

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT
STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

"LIGHT--BRILLIANT LIFE-GIVING LIGHT"
REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Introduction

The following studies will be on themes from the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is a magnificent book of revelation about Jesus Christ our Savior. One of the main emphasis in the Gospel is that those who read it, both believers and unbelievers, might come to a true and saving knowledge of the living God (John 15:1-5; 20:31). As you study John's Gospel, you will notice theological and biblical contrasts in his book: light-darkness, life-death, Law-Grace, creation-New creation, Old Testament signs-New Testament realities, and the present age characterized by sin, death due to Adam's fall and the age to come that has now dawned in the coming of God in the flesh. In fact, the Gospel of John opens with many of these theological contrasts.

The Gospel of John also presents a horizontal perspective as well as a vertical perspective of history. On the one hand, John emphasizes the horizontal perspective of a new creation dawning in history because of the coming of Jesus into the world (John 1:1-18). This history that extends back to the first creation is consummated in the coming of a new creation (Thus the reason John begins his gospel with "In the beginning"). On the other hand, John focuses our attention on a vertical perspective of history because real eternal life and knowledge of God is obtained by being "born from above", Jesus came down from above, His Kingdom is not of this world, etc. As we study the themes in the Book of John, may we keep these basic truths in mind.

The Gospel of John as Story, Play, and Film

I believe that it is helpful to think of the Book of John with story-perspectives. For instance, John's Gospel could be understood as the story of Jesus Christ and how we all either fit into that story, or do not fit into His story. This story is filled with paradox, irony, misinterpretations and misunderstandings, and ultimately with a hero who is resurrected to his proper place upon the completion of his journey for those he loved [NOTE: the use of "story" in no way means that it is a fictional story. "Story" is used as a way of capturing the essence of God's revelation of His reality in Jesus Christ. Some men make up their own fictional stories, and some men by his grace, submit to God's Historically True Story].

You could also look at John's Gospel as a play. Chapter 1 is a prologue to the play, perhaps with overture music, chapters 2-12 form the content of Act One, chapters 13-20 form the content of Act Two, with an epilogue at the end in chapter 21. Another perspective for approaching the book of John is like a film. Chapter 1 contains the opening titles, musical theme, and credits. It gives you the history prior to the story in the film. Chapters 2-20 are various angles or shots the camera captures, then it is edited by John to focus every event, sign, and saying to reveal Jesus Christ as the Author of the story. Chapter 21 would be the closing credits and music of the film.

John Chapter 1

John 1:1-14: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness

has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Light in the Darkness

When I was a young boy, I used to be terribly fearful of the dark as I would go to bed each night. The dark at night was the place of the unknown, the unfamiliar, and the unrecognizable. Shadows would lurk about my room, moving from wall to wall as I would see shapes that my mind would arrange as horrible threats to my existence. I would try to get up out of my bed to reach the light switch, and I would do this as fast as I could, because in my mind I was racing the images I saw on the wall that I thought were not to only scare me, but to take my life.

If I could not get enough to nerve to quickly jump out of bed, I would merely wait until the light of morning, then I could see clearly that there was nothing in my room, and there was truly nothing to fear but the fear I experienced itself. What a comfort the light of morning was whenever I was fearful of the dark. Light is comforting to all of us in this world, because it enables our eyes to see all around us and to have the ability to observe the beauty of the universe all around us.

Just like when I was a boy, the world had been submerged into darkness because of the fall of Adam into sin. What the Westminster Confession of Faith calls the "estate of sin and misery" (WCOF, chapter 6) the Apostle John describes in John chapter one of his gospel as a "darkness" (v. 5). Men could see all around them the reality of a Creator, and of his beautiful creation (cf. Romans 1), yet because their hearts were darkened, they could not comprehend it, nor ignore it by overcoming it (v. 5). So, God in His grace took upon Himself human flesh to point our way to the true God, our true and eternal God the Creator.

Who was this man who came to dwell among us, to show us the light (v. 14)? This man was very God of very God! John wants us to know that just as there was deep darkness in the original creation of the world, and God said "Let there be light!" in the darkness, so in Jesus Christ, God begins the consummation of a new creation with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world who will also cry out "Let there be light!" - - and there was, and will continue to be light until he returns for those who believe.

With God and Was God

Who was this man who had the ability to speak and light would come forth from darkness? Who was this man who could do what God could do in healing men's sicknesses, enlightening the eyes of those who could not see, causing some to be born again, or "born from above"? This man was "with God" in the beginning, as well as "was God". This man Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, who came to dwell among us, so that we might know the true God in the midst of our darkness.

