

The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide *week one*

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Each year, as part of our Leap of Faith (a communal faith experiment in the six weeks running up to Easter), we take a look together at a biblical theme, one of the major stories of the Bible, or an entire book of the Bible. We like to think of these experiences as a sort of guided Bible tour. All of us take a walk through a section of the Bible, and along the way the Daily Bible Guide team points out little tidbits of information, things that we find interesting, and things that make us think.

We've done, I believe, ten of these daily Bible guides now. One of the most gratifying things about them is that they seem to work pretty well for a wide spectrum of people. People who are new to the Bible tell us that they find that they make reading the Bible accessible and interesting. Long-time Bible readers say that they make it fresh and thought-provoking. We hope that this time, once again, no matter where you're coming from, this Bible Guide offers you an enjoyable, helpful, and meaningful six weeks in the Bible.

This year, our little walk will be through The Gospel of John. The gospels are the Bible's accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus (the word *gospel* being Old English, of all things, for 'good news'). There are four of these biblical gospels, and the Gospel of John will be the third one on which we do a Daily Bible Guide. Something that fascinates me about the Bible is that it doesn't include a single authorized biography of Jesus, but instead four different people sharing their stories of who Jesus is to them. And when it comes to 'different,' John's Gospel is the most so. The other three gospels follow the same basic plot outline and include a similar cast of characters; they show their differences through how they include, exclude, minimize, or magnify various episodes or teachings that seem very much to have been drawn from a common store. The Gospel of John is on a different track, in terms of material and style. Some scholars think that John had read the other three gospels, considered their more conventional narrative ground well-covered, and went about writing a more 'spiritual,' as opposed to historical, commentary on them instead. Other scholars dispute John's familiarity with the other gospels and the idea that he is somehow trying to be less historical. But the fact that John's Gospel is different is indisputable--not necessarily contradictory, but definitely different. There is a great deal of diversity of opinions as to how exactly John's Gospel differs. Is it the most abstract of the gospels, or the most personal and intimate? The most heart-felt, or the most philosophical? The most spiritual or the most secular? The most universal, or the most particular to 1st Century Palestine? Perhaps we'll have our own opinions by the time we're done.

By the way, there are vast, unresolved disagreements among scholars as to whether or not this gospel was in fact written by the John who was one of Jesus' closest followers and one of the twelve original apostles. I don't really have strong stakes in the controversy or strongly formed opinions about it; it seems to me that it very well could have been written by John, but it doesn't matter to me much if it turns out not to have been. Simply for ease of reference, throughout the guide we refer to the author as 'John.'

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Each day's guide consists of three parts:

- The story of the day--on average a page a day from The Gospel of John. It may be as short as a half-page or as long as a page-and-a-half, depending on the logical ending point for the passage. We've included the text for the story of the day in the New Living Translation (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007). I find it to be a fresh, readable, reliable translation in modern vernacular. You should, of course, feel free to read in your own favorite translation; but unless otherwise noted we'll be quoting from the New Living.
- Points of interest--our comments on the story. We'll include relevant historical or literary notes here. We'll also give our reactions to and thoughts on the story: how do we interpret this passage? what do we find confusing or helpful? what do we appreciate or find difficult?
- Taking it home--three suggestions as to how we might use this story in our own lives. They might be spiritual exercises, or little life experiments. Most commonly, they're suggestions as to how to pray in response to the story of the day. Each day, we'll think about how the passage applies to three different sets of people:
 - You--what does this passage mean for you, your family, and your closest friends?
 - Your six--think of six local friends who don't seem to have much of a direct relationship with God, and for whom you wish the very best in life. What does this story have to do with these six people and your friendship with them?
 - Our church--how is this passage relevant to our church as a whole?

NEW!--For Families

To make the Bible Guide more inclusive of families with children, we're offering two family-friendly elements:

- **For you and your family**--three times a week, on the days when we consider the passage a little easier for kids to digest, we'll swap out the 'For you' section for a special 'For you and your family.' It will be designed for families to be able to do together, perhaps as part of your morning, dinnertime, or bedtime routine. For those of us without children in our households, we think these sections should still serve as interesting conversation-starters with our roommates, spouses, significant others, workmates, or some other group of friends.
- **Spiritual practice of the week**--in our Users' Manual (which you can usually find nearby wherever you picked up this Bible Guide), we invite participants to consider trying out the spiritual practice of fasting for the Leap of Faith. We've noticed that it can be (especially) hard for kids to keep focused on one spiritual practice--perhaps fasting more than others--for a full 40 days. So we thought your family might instead want to try several different ones, one per week. Your family might even find a few spiritual disciplines you'd like to continue together after the Leap of Faith. Here's an outline of the ones we'll be trying:
 - Week 1: Worship and Praise
 - Week 2: Prayer
 - Week 3: Study and Memorization

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- Week 4: Confession and Forgiveness
- Week 5: Fasting and Service
- Week 6: Thanksgiving

Parents, we hope you feel free to use the Bible Guide as it best serves your family. One option for families with kids might be to opt in for only the three family-friendly passages each week. Don't feel bound by the dates; use these passages on any day that works best for your family.

