doing so, Jesus would immediately be comparing Himself to the priests and King – those who the Israelites were expecting to talk during the feast. Jesus declares His role as mediator between God and man, and as ruler for the people.

The Jewish leaders would have noticed this subtlety and attempt to undermine Jesus' authority – questioning why He feels He can teach in this way. The Jewish Leaders – who would have studied and memorised the Scriptures – feel they have authority. Jesus instead points to the authority of God who had sent Him – the same God who they should have recognised from the Scriptures. Jesus points out their incorrect motive of self-righteousness, and instead points glory to God.

Jesus Challenges Their Actions (verses 19-24).

Jesus changes from defence to attack – challenging the religious leaders on their own observance of the Jewish laws. The laws - that God had given - had been made so strict and particular so that outwardly you could appear to be perfect. The Jewish Leaders would be proud of their obedience to the laws – having followed the letter of the law.

Jesus challenges this attitude to the law – being more interested in the purpose and intent of the law, rather than the letter. The Jewish people had skewed the law, in order to appear perfect – but lost the community, celebration and focus which God had intended. We can be guilty of skewing the law in the opposite direction – bending the law to give us liberty and freedom over our lives. However, this still misses the freedom and feast that God has purposed for us; like a train that is not on its track, it cannot flourish and achieve what it is meant to do. The tracks may seem restrictive, but they get the train to where it is meant to go.

Struggling with Truth

- John 7:25-52

Suggested Questions from the Text

John 7:25-27,31,40-44 - "But we know where this man is from."

- What qualifications do our friends/family ask for to prove Jesus/Christianity is true or important for them?
- How can we risk relying on 'clever arguments' to show Jesus' authority?

John 7:28-29 - "I am from him, and he sent me"

- How does Jesus eternal identity affect our view of Him, and His role as Messiah?
- How do people attempt to fill the longing for relationship that we are created to live in?

John 7:37-39 - "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."

- When have you known the comfort of the Holy Spirit during tough and challenging times?
- Have you let your Christian life run dry? When did you last seek refreshing from God's Spirit?

Sermon Overview (Struggling with Truth)

If we could search the whole universe, map the physics behind creation and understand the science behind every moment in our lives - still no piece of information could possibly be discovered that rivals the insight these verses provide - assuming them to be true. We will still have huge questions that telescopes can't answer: 'how did this happen?', 'why did this happen?', 'what is the power behind it all?'. It is the quest for truth - but as we know from various moments in our lives, sometimes the truth is hard to accept. Sometimes when truth comes, we resist it, we deny it, we struggle with it. Jesus doesn't show in these verses the physics behind the cosmos - but what he does reveal is the One who 'caused' all these things, and His purpose in them and how they affect every single one of us. Here we see oneness of The Father, The Son and The Spirit in the Mission of God.

Who is Jesus? (verses 25-27,31 and 40-44).

Jesus has been teaching in the Temple, during the celebration of one of their festivals - and His message and His actions have led many in Jerusalem to debate who He is, and why He can teach in this way. Some are starting to wonder whether He could be the Messiah for which they have been waiting. This has massive ramifications for the authorities. If Jesus is the Messiah, then He is Israel's King - the King they have been anticipating for hundreds, if not thousands of years. If Jesus is the Messiah, then He is the one with the greatest authority - and they will have to submit to Him. So, they decide to challenge this claim, and engage in a debate - revolving around a number of Old Testament Messianic prophecies. What they know of Jesus doesn't appear to match up with the prophecies of the Messiah - surely Jesus cannot be the One they are waiting for.

Jesus knew what they were debating – and knew that He did in fact confirm these prophecies. Yet He chose not to correct them by showing His credentials: born in Bethlehem. Nor did He rely on His record of signs and wonders. Jesus chooses to reveal Himself to them on His own terms – not theirs. He does this, not by winning arguments, but by winning hearts. Jesus could have confirmed He was the Messiah, but instead He gives them an even greater insight into who He is. Jesus hasn't been eternally 'The Messiah' - He wasn't from eternity the Christ, or The Saviour. He came into the world to become these - to rescue God's people and to be their everlasting King – but before there was a universe He existed. It is to this that He draws our attention.

Where did Jesus Come From? (verses 28-29).

Jesus doesn't identify with His birthplace – nor does He identify with a Heavenly place. All of this is part of the creation of God. The answer Jesus provides here - and the definition of 'ultimate existence' of what always was, and is, and will be - is the most profound and yet mysterious insight into God that we can ever grapple with. Jesus is owning a fundamental aspect of who He Is – He Is the Son who is from the Father. This is in the present tense – not a past event. This is a vital revelation – He has always been with God, in God. He has come to be Messiah and King, but if you want to know who He truly is then this is what He would have you know, 'He is from God'. True existence is Father, Son and Holy Spirit eternally living in One.

Jesus comes from the Father and returns to the Father is constantly 'in the Father' - a perfect unbroken/faithful/loving relationship - it is what we all long for and need, it is a longing that no human being can ever adequately fulfil. Jesus was sent in order that we might be eternally established in a perfect loving relationship, that meets and satisfies all of our longings, when our loved ones will feel no pain, nor will we. The only way we can enter a life free from the pain associated with loving others, is either never to love at all, or for death to be conquered. God is love and God in Christ has conquered death.

What did Jesus Come to Do? (verses 37-39).

Here we have the complete picture of the Trinity, the mission of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to bring men and women into this everlasting union with God. Those who come to Jesus know where He's from, because they receive the Spirit. You have to understand that the gift of the Spirit is central to Jesus' mission – and is available for all who believe.

The Christian life is not meant to be dry or lacking. God has intended for the Christian to live with joy and power – even in the most incredible suffering and pain. If you marginalise the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian then you not only undermine Him, but you undermine the mission of Jesus, which God the Father sent him on. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to participate in the eternal love of God and know an enduring hope in all circumstances.

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