During a time period in history when men are offering up sacrifice and praise to every created thing in hopes of finding fulfillment and instead end up merely creating another idol to worship because they know there is a true God but are too blind to see him, or to find him. Jesus Christ the one who was "with God" and "was God" comes to make this true God known to us.

The good news of John's gospel in revealing Jesus Christ as the one "with God" and the one who "was God" is to remind us of the need of a Savior who would be "like us, yet not like us". We needed someone who was distinct from God, that is "with God", who could by his grace take upon himself human flesh, to become a man to represent us righteously before God. We also needed someone "not like us" who was ultimately "like God" or rather "was God" so as to truly reveal God to us, to truly live for us, to have the power, holiness and love of God that only God *could have!*

The sad part of what John writes is that even though this Jesus was "with God" and "was God", and the world and everything in it was created by him and for him (v. 3), the world, because it was submerged in darkness did not recognize him. The creatures do not recognize their Creator because they are submerged in the blackest darkness and need the Light of the World to bring not only light, but ***life***. The good news was that this Jesus Christ was not only light, but life, and this ***life was the light of men*** (v. 4).

Old Creation and New Creation

Since the "old creation" ("In the beginning...", Gen. 1) and the fall that occurred in that "old creation" (Gen. 3), the world was submerged in an estate of sin and misery, ruled by the results and circumstances of the fall of Adam. People in the world were ruled by the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, the god of this age, and the principles of sin, such as self-centeredness, idol worship, false religiosity, and lived with the ultimate destiny of death and separation from God their Creator. Yet God in his grace came to tabernacle, to dwell with men in darkness so as to give them life, and in their new life as new creations to be given light!

You see there was nothing wrong with the light of the "old creation". It was because the people were submerged in sin and darkness with tainted hearts that they were unable to see or comprehend the light of God's glorious "good" revelation in the world around us (Gen. 1:31; Psa. 19). So, Jesus Christ comes to establish a new creation with new creations (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), that is people who believe, who will live eternally with him and be able to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We see a glimpse of this now, but O what we will see people of God when we see him face to face - as he is. In fact, as John writes in his first epistle, we shall be like him!

Do you know that a new creation a "new beginning" (v. 1) has dawned in Jesus Christ? Do you comprehend God and see him as God in the flesh? Embrace him by faith today! Ask him for life so that you might truly live as you were purposed to live as his obedient creature! Ask him for light so that you might truly see your sin and the darkness in which you live, so that you might truly know the beauty of the Lord your God! Praise be to God for dwelling among us in our own flesh!

This is our hope and the encouragement that John give us in the first few verses of John chapter 1!

Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT
"GOD'S GLORY IN THE FLESH"
REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Introduction

Are you feeling like you have gotten yourself into a mess and there is no way out for you? Do you feel forgotten and lonely perhaps because of age and you think you are no longer important to your church or family? Do you often struggle with the same sins over and over, the sin you think you have completely conquered and forgotten, and then there is to threaten your intimate walk with Christ again? Do you feel like there is a situation that God is not big enough to change? Do you feel like you have prayed and called out to God about something in particular and he has not answered and you are questioning his love for you?

In all of these situations above, the one most important thing we all need is the realization and knowledge that God is with us and that He is able to do above and beyond whatever we ask or imagine! Even if it seems too big or difficult for you, God is able and God is with you! The fact of God being with us is the great truth that John communicates in John 1.

Throughout redemptive-history, God's people had awaited the day when God would fully and permanently dwell with them. He dwelled in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve until the fall of man into sin and rebellion caused separation. Later, by His grace, God dwelled with Israel in the Tabernacle of Meeting that He commanded Moses to oversee (Exodus 25ff). During the "golden age" of Israel's existence as nation, God dwelled in a Temple built by Solomon. The hope that everyone was looking forward to was that one day God would permanently dwell with his people and this presence would ensure His people that He cared for them, loved them, and would be strong enough and able enough to do whatever they asked.

John begins his Gospel declaring the good news of Jesus by pointing us to the reality that God became flesh and made his dwelling among us - - the living God stepped down out of heaven to take upon himself human flesh so that he could be a perfect Mediator on our behalf, sympathize with our weaknesses, to present himself to God as a sacrifice for our sins and rebellion. The unbelievable and unimaginable took place: God became one of us! And in the *enfleshing of God*, we see and behold the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! Today's study will focus on John 1, verses 1, 14, and 18.