For your convenience, all family-friendly materials in the Bible Guide will be printed in red text.

For residents of the digital age

If picking up a paper-and-ink copy of the guide is inconvenient for you, or feels hopelessly behind the times, you can find these materials online

- in PDF at www.bostonvineyard.org/classesprograms/leap-of-faith
- or, even better, in blog form at <http://dailybibleguide.wordpress.com/>
- or--NEW TO THIS YEAR—download the app: See Info Kiosk on for Leap of Faith App for Android and I-phones.

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Spiritual Practice of the Week for Families: Worship and Praise.

When your family participates in the Bible Guide this week, begin or end your time by thanking God for your day. Have each family member speak out at least one good thing about their day. But don't feel limited to just one thing. Feel free to go crazy! See just how long you can make your lists. Alternately, you might start or end your time by singing a worship song together. At the end of the week, briefly discuss what you liked and what you might not have liked about this particular spiritual practice.

Monday, February 27--John 1:1-18

¹ In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

² He existed in the beginning with God.

³ God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

⁶ God sent a man, John the Baptist, ⁷ to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸ John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. ⁹ The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹² But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

¹⁴ So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

¹⁵ John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

¹⁶ From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

Points of Interest

- 'In the beginning'--John starts his gospel with the same words as the Bible itself (Genesis 1:1). Interestingly enough, the first words of The Gospel of Mark are also 'The beginning,' but Mark's beginning is Jesus' baptism in his adulthood. Matthew and Luke, by the way, go farther back

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than Mark; they start their stories with Jesus' birth. But John goes all the way back, to the beginning of the world. I have a mental image of John reading Mark's 'The Beginning,' and exclaiming, 'Pshaw. The story goes back way farther than that, buddy.' When he writes his own gospel, he decides to do it right.

- 'the Word already existed'--in Genesis, the sentence goes, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' John eventually gets there, but first he introduces a character unknown to Genesis, the Word. In Genesis, it is, in fact, through words that God creates everything. John, however, personifies those words. The words are so much a part of God that they are, in fact, God. The Word seems to be what turns God's intentions into reality. John may be borrowing from one or two places as he describes this Word of God. First of all, he speaks of the Word in terms very similar to how the writer of the biblical book of Proverbs describes Lady Wisdom:

By wisdom the LORD founded the earth;

by understanding he created the heavens (Proverbs 3:19).

So, in Jewish biblical terms, the Word is God's wisdom, or at least plays the same role. Secondly, John may be referencing Greek philosophy. The Greek word used here for 'Word' is *logos*. While on the one hand simply meaning, 'word,' it had also been adopted as a Greek philosophical term meaning 'that which gives shape, form, or life to the material universe' (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992. 'Logos'). If John is intentionally evoking both Proverbs and Greek philosophy, he seems to be saying that, no matter who you are, Jew or Greek (the two people groups into whom he would mostly have divided the world), this Word is the one you would think of as having started it all.

- 'The light shines in the darkness'--this is perhaps another reference to Genesis. Before God begins his creative work, the world is an empty, wet darkness. God's first words are, 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1: 2-3). The Word seems to be playing many roles here. The Word is God's companion at creation, and God, and what God brought into the world to bring it out of darkness, all at the same time.
- 'John the Baptist'--this is not the same person as John the author. Though the author John is fairly disinterested in telling us so, John the Baptist is Jesus' cousin. He's famous for being a sort of throwback to the prophets of the old days. He hears from God and speaks for God in a way no one has for hundreds of years.
- 'not with a physical birth'--I think John is describing a second work of the Word. The same one who got the very universe started is now offering people the chance to re-start their lives. This time around, the Word's work is spiritual, not physical.
- 'the Word became human and made his home among us'--today's passage is a preview for us of John's whole story. And here it is in a nutshell: 'I'm telling you the story about when God's very Word became one of us.'
- 'the law was given through Moses, but God's unending love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ'--Moses is the first great leader of the people of God (he lived about 1500 years before John's story), famous for bringing them the law which would form them and direct them as a people. At one point in the middle of his career, Moses tells God that he wants to know God better, and God tells him God's full 'name':

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“Yahweh! The LORD!

The God of compassion and mercy!

I am slow to anger

and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:5-6).

Moses is able to give people laws from God. The Word is able to give people God. The Word, you could say, is what Moses wanted so desperately to know.

- ‘came through Jesus Christ’--the Word’s human identity is now revealed.
- ‘No one has ever seen God’--in the moment I mention above, Moses asks to see God face to face. God tells him that, for Moses’ own sake, he can only get a glimpse of God’s back (Exodus 33:20-23). Through Jesus, we can get a better view than Moses himself got.