John 1:1-18

ESV John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (

John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'" 16 And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

"God Was the WORD"

God's Glory dwells with man in the Person of Jesus Christ, but this was something that no one in their wildest imaginations could have fathomed until God made it clear in the life and preaching of Jesus. Notice in verse 1. John says that "In the beginning *was the WORD, and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God.*" Jesus was "With God and Was God". This shows that the WORD was both distinct from God the Father as well as equal with.

It is important to explain the Greek Text of John 1:1, particularly since many want to deny the divinity of Christ, some willing only to acknowledge him as a "good teacher". In the Greek text of John 1:1, John literally wants to say that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *God was the Word.* Because the Greek text has no article before 'God' in the last clause of verse 1, some false teachers have tried to translate this as: "The Word was a god", perhaps a god-like person, like in Greek thought, but not THE GOD.

John however does not have an article so as to emphasize the placement of God before Word, so that it says: "God was the WORD. In other words, there is absolutely no question as to what John communicates: The Word is distinct from God (with God), as well as equal to God (was God).

It's a WORD, it's a logos, it's a man, no it's God in the flesh!

John goes on to stress Christ's "God-ness" or Deity, or Divinity by explaining Jesus with the use of a Hebrew term as well as a Greek term. To the Greeks, Word, or LOGOS, meant the rational principle, or logic that held all of life and the cosmos together. It was an impersonal force that kept all order from turning chaotic when someone sneezes.

To the Hebrews the Word communicated God's divine speaking, as when God speaks in the creation and all comes to pass. The divine fiat that commands life and light and life and light comes forth into nothing. It also communicates the Word spoken by the prophets that would not go forth and return empty or void (Isa. 55-58), that burned within the hearts of God's prophets. The WORD also communicated God's wisdom and how to live within God's world (cf. Proverbs 8).

This LOGOS, this WORD of God **became flesh!** To use Paul's expression elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, this would have been foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews! This was the unbelievable, but it was God coming to dwell with man in glory in a way that was so very unexpected!

What kind of flesh was this? Real flesh? God had flesh like ours! When we think if God in flesh and desire to see God's glory displayed in all its fullness look to the God who became like us, had a body like us (yet without sin nature), got his feet dirty, who had a heart beat, who would have sweat and perspired on a hot day in the sun and our God would have even had body odor. What kind of God is this? What child is this? Behold, we see the glory of God revealed in a crying peasant child named Jesus who was probably licked clean by the animals (his own creatures) in the cattle stall in which he was born. This is the kind of flesh that God took own -- our own. That is why he understands how we feel and that is why he sympathizes with us in weakness and in our struggle in this world!

This is such great news that God would answer our ultimate prayers to see him and to behold him with our own face and yet men want to deny the deity, God-ness, or divinity of the Word. Why? Because since the fall man likes his own will and way, he likes playing God like a small child playing house with her dolls, and he neither wants to be obedient to this Word, nor honor him in worship. In other words, denying Christ's Deity, God-ness, or Divinity is man's last ditch effort to diminish or rewrite the revelation of God's hope extended to man.

The "God-Ness", Deity and Divinity of Jesus, the WORD Enfleshed

John's main intent in chapter 1 is to stress the deity, or "God-ness" of Jesus Christ (compare 1:1, 18; 20:28-31; "I AM" statements of Jesus). In fact, the whole of John's Gospel has an inclusio from the first chapter to the end of part two in chapter 20. He begins with the foundational statement that Jesus was God, then he ends book two in chapter 20 with Thomas' revelation: "My LORD, and My God" as he believes in Jesus. This revelation of John is held out so that all of us will believe (John 20:31).

This is the ultimate question for ourselves, our friends, family and neighbors: "Who Do You Say Jesus Is?" How you answer this reveals whether you have a Savior who can truly save: a Savior like you, as well as not like you; One who was with God, and was God! But also in the midst of your pain, misunderstanding, lack of faith, loneliness, and struggling with your sins, you need to also be reminded of *Who Jesus is!* If God is able to surprise even the finest of Bible scholars who taught at the first coming of Jesus, he is surely able to surprise you each and every day as you remind yourself that the Word Who became flesh is with you and He is able to do what He has promised to you that He will do!