Taking It Home

- *For you and your family: As we start reading an entire book about Jesus, take a moment to think about him. What thoughts and feelings come to mind? In this passage, John gives a handful of descriptions of Jesus: the Word, the light, the Son, etc. Can you relate to any of these? There seems to be an endless number of ways to experience Jesus. Together with your family (or household or friends or whatever), make a list of ways you would describe Jesus. Consider sharing a story or two that goes along with one of your additions to the list.*
- For your six: John paints a picture of Jesus coming to us right where we are, in a form we should be able to recognize. Pray that Jesus would indeed show himself to your six in a way they can relate to. Pray that your six would find him tangible, digestible and nearby.
- For our church: One thing John makes sure to repeat in this passage is that Jesus is full of unfailing love and faithfulness. It’s hard to entirely wrap my mind around what truly unfailing love and faithfulness is actually like, but it sounds great. I think that if we really got a grasp of Jesus’ unfailing love and faithfulness, it would be a game-changing technology--sort of like the iphone, but infinitely more amazing. Pray that God would fill our church with his unfailing love and faithfulness, and that we would each experience a tangible piece of it. Pray that our church would play a role in bringing God’s unfailing love and faithfulness to others also.

Tuesday, February 28—John 1:19-34

¹⁹ This was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He came right out and said, “I am not the Messiah.”

²¹ “Well then, who are you?” they asked. “Are you Elijah?”

“No,” he replied.

“Are you the Prophet we are expecting?”

“No.”

²² “Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?”

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²³ John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Clear the way for the Lord’s coming!’”

²⁴ Then the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ asked him, “If you aren’t the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?”

²⁶ John told them, “I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. ²⁷ Though his ministry follows mine, I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal.”

²⁸ This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’ ³¹ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³² Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. ³³ I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”

Points of Interest

- ‘Who are you?’--John the Baptist has become quite the sensation. So, the religious professionals send some people to investigate. Is this something important, or just a crazy fad? A genuine prophet to whom they should listen, or a quack they should shut down?
- ‘I am not the Messiah’--the Messiah is God’s special agent, who is supposed to repair everything that is wrong with the world. By the time of John the Baptist, the Jewish people have been waiting for hundreds of years for this Messiah to come and do his work.
- ‘Are you Elijah?’--Elijah was perhaps the flashiest of the Israelite prophets. He was famous for his spectacular miracles, and he made pretty much the most dramatic exit ever. He didn’t exactly die. Instead, he hopped on to a flaming chariot and was carried away to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). A later prophet said that Elijah would come back again before the time of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). If John the Baptist isn’t the Messiah, they wonder if perhaps he is the second coming of Elijah, and therefore a sort of high-quality warm-up act for the Messiah.
- ‘Are you the Prophet?’--before Moses died, he promised that God would send another prophet just like him so that the people would not be left stranded (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). This promise was, to a degree, fulfilled immediately when Joshua, Moses’ protégé, succeeded Moses. But from early on, it was also taken as a prophecy with more cosmic implications, the idea being that Moses was a mere foreshadowing of an even bigger and better Prophet to come. If John the Baptist isn’t Elijah, they wonder if he could be this Prophet (*IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).
- ‘a voice shouting in the wilderness’--John the Baptist is, with a subtle shift of punctuation, quoting Isaiah 40:3 (Isaiah says, ‘A voice shouting, “In the wilderness, clear the way for the

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Lord's coming.'). He's not actually Elijah, nor is he willing to claim for himself such a grand title as The New Elijah. He's just someone yelling in the desert.

- 'the Pharisees who had been sent'--the Pharisees are one of the two dominant politico-religious parties in Roman Judea. They are known for their expertise in the Law. It's unclear to me whether this entire delegation from Jerusalem consists of Pharisees, or if it's a multi-party group, but only the Pharisees among them have the question.
- 'what right do you have to baptize?'--if John the Baptist is, by his own word, nothing but a guy yelling in the desert, why is he causing such a ruckus? I think the Pharisees are more or less saying to John the Baptist, 'Leave this to the religious professionals, friend.'
- 'I'm not even worthy to be his slave'--John the Baptist is pointing out that they've forgotten the 'Clear the way for the Lord's coming,' part of his self-description. He may not be a big deal, but the one he has been sent to announce is. He's creating such a big spectacle because something very exciting is about to happen.
- 'Look!'--here's the big announcement. John the Baptist is the announcer or the warm-up band; Jesus is the main attraction, and he's about to take the stage.
- 'The Lamb of God'--Jesus is accumulating names or titles at quite a rate. By my count, we're at five already: 1. The Word; 2. the light; 3. God's one and only son; 4. the Unique One; and now 5. the Lamb of God.

With this new one, John the Baptist is probably referring to the Passover lamb. In the time of Moses, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God rescued them by inflicting the Egyptians with increasingly severe punishments until they finally agreed to let the Israelites go. On the night of the last plague, God sent an angel to kill the oldest child in every Egyptian house. The sign that a house was Israelite instead of Egyptian was some lamb's blood sprinkled on the door frame; whenever the angel saw the lamb's blood, that house was spared, or passed over (Exodus 12:1-13).

As the Word, Jesus is bringing about a new kind of creation. As the Lamb of God, he is performing a new rescue.

- 'who takes away the sin of the world'--I'm intrigued by the fact that it's singular 'sin' here, not 'sins.' Jesus isn't so much focused on some endless list of immoral actions that have been performed; he's concerned with one particular way we tend to get off track. I wonder if this 'sin of the world' has anything to do with what John says in yesterday's passage about the world not recognizing the light (1: 10). We have a hard time recognizing and pointing ourselves toward what would make our lives better. Jesus has come to take care of that problem.
- 'I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed'--baptism, as performed by John the Baptist, is the immersion of an adult in water for ceremonial purposes. As far as we can tell, baptism is John the Baptist's particular spin on the ritual washing that would have been very common in both Judaism and other neighboring religions (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 'Baptism.'). These rituals were performed as symbols of spiritual preparation and of anticipation of a fresh start. Through his baptisms, John the Baptist is doing what he can do to make sure people are paying attention when the main event begins.

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- ‘I didn’t know he was the one’--this wasn’t arranged ahead of time. We’re watching live as the One for who he is preparing is unveiled.
- ‘the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit’--while meaningful in its way, John the Baptist’s baptism is like play-acting when compared to the work of the one who follows after him. John’s baptism is in water, one of the world’s most ordinary substances. Jesus will instead be baptizing people in the very essence of God. That’s no small upgrade.

Taking It Home

- For you: I love how confidently John knows his purpose is in the world--or, rather, I crave it. His calm assurance is almost a little infuriating when I think of how uncertain I can often be of what I am supposed to be doing. Is there a situation in your life right now in which you’re not quite sure what your role is supposed to be? Maybe a project at work? A friend in need of help? Take a moment to ask God to show you what God would like your role to be. Pray that you would have John’s sense of confidence as you continue to be involved.
- For your six: It seems like John knows how to respond to Jesus because God had revealed to him ahead of time things about Jesus he couldn’t have known otherwise. Ask God to speak to your six about Jesus. Pray that God would in fact reveal Jesus to your six.
- For our church: While John knows that he gets to play a key part in the exciting things Jesus is about to do on earth, he also has to spend a good deal of time simply waiting or just plugging away at the day to day of his life (which in his case means hours under the really hot sun in a mostly barren place dunking people under water). Ask God to help our church to do both of these things well: earnestly believe for big promises from God; while also faithfully and joyfully living out the everyday routine of our lives.

Wednesday, February 29—John 1:35-51

³⁵ The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. ³⁶ As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

³⁸ Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

³⁹ “Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. ⁴¹ Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”).

⁴² Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” ⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

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⁴⁵ Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” ⁵¹ Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

Points of Interest

- ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God!’--apparently no one entirely picked up on John the Baptist’s big hand-off to Jesus yesterday; so, he does a second take. He’s a little snappier this time. I can understand why he might have rambled a bit the first time around; he was excited, and taken by surprise.
- ‘When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus’--John’s second announcement also has a more targeted audience. Yesterday, he seems to have made the pronouncement more generally. Today, he tells two particular disciples, ‘You might be interested to know that that guy right there is the Lamb of God.’ It works. They leave John the Baptist and follow after Jesus. *Disciple*, by the way, means, ‘follower.’ It was the term used for someone who was being trained under a particular teacher; it was rather like, ‘intern’ or ‘apprentice.’ These two are essentially transferring schools to study with a different professor.
- ‘What do you want?’--Jesus seems to be surprised to find that he’s picked up a couple of followers.
- ‘where are you staying?’--I get the feeling that they’re fumbling a little for words. They could have said, ‘We heard you’re the Lamb of God,’ or, ‘We’d like to be baptized in the Holy Spirit,’ or, ‘Could you take away our sin?’ Instead, they say, ‘We were wondering if you could tell us your address.’ It’s perhaps a little short of the mark. It turns out in their favor, though, because instead of just telling them where he is staying, he shows them, and then invites them to stay. ‘Come and see,’ Jesus says, inviting them into a relationship rather than just giving them the information.
- ‘Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother’--Simon Peter eventually becomes famous among Jesus’ followers. Here, we get the story of how Simon and Jesus first meet. It turns out that Simon’s lesser-known brother Andrew is one of these first two disciples. After spending the evening with Jesus, Andrew thinks, ‘Simon has got to meet this guy.’ We don’t know much of what Andrew does after this, but just this one decision to tell his brother what he’s seen makes a huge impact.