C. S. Lewis' 'Liar, Lunatic, or LORD'

Men today deny his Jesus' Divinity and accept him as just a "good teacher" or nice religious person. He is called by some to be the first social activist, feminist, pluralist, and everything else under the sun other than "very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one essence with the Father." If he is just a good teacher, he is not even that. C. S. Lewis said one time, we can call Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or Lord, but we cannot merely call him a good teacher if indeed he was not God.

To use C. S. Lewis' comment from his book *Mere Christianity*, we can say Jesus lied to us and so we can say he is bad because he was a nasty liar. We can also pity him and say he was a lunatic to think he was God and to lay down his life for a cause that was of his own making (or to surrender himself in his death on the wheel of history). But if he is who he says he is, and HE IS because he said and proved that he was I AM, then we must call him LORD and because he is LORD we must obey him and worship him.

A Search, A Quest and a Rejection

Even within the pale of so-called "Christian circles" men are looking for the "historical Jesus" and the historical Jesus is not divine in their estimation- - yet that is exactly what John is communicating in his gospel- - so that all will believe and know the True God and Jesus Christ His Son (John 17:3-5). If these men on their search or quest for the so-called historical Jesus are removing Scripture that does not rightly reveal Jesus, and they believe Jesus is not God, then they will desire to reject all of the Scriptures that do indeed witness to the fact that he is God -- and that leaves them with a continuous search with nothing ever meaningful and true found concerning this Jesus!

If these "scholars" come to the table of their search with the bias, or the presupposition that Jesus is not God, they are not very likely to find him revealed as *God*. What a shame! For all who deny him in this way, there is only the threat of eternal death and punishment, eternally realizing and being reminded consciously while in torment, that this Jesus was the Great I AM and rather than believing what they saw so clearly in the life of

Jesus and hearing in the preaching of Jesus and about Jesus, they will realize that they rejected him and they will glorify God in his great justice despite their so-called search because they will get what we all deserve apart from the grace held out in Jesus Christ, the WORD who was enfleshed!

But for all who believe, we have God's covenant promise: To Be Our God and to dwell once again with Him like we were originally created to do in the creation of all things. God dwells in the flesh so that we might truly come to know that God is not silent, rather he reveals himself clearly all around us in His beautiful creation ("the theater of his glory"- Calvin), and specially He reveals himself in our own human flesh.

The Glory of the God in the Face of Jesus Christ and Existential Blindness and Deafness

In Exodus 33:12-34:8- Moses wants to see God's face. God in his grace (and protection of Moses) only reveals his back side as well as his attributes to him. Moses wants to know as God's Mediator if God is going to be present with him as Mediator. Moses longs for the presence of God to be with God's people permanently. He longs for the day when God will truly be with us! What John writes, Moses could have never conceived: God would reveal his glory with a face like Moses (and Moses gets to experience the transfiguration of Jesus with Elijah when the cloaked God with a human face in our flesh "unzips" his glory for a moment of revelation in time!)

In the fullness of time, that John records for us in John 1, the God does come to us to dwell with us to live for those who believe, and to open up the way for God to come and dwell permanently with us by His Spirit, and one day in glorified bliss in the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 21-22). This is the hope of all those who would believe.

Many unbelieving people in the world say that if they could just see God, or see Jesus, then they would believe! But, Jesus says:

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book...

In Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*, the knight (one who represents religious existentialism) who realizes the meaninglessness of life in the face of death, who thinks he has searched for God, cried out to God, and God has not answered him says for all unbelievers who want to see God:

"My indifference has shut me out. I live in a world of ghosts, a prisoner of dreams. *I want God to put out his hand, show his face, speak to me. I cry out to him in the dark but there is no one there...Why can't I kill God within me?*"

Religious existentialism dealt with God's so-called "silence" and Francis Schaeffer wrote the book "He is There and Is Not Silent" based on this type of thinking. Problem is, men want God to appear to them on their own terms, not in God's terms- - they cannot ever recognize God's divinity nor their own humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ! Only by God's grace giving them true life, so that they might have true light: "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men" (1:5).

In Christ we see what Moses longed to see: God's face, as well as God's attributes and even his personality. If men want to see or hear God they must look to and listen to Jesus Christ. He is the only One who has seen God and made him known (1:18). Men can wait around for the rest of their lives supposedly "Waiting on Godot", but "Godot", rather, the WORD has clearly made God known to all and the resurrection is the reason

why God calls men everywhere to repent, turn, be obedient to, and worship this LORD Jesus Christ. Paul says it like this to the Greek Philosophers at Athens (who were in their own way "Waiting for Godot"):

"In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, " For we are indeed his offspring.'...The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."

God's People are Reflections of His Glory

May we as a people look to Jesus each day, each moment to see the love of God expressed and displayed by faith in the face of Jesus. May we then go out to each other and into the world with the face that still shines because of the reflection of the glory of God, not coming from the outside, but arising internally from our hearts' affections to show the love of Christ to others (2 Cor. 3:7-18).

May we share God's good news to others and others "see Jesus Christ" in our deeds and hear Jesus Christ in what we say! May we encourage one another as believers with the good news that no matter what we are going through, whatever difficult place we find ourselves in, may we be reminded that God is With us! He is our "Immanuel"! God is with us in Jesus Christ and because of Jesus Christ and His resurrection and glorification at God's right hand, we are given His Spirit and so God dwells with His people in the most intimate of ways! May we come to realize the power of his strength that works within us (Eph. 1:15-23).

And may we warn unbelievers as well as encourage each other that one day God will dwell permanently with us in glorified flesh as Revelation 21 describes for us in detail:

³ And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, *and be their God:* ⁴ and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away....²² And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof. ²³ And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof *is* the Lamb. ²⁴ And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. ²⁵ And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there): ²⁶ and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it: ²⁷ and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

VOX DEI AND AGNUS DEI: VOICE OF GOD AND LAMB OF GOD REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Introduction

This week's study will be from John 1, verses 19-34 when we are first introduced by the Apostle John to the forerunner of the Messiah, or the "Voice of God crying in the wilderness" who prepares the way for Messiah. The first thing we are told about John the Baptist in John's gospel is that he was "sent from God" (v. 6). This is extremely important for our study and in considering the context of John the Baptist's conversation with the Jews of Jerusalem and his authority as a prophet and minister of God. We will consider this more in our study.

What we need to understand about John the Baptist's ministry is that it takes place in a unique redemptive-historical context. When John the Baptist comes as the *Voice of God*, he comes to the last period of the Old Covenant ("the sun is setting on the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is dawning simultaneously" [I learned this quotation from someone else and cannot give credit because I have forgotten who said it]). When considering his ministry, as well as the whole of John's Gospel, we must remember that there is an overlapping of creations, or ages, as well as an overlapping of covenants. The Old covenant is coming to an end and the New Covenant is dawning the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

John the Baptist's Ministry

John the Baptist's ministry as the last of the Old Covenant prophets, "bridges the gap" between the Old and New covenants. The overlapping of the old creation characterized by sin and misery and the dawning of the new creation with Jesus and the sending of the Spirit happens during John the Baptist's life time. The Old Covenant of types and signs gives way to the heavenly reality revealed in Jesus Christ. For instance, where the sacrifices of animals was an ongoing activity in the Old Covenant, so in the New Covenant Jesus lays down his life as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, as the final sacrifice, or the reality to which the sacrifices pointed forward!

What is the relationship between John's unique ministry and Jesus the Messiah's unique ministry? There are several ways we can think about John the Baptist's ministry in contrast to Jesus' ministry. We can think of it with a building metaphor, as well as a show, or event metaphor. With the building metaphor, there is one who surveys the land, clears the way for a construction project. John surveys and clears the land, preparing the way for Jesus to build and construct his New Covenant Temple.

Another metaphor is that of a show. There is one who introduces the main attraction before the curtain goes up, or "opens up" for the main act. John the Baptist comes to introduce, but Jesus is the main attraction, or the main show. Finally, you can think of John's relationship to Jesus with an event metaphor. For an event, say like a birth, you send an invitation, then you have the event itself. John's message is the invitation, Jesus is the event itself. This is the relationship between the unique and covenant closing ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Text of Scripture: John 1:19-34

John 1:19-34: And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are

you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." ²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Sent From God

The first truth that John reveals about John the Baptist is that he was sent from God (1:6). He goes on to say that he was a witness to the Light (1:7-8), not the Light Himself. The Jews send from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask John the Baptist: "YOU! Who do you think you are?" (that is the way the text seems to read in the Greek). John answers by saying firstly, "I am NOT the Christ -- I am not Messiah who we are anticipating". Then he goes on to say that he is not the prophet, nor Elijah (1:19-25).

Now in this final Old Covenant period, there is a great Messianic expectation in the air. There are hopes among the Jewish people, as well as Gentile converts, that Messiah will come any time. That there will be a prophet sent like Moses from among the brothers, and that Elijah will come before the great Day of the LORD. The two important Old Covenant Scriptures concerning this expectation were Deuteronomy 18 and Malachi 4. In addition to the Scriptural teaching there was a heightened Messianic awareness because of Rome's domination, as well as teachings, and movements of this time that emphasized the "nearness" of the coming of the Messianic King.