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- ‘We have found the Messiah (which means “Christ”)--as I said earlier, the Messiah is God’s Special Agent in the world. Various Old Testament prophets spoke of some servant of God who would come along and fulfill people’s deepest longings or accomplish the impossible or finish the work that God had started. Later readers figured out that all of these different servant prophecies were actually describing the same person, whom they gave the title the Messiah. *Christ* is just Greek for ‘Messiah.’ Apparently, John’s audience is mostly Greek-speaking; so he translates the Hebrew term for them.
- ‘you will be called Cephas’--*Cephas* and *Peter* mean ‘Rock,’ in Aramaic and Greek respectively. Jesus boldly gives Simon a nickname the very first time they meet. In fact, more than that, Jesus predicts a nickname other people will give Simon: ‘People are going to be calling you Rocky.’ Jesus looks at Simon, and he doesn’t just see Simon as he is now; he sees clearly into Simon’s future.
- ‘the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about’--what has for a very long time only been a hope is now actually happening, right in front of their eyes.
- ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’--as far as we know, Nazareth is a perfectly respectable, but small and unimportant, town (*IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*)
- ‘a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity’--I’m almost certain that Jesus is being kind of snarky here. I just don’t know exactly how. It could be as simple as calling out Nathanael’s bluntness, as displayed in his dig on Nazareth: ‘Here’s a guy who doesn’t hold anything back!’ But there’s something a little strange about the comparison ‘as honest as Israel’ that makes me wonder if there’s more to it than that. Israel, also known as Jacob, was a famous trickster. One time, Jacob literally put on a fake beard to fool his blind father and steal a blessing meant for his brother (Genesis 27:15-19). So to say that Nathanael has as much integrity as Israel may not be such a compliment. It’s not entirely clear to what lack of integrity Jesus would be referring. Maybe he’s saying that he’s not fooled by Nathanael’s cynical exterior: ‘You’re not as tough as you like to pretend to be Nathanael.’ I guess, in that case, Jesus would sort of be complimenting Nathanael, just in a tricky way.
- ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God’--whether my guess above is right or not, it does indeed prove to be true that Nathanael’s hard exterior is quickly penetrated.
- ‘and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway’--from now on, there will be frequent traffic between heaven and earth. ‘Son of Man,’ by the way will become a favorite title Jesus has for himself. It’s a bit like John the Baptist calling himself ‘a voice in the wilderness,’ unassuming and at the same time full of prophetic import. What could be more plain than calling yourself ‘just some guy’s son’? And yet, it also evokes a famous picture of the Messiah:

As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. **14** He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

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Taking It Home

- For you and your family: The disciples followed Jesus because he was what they had been looking for. Jesus called them to “come and see,” thus extending an invitation for them to experience him for themselves first hand. As we start the Leap of Faith , take some time to think about how you would like to experience Jesus. Share with your family (or friends) what you’re looking for from Jesus. Pray together that you would each experience Jesus firsthand for yourself.
- For your six: Each time a disciple meets Jesus the first thing they do is to tell their friends about what just happened. It just seems natural to share the good things going on in our lives. I think that is one of the reasons why we post things on Facebook, and why we ‘like’ other peoples’ posts. First of all, pray that God would do good things for your six, so much so that they would want to share about it. Secondly, ask God for a chance to share genuinely with each of your six something good God has done for you recently.
- For our church: I love how instantly and intimately Jesus knows his disciples. He gives them new names and knows exactly where they were before they met. Ask God to make our church a place where people feel instantly and intimately known –both by God himself and by other people.

Thursday, March 1—John 2:1-12

1 The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. 3 The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.”

4 “Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

5 But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

6 Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, 8 he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.

9 When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. 10 “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

11 This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

12 After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

Points of Interest

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- ‘in the village of Cana in Galilee’--Roman Palestine during Jesus’ time had two different Jewish regions: Judea and Galilee. Judea, the site of the big city Jerusalem, was the more metropolitan area. Galilee was a more quiet, out of the way place (at least as far as Jewish affairs are concerned; Galilee actually contained some sizable Gentile cities). Jesus and the disciples were all from Galilee.
- ‘The wine supply ran out during the festivities’--this, as you might imagine, would be quite an embarrassing failure on the part of the hosts. With the bar closing early, there’s a very real possibility that the party could come to a premature end.
- ‘Dear woman, that’s not our problem’--Mary has an inkling that Jesus could do something about the situation. Jesus doesn’t disagree, but he’s trying to mind his own business: ‘Mom, wedding coordinating isn’t really my line of work.’
- ‘Do whatever he tells you’--there’s something charmingly domestic about the way Mary simply ignores Jesus’ hesitation. Jesus may be the eternal Word, the Lamb of God, the Holy Escalator between heaven and earth, but he’s also the son of a mother who is unwilling to take, ‘No,’ for an answer when she asks her boy for something. I wonder how often Mary and Jesus have been in situations like this before.
- ‘take it to the master of ceremonies’--this is much like a waiter giving the head of the table the ceremonial first taste when a bottle of wine has been uncorked.
- ‘the servants followed his instructions’--it’s pretty amazing to me that they would actually obey Jesus here. I’m sure the master of ceremonies would not be amused at being served a mouthful of bath water. But, like a dutiful butler, they simply say, ‘As you wish, sir.’
- ‘you have kept the best until now’--what could have been a humiliating experience of trying to economize just a little too much on the cost of the wedding ends up looking like extravagance instead. When the guests are too tipsy to care, the host brings out the good stuff.
- ‘the first time Jesus revealed his glory’--Jesus spends his first miracle on saving a family friend from embarrassment. I find it extraordinarily kind. It reminds me once again of that time when Moses wanted to see God. ‘Show me your glory,’ Moses asked. ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you,’ God responded (Exodus 33:19). As far as God is concerned, God’s glory is God’s goodness. ‘God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ’ (1: 17).
- ‘his disciples believed in him’--none of the other guests even know what happened, but the disciples get a private glimpse of just how special the person they are following is.