Deuteronomy 18:15-18: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers- it is to him you shall listen- ¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' ¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

Malachi 4:4-6: ⁴ "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

The Old Covenant people were anticipating a prophet like Moses, one from among them (Deut. 18), as well as the sending of the Prophet Elijah before the day of Messiah (Mal.

4). John is being questioned by the "church authorities" of his day if he is Messiah, the Prophet, or Elijah. What the Jews ultimately want to know is why is he preaching if they have not authorized his baptism for repentance. If they have not authorized it, then who has?

The Church UNDER the Word

What is sad about the Jews sent to question him is that although they had authority as the early church teachers (Matt. 23:1-2- Jesus says that they have authority, but don't do what they do!), they have sadly ceased from being under the authority of the Word of God. In fact, their own traditions and interpretations of the Word of God have been placed on the same level as Scripture. Thus, when the last and final prophet of God, the Voice is sent to His Church, they don't recognize God's Word, God's prophet, and most of all, God's Messiah.

How many churches, how many congregations have slowly slipped from submitting the authority of Scripture alone? How many times do we each day fail to submit to Scripture's authority by living any way we please, and do what we want to do regardless of what we know Scripture to teach? None of the people who were once legitimately the church of Jesus, ever just woke up one morning and decided not to believe, to become liberal in their theological thinking and to submit the Word of God to their own reasoning. It happened over time...they drifted (Hebrews 2:1-4).

We must be diligent not to drift, but to always be checking our ministries, our messages, our motivations as we learn each day to once again sit under the authority and light of God's teaching, lest Jesus return one day and some churches and congregations don't even recognize him because he does not reveal himself in the manner that these churches and congregations have taught. Somewhere over time, people drift out from under the authority of the Word, begin to come up with ideas of Jesus that are inconsistent with Scripture, and then create a Jesus of their own making. Hebrews 2 reminds us of the potential of "drifting" from sitting under the authority of God's Word:

Hebrews 2:1-4: Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

When this happens, we become like the Jews who were sending their priest and Levite representatives to question John the Baptist (notice man sent these men to question John the Baptist, v. 19, but *God sent John*, v. 6). When those who were once legitimately the people of God drift from under the authority of the Word, they cease to be who they are called to be and thus their so-called authority is voided, because the authority of God's people, His church, is always derived from Scripture alone.

When this happens to men and women in churches and congregations around our world, and the people begin to care more for the Jesus of their own making, and depend upon the authority of their traditions and interpretations, and cannot hear the Word of God when it is preached, nor can they see the Word of God when he reveals himself, then these congregations can no longer claim any authority at all, because they are not authorized to speak anything but what is revealed in Holy Scripture. This is the sad truth here in John 1:19-34. Those who were in authority as the "teachers of Israel" (cf. John 3:8-11), were so dependent upon the "word of God of their own making" that they could not hear the Word of God when he came in the spiritually dry wilderness to proclaim Messiah, as Isaiah prophesied he would do!

May we all continue to be like the Bereans in Acts 17, being called noble because we submit to the Word of God! May we learn truly to submit to our elders sent by God to preach the Word (Heb. 13; 1 Peter 5), and submit to one another out of reverence, as we learn together with all the saints what is the height, depth, length and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:18). May we continue to learn from this sad incident in the final days of the Old Covenant. Yes, there are some believers at this time (Anna and Simeon come to mind, as well as the other Jews who will become disciples, including John who wrote this gospel), but the majority of Israel's leadership has been corrupted because they have drifted out from under the authority of God's Word (there are exceptions as we shall see in Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus).

John's Gospel is "Pro-Semitic"

John's primary calling was to reveal Messiah to Israel (1:31). Yet when even the Voice of God comes to Israel, "his own", the Jews do not receive him (cf. v. 11). Now, let's talk about why John includes in his gospel the term "the Jews". He uses this term first John 1:19. These are the Jews who send the priests and Levites to question John. Some have said that John's Gospel was anti-Semitic, but that cannot be true; John himself was a Jew as well as many of Jesus' disciples.

John, the author of the Book of John, is a Jew, and he is using this term "the Jews" throughout his Gospel to point to two truths. First, in his Gospel John will use this term to speak of those in Israel opposed to Jesus (cf. John 6:41; 8:33ff; 10:31; 13:33). Secondly, John wants use the term "the Jews" to show how the Jews are not truly realizing the fulfillment of their heritage in believing in the Messiah.