Taking It Home

- **For you and your family:** The situation at the wedding looks pretty bad, and the servants don’t know how it will all turn out. All they know is that they’re supposed to do whatever Jesus says, which means filling six big jars with water and taking some of the water to the master of ceremonies. Without them knowing, as they do as they’re told, the water turns into wine, and everything works out really well. Is there any situation in your life now where things are looking bad? Ask God to give you faith that, despite how it looks, things could work out for the good. Is there anything God is asking you to do to act on that faith that God can transform the situation?

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- For your six: One of the results of Jesus' sneaky behind the scenes miracle is that the bridegroom receives abundant honor instead of shame. Ask God to honor your six today. Pray that God would honor them in front of their family, friends and coworkers. Ask God if there is a way that you could show honor to your six.
- For our church: Jesus' first miracle ever is making sure a wedding reception is a hit by meeting a very practical need. Jesus is willing to give attention to something that might seem trivial. Pray today for the practical needs of our own church, all the somewhat basic things that we need to operate. Also, pray for the practical needs of all the people in our church community. Ask God to abundantly provide for even the most basic of things.

Friday, March 2—John 2:13-25

¹³ It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. ¹⁵ Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. ¹⁶ Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

¹⁷ Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."

¹⁸ But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."

¹⁹ "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

²⁰ "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" ²¹ But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

²³ Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. ²⁴ But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature. ²⁵ No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like.

Points of Interest

- 'so Jesus went to Jerusalem'--properly speaking, every Jew was supposed to travel to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the Passover holiday (Deuteronomy 16:5). In reality, attendance was by no means perfect. It seems that from the very beginning, Passover observance could become a bit lax (Nehemiah 8:17). By Jesus' time, the Jewish people were so numerous and so far flung that it was simply impossible for all of them to gather in Jerusalem every year. Nonetheless, spending Passover in Jerusalem was considered especially blessed. Rather like the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, devout Jews would make an effort to travel to Jerusalem for Passover at least once in their lifetime. Living relatively nearby, Galileans like Jesus would probably make the trip to Jerusalem fairly frequently; every year was not out of the question.

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- ‘exchanging foreign money’--imprinted as they were with pictures of foreign gods, normal coins were not allowed in the temple. Before they could be offered or spent in the temple, they would have to be exchanged--for a fee--for the special, religiously approved temple currency.
- ‘Get these things out of here’--‘these things’ were the Passover lambs and the other sacrifices being offered at the temple. Allegedly, these were the very things meant to bring people closer to God, but when Jesus looks at them he only sees so much useless clutter. The true Lamb of God recognizes a fake when he sees one.
- ‘Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace!’--the temple was supposed to be the symbol of God’s presence in the world, but it has become something of a tourist trap instead. The temple officials and their authorized vendors see people’s religious devotion as an opportunity to make a quick buck, by selling all of the necessary religious articles at a significant mark-up.
- ‘Passion for God’s house will consume me’--Psalm 69:9. The New King James version translates this verse, ‘Zeal for your house has eaten me up.’ The idea here is that Jesus cares more about God’s house than his own well-being. Quite literally, it turns out, Jesus is willing to spend his life to see God’s original intentions for the temple fulfilled.
- ‘What are you doing?’--Jesus may think of the temple as his father’s house, but as far as these officials are concerned the temple belongs to them and Jesus is just some unbalanced intruder. By the way, in the other three gospels, this showdown between Jesus and the temple officials happens much later in the story, just a few days before Jesus’ execution. I think John moves it to the front of the story to heighten the contrast between the officials’ treatment of the temple and Jesus’ recent actions at the wedding in Cana. Jesus took an ordinary wedding and turned it (with some maternal prodding) into an opportunity to show God’s goodness and glory. The temple officials take a place intended for God’s glory, and turn it into a source for selfish gain.
- ‘in three days I will raise it up’--it’s verses like this that lead scholars to believe that John is aware of the other gospels, and even assumes knowledge of them among his readership. The other gospels slowly build toward a dramatic climax in Jesus’ death and resurrection. John suddenly and rather poetically and indirectly refers to it in chapter 2. Jesus’ death and then his resurrection are not surprise plot twists in John’s story; they’re the backdrop against which the entire story takes place.
- ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple’--in fact, the temple still wasn’t quite finished. Herod the Great, a terribly unpopular usurper, began major renovations on what had been a rather modest building in order to gain some favor with the people (after having just killed off the entire royal family and taken the throne for himself). Continuing long after Herod’s death, the project transformed the temple into one of the more impressive buildings in the entire Roman empire. But all of that is beside the point Jesus is trying to make.
- ‘he meant his own body’--the temple is essentially the physical manifestation of God’s presence among God’s people. In that case, Jesus himself is a far better temple than a pile of stones funded by a bloody tyrant and filled with profiteers.
- ‘they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said’--Jesus has issued a challenge to the temple officials: they kill him; if he stays dead, they’re the rightful authorities of God’s temple; if

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he rises again, he is. Much later, when it all happens, the disciples remember the contest, and declare Jesus the winner.

- ‘the miraculous signs Jesus did’--it’s unclear to me if the miracle here is Jesus facing down the authorities, or if he accomplished more standard miracles like healing the sick, of which John does not bother to tell us the details.
- ‘Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew human nature’--everybody enjoys a good fight, and everyone loves an underdog. So the people are entertained by Jesus’ face-off with the temple officials. But Jesus is not under any illusion that they are in some fundamental way on his side.

Taking It Home

- For you: Far from being impressed by the Jewish leaders’ four decades of dedicated work to build the temple, he’s actually infuriated by how its driven them and others away from God. Take some time today thinking about the things in your life you have worked the hardest at or invested the most in. What is it that you’re pouring your time and resources into? Take some time to ask God what he thinks about that. Have you been spending your energies in the right direction? Has your big dream at all gotten in the way of you simply drawing closer to God?
- For your six: Ask your six what their experiences of church or places of worship have been like? Did they have good experiences? Bad? Are they, like Jesus at the temple, infuriated by hypocrisy they’ve seen? If past experiences of churches or places of worship are hindering your six from connecting with God, ask God to heal those hurts. Pray that your six would find a place or community—maybe it’s a church, or maybe it’s not—where they could easily connect with God.
- For our church: I’d like to think we’ve greatly advanced since the days of the den-of-robbers temple described here. However I wonder if what’s described here is indicative of the natural tendency of any place of worship to somehow lose focus. All sorts of clutter builds up and becomes barriers that get in the way of people experiencing God. Ask God to protect our church from that tendency. Ask God to remove any barriers that we have actually created ourselves. Ask God to make our church a place where people can easily come and experience God without distraction.

Saturday, March 3—John 3:1-21

¹ There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

³ Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

⁴ “What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

⁵ Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can

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hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ¹¹ I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. ¹² But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

Points of Interest

- 'After dark one evening'--Nicodemus is curious enough about Jesus to seek him out, but embarrassed enough about it that he doesn't want to be seen.
- 'we all know that God has sent you'--we already have some indications that Jesus and the religious leaders may not end up on the friendliest terms. First, there was the delegation sent from the Pharisees to investigate John the Baptist. Then, in the last passage, there was the whole showdown at the temple, leading up to Jesus' not-so-friendly challenge: go ahead and kill me then, and we'll see whether or not I stay dead. SPOILER ALERT: things don't necessarily get better between Jesus and the religious authorities. In public the religious leaders are nothing but adversarial to Jesus, but Nicodemus here gives us a rare glimpse behind the scenes. The religious leaders are not as monolithic and hostile in their opinions as they appear on the outside. Who knows for how many people Nicodemus is speaking and how accurately he represents them, but at least from his perspective the religious leaders have to admit in their heart of hearts that something is happening that is hard to explain apart from the work of God.
- 'Your miraculous signs are evidence'--once again, we hear of miraculous signs. Apparently, Jesus is performing more miracles than the one in Cana. Intriguingly, John hasn't told us the stories of these miracles, or even directly told us when they occur. He only mentions them for the impact they have on people who hear about them.
- 'unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God'--I imagine that Nicodemus was expecting gratitude or relief from Jesus: 'Thank you. It's good to know that some of you religious leaders are on my side.' Instead, he either gets complimented on his good taste or insulted on his ignorance. Either Jesus is saying here, 'You must have been born again since you can recognize what's happening as being from God,' or he's saying, 'Spiritually speaking, you're at

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best an unborn fetus. You have no idea what you're talking about.' I honestly don't know which. Either way, it throws the conversation into some confusion.

- 'How can an old man go back into his mother's womb '--we'll notice in John's Gospel a certain tendency for Jesus and other people to talk past one another. Jesus will use a spiritual metaphor, and the other person--either out of genuine misunderstanding or willful misrepresentation--will take him literally. It happened in the last passage regarding the 'temple' being destroyed. Here, it happens again over the idea of being born again. I'm not sure whether I think Nicodemus is actually confused or he is mocking Jesus. It does seem clear to me that he's trying to stress to Jesus, 'I'm no kid. I've lived a long life.'
- 'Humans can reproduce only human life'--of course, Jesus is not suggesting that Nicodemus crawl back up into his mother's womb. First of all, eww. Secondly, it would be pointless. Once you were born again, you'd end up right back where you started. The rebirth Jesus is recommending is one that would actually bring you somewhere different.
- 'you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from'--Nicodemus wants it all locked down. What exactly is being born of the Spirit? What's the step-by-step process by which it is accomplished? What's the checklist by which you know whether or not someone is born of the Spirit or not? He wants it all laid out, clearly defined, in black and white. Jesus replies that this new birth is more like the wind. Nobody knows exactly what wind is or where it comes from. You can't capture the wind in a bottle. And yet everyone knows that wind exists, and everyone can feel it when it blows. What is this being born again? Well, you know it when you experience it.
- 'we tell you what we know and have seen'--Who is 'we' here? Jesus and the Spirit? Jesus and John the Baptist? Jesus and the prophets? Anyone who has been born of the Spirit? I'm not sure.
- 'as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness'--when the Israelites in the desert were plagued by poisonous snakes, God commanded Moses to sculpt a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole; whoever looked up at the bronze snake was unharmed by the poison (Numbers 21:8-9).