The true reason for being a Jew, the consummate fulfillment of their heritage, is to believe in Messiah. When they reject their own heritage, John is pointing out to them the triviality of this earthly heritage, so that they might truly understand their heritage and hope fulfilled in Jesus. So, John is extremely *pro-Semitic*, as all of us are who witness the precious gospel to our Jewish friends so that they might come to believe in the One Who has come to them, so that by God's grace, some would truly receive him and become true children of God and Abraham (John 1:11-13; Malachi 4; cf. John 8:44ff).

Isaiah 40: The Vox Dei

Finally, after John the Baptist tells the Jews WHO HE IS NOT, he tells them who he knows himself to be by God's authority and because God has sent him. John says that he is the voice of God, the one sent by God to prepare the way of the LORD and the time of the end of all history, or the old creation (as well as the beginning of a new creation). He is the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:

Isaiah 40:1-5: Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

One thing we need to consider. We can agree with John that he is not the Prophet spoken of by Moses for that is Jesus. We know He is indeed not the Messiah, but what about the fact that John says He is not Elijah. *Jesus says he was the Elijah who was to come, revealed in Malachi 4.* How are we to understand this?

The best way to understand this is that John the Baptist knew certain things about who he was and his significance in redemptive-history - -but not everything. What he did not know was the extent and importance of his ministry. Jesus tells us in another place found in Matthew 11 that John is indeed more important than he realized. In fact, all of Jesus' disciples until he returns are more important than they realize when they preach the Kingdom of God and the whole counsel of God! This should be an encouragement to us all as everyday we minister and serve in Jesus' name! Don't ever say your life, your witness, your ministry is not important- - it is more important than you will ever realize! (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58).

Matthew 11:7-15: As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, "" **Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.**" ¹¹ **Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.** ¹² **From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.** ¹³ **For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John,** ¹⁴ **and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.** ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus clarifies the importance of John and he graciously recognizes John's ministry to be more important than John realized at the time ("I'm not Elijah", John the Baptist says...Jesus says: "Yes He is...He is too humble to realize it!"). Jesus agrees that John is the voice of God crying in the wilderness, but he goes on to say there is no one greater born of women, yet those who are least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. Jesus then goes on to explain the uniqueness of John's ministry in v. 13. He says: For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. John was the last of the Old Covenant Prophets and the link or bridge to the New Covenant as looked at before.

John's Message

Well, we have looked at John's ministry, but what about John's message. John the Baptist's ministry was one under the authority of the Word and he was sent by God. Only men under the authority of the Word and those who are truly sent by God are called by God to declare his good news. That is most important to remember today. The men and women who have raised themselves up as so-called prophets or preachers in any age, have not been under God's Word and have wreaked havoc in Christ's Church. Why? Because the Word of God teaches that a person never ministers in his own name, raising himself up, or being called merely by men. God calls men to preach, God sends men to declare his gospel, and those men submit to the authority of the Word of God, if they are legitimate. [In fact, Ephesians 4:11ff teaches us that those sent by God in our own day are gifts of the resurrected and ascended Jesus!]

John's message was "Behold the Lamb of God" (1:29). John preached Christ which is still the call of ministers today! To preach Christ and him crucified. For Paul, he said although preaching is foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews, he was to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified for it *IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION* (Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 1). John preached a message about Jesus, not about himself. He preached and focused his message on Christ who was revealed in the Scriptures.

Who is the Lamb of God? Well many Old Covenant images are conjured up with this declaration and preaching. John the Baptist's imagery would have reminded the people

of Father Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and the provision of God for the sacrifice. They would have remembered Isaiah 53: the Lamb led to the slaughter, as well as the many temple sacrifices that signified the need for a substitute and the wages of sin which is death. Also, the Apostle John would have revealed more of this Lamb eventually in the Book of Revelation that he would write approximately 10 years after his gospel, and reveal Jesus as the victorious Lamb Who sits upon the throne.

Christ-Centered Preaching

John the Baptist preaches that this Lamb of God is the One "Who takes away the sin of the world". Notice the comprehensiveness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross (the world). The world means both Jews and Gentiles, for all of those who believe. This preaching of the Lamb of God would have called men to recognize their own sin, and the need for a substitute in the Lamb. What the Old Covenant sacrifices pointed forward to, Jesus was the perfect Lamb, the Perfect fulfillment and Final and Sufficient Sacrificial Lamb of God, who can and will take away, or bear the sins of those He loves, so that they might receive God's forgiveness!