It strikes me that we've referred to Moses quite a bit. I think John is portraying Jesus as the newer and better Moses. Moses, with the help of the law, brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and to a new land of their own. Jesus, with the help of the Spirit, is leading people out of slavery to sin and into eternal life.

- 'people loved the darkness more than the light'--it's like there's been a power outage, and Jesus has gotten the electricity working again. When the lights go back on, a surprising number of people, instead of cheering, scramble to hide what they've been doing in the dark. Jesus seems to be saying here that he doesn't care so much about what people were doing when the lights were off; he's simply there to turn the lights on. If there is any judgment happening, it's from the people who were in the dark; they're judging whether or not they want the lights back on. The temple officials are a good case in point. Jesus gives them a choice between a temple which will usher them into God's presence and a temple which will make them money. They choose

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the temple that makes money. As a result of that choice, they will naturally get more money and less God.

- ‘so others can see that they are doing what God wants’--I think Jesus is referring to the fact that Nicodemus has come to Jesus under cover of darkness. Nicodemus seems unsure whether he wants to stay in the dark or come into the light. He seems to like his current role as the hip, with-it one among the old religious establishment. Jesus tells him that there’s a lot more life available to him--spiritual life, heavenly life, eternal life--but it takes admitting that he hasn’t already arrived, that as far as experiencing the new life of the Spirit is concerned, he’s just a baby. We’re left hanging. What will Nicodemus choose?

Taking It Home

- For you: Jesus tells Nicodemus that he can try as hard as he wants to understand and be close to God, but in the end it won’t really matter at all unless Nicodemus receives the Holy Spirit. Tell God that you want more of God’s presence and as much of the Holy Spirit as you can have. If there are any situations right now that you just can’t seem to make better on your own, ask God for more of the Holy Spirit’s help there.
- For your six: In this passage, Jesus talks about the strange attachment we can sometimes have to the dark parts of our life. Do you see in any of your six a tendency to stay entrenched in things that clearly aren’t working out well for them? Pray that they would have the courage to leave those things behind and step into a new light-filled life.
- For our church: Ask God to help our church be one that truly conveys just how much God loves the world. Pray that our church would be able to grasp this love and that we would be able to convey it. Pray for our church to somehow play a part in tangibly loving the whole world.

Sunday, March 4—John 3:22-36

²² Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

²³ At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. ²⁴ (This was before John was thrown into prison.) ²⁵ A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. ²⁶ So John’s disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us.”

²⁷ John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ ²⁹ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰ He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

³¹ “He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. ³² He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! ³³ Anyone who accepts his testimony

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can affirm that God is true. ³⁴ For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. ³⁶ And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

Points of Interest

- 'Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people'--We've seen Jesus at work in his home in Galilee, and in the capital Jerusalem. Now he moves on to the major center of Jewish population, the less urban parts of Judea. This is John the Baptist's country, and Jesus is sort of doing John the Baptist's thing.
- 'A debate broke out'--John the Baptist's followers end up in a theological controversy with some religious scholar over whether or not John's baptism is a proper form of ceremonial cleansing. John the Baptist's disciples seem concerned that losing some of their constituency to Jesus has lost them some leverage in this debate. It's harder to claim that their baptism is legitimate when people are leaving in droves to get baptized by Jesus instead.
- 'You yourselves know how plainly I told you'--as far as John is concerned, the fact that people are leaving him to follow Jesus is no reason for alarm. In fact, it's a sign of success. All he has ever tried to do is introduce people to Jesus.
- 'how few believe what he tells them'--far from being disappointed at how many people are abandoning him for Jesus, John the Baptist is disappointed at how few people are accepting what Jesus is offering.
- 'God gives him the Spirit without limit'--apparently, John the Baptist needs to move around just to ensure that he has enough water for baptizing. Jesus will never run out of the Holy Spirit he uses for his baptism. John the Baptist has experienced the Holy Spirit only in small drops here and there. Jesus is filled to capacity, and has plenty in which to shower other people around him as well. It's a whole new experience of God.
- 'has put everything into his hands'--Jesus has been given the keys to the car, as it were.
- 'will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment'--Jesus offers limitless connection with the living God through the Holy Spirit. But if you reject the offer, there's nothing he can do for you; you're left out in the cold.

Taking It Home

- For you: I can imagine John's disciples felt a little offended at and slightly jealous of Jesus. Fair enough: they were in fact losing business and popularity and not getting the respect they deserved. Is there a situation in your life where you feel like you're being overlooked or not getting the credit you deserve? Maybe you used to be the star, and now there's a new kid in town. John the Baptist tells his disciples that Jesus has something better to offer, even if it means they don't get credit. Ask Jesus to show you what his better offer to you is.
- For your six: As Jesus moves quickly from place to place and thing to thing, he somehow manages to carve out time with the people he is closest to. Time is not an easy thing to come by these days. Ask God to give you six times to both do the things they love the most and spend

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time with people they care about the most. Also, ask and look for quality time to spend with your six.

- For our church: Ask God to give our church John's gift of preparing a way for others. Ask God to make our church a place where people are prepared to do what God is ultimately calling them to do. Pray that our church would have a humble spirit and be a place that is 'filled with joy' at anyone's success and growth in God.