John's message reminds us all of the importance of a Christocentric (Christ-centered) ministry and life. Our message of Jesus to our friends and family should always be pointing away from ourselves to Jesus and His grace and forgiveness. Men will see our mistakes and our failures at times. Sometimes we will be called "fakes" and "hypocrites" because we are not perfect. But we must continually be showing forth the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and be humbled by this reality!

Others who God has placed around us in our everyday life will never come to know his saving truth from merely our good behavior. They will see that our good behavior is because our hearts have been gripped by this Lamb's goodness and grace and mercy, and so we shall point away from anything good (or bad!) that we do, to the Lamb of God who is our hope, as well as the hope of the world!

Importance of Preaching

We also need to learn from John's method of declaring his message and remember in our age the importance of preaching. If we all had it our way, we would hire clowns, actors, and use PowerPoint Presentations to communicate the gospel of God's grace. We would build big and shiny buildings and ministries and cater to whatever the lost world would like to see and hear (2 Tim. 3:1-17- Paul says this is what we are all tempted to do). We would have bright neon signs that say: "This IS IT!", and we would design our message as well as our worship so that it would be most pleasing to an entertainment culture!

Preaching is always going to be foolishness to the world, according to 1 Cor. 1 - and it is often foolishness to God's own people! Why, how can this be? Ultimately, this is because they forget to submit to the authority of God's Word and to use the manner of ministering Jesus Christ only in the way that God has commanded and taught them to do in His most holy Word (we must be on our guard against this). Only those who have true life, will see the light (1:5). So, we should not bother about trying to make the ministry, the preaching of Jesus Christ attractive to the lost, only the true life found in Jesus will open their eyes so that they are not merely dazzled by downtown neon flashing lights, but are drawn to the preaching of the Word of God, as they submit their lives and their thinking to this Word!

Remember as the people of God, is not too difficult for us to drift out from under the authority of the Word of God (Heb. 2:1-4). As the hymn reminds us: "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the One I love!" We must be reminded that as long as we are trying to make the gospel appealing by surveying the goats to get their input and advice on how to present to them the gospel in a way that would make them comfortable,

we as sheep are slowly drifting- - out from the authority of God's Word- - and under the authority of popular culture! Additionally, if we are denying the centrality of preaching the Word, we are also guilty of entertaining the goats while the sheep starve to death from a lack of hearing the Word of God declared, and from that Word hearing of the Christ week after week and how he truly saves! *A Word-Centered, Christ-Centered ministry is a God-Centered and extremely powerful ministry regardless of what the world thinks!*

John's Messiah

We have considered John the Baptist's ministry and his message, now finally let's look at John the Baptist's Messiah. John says He was "Before Me" (1:16; 30). This is not about age, or preeminence in the community, or ministry, John was 6 months older and ministered before Jesus. John's comment is stressing Jesus' eternal nature as we learned in John 1:1, 14, 18. But notice something important, John the Baptist also points to Jesus' true humanity as one who can sympathize with sinners in their weakness, but without sin (1:30; cf. Heb. 2:14-18). Jesus was God in the flesh (1:14), truly a man (1:30).

John the Baptist's baptism was a baptism of repentance (cf. Matthew 3). There were other baptisms at this time at the end of the Old Covenant. The primary baptism in Israel was for Gentile converts who were making a profession of faith in Jehovah God and were committing themselves to the "visible Church" of God. John's Baptism, like his ministry, was unique. It was a baptism that went with his preaching of God's Word to the church and the world. John's baptism prepared the world, that is, both Jews and Gentiles for the coming of Messiah.

Now the Jews did not like this idea. Many of them would not submit to John's baptism for repentance because it implied they were like "Gentile sinners" outside of the covenant. John was sent by God to proclaim repentance and a need for cleansing from sin that would be deeper than merely the surface or the sign. The baptism John's baptism ultimately pointed toward was Jesus' Baptism with Holy Spirit (1:33). This is why John the Baptist says my baptism is important, but in light of Jesus' ministry, his baptism is much more important. Jesus' baptism was of the Spirit, where hearts would be truly cleansed from sin, and men would be refined and purified so as to love God and neighbor and truly love!

Jesus received God's baptism of wrath upon the cross as the Lamb of God who lays down his life and takes away the sin of the world. Jesus does this so that he might take upon himself the curse that was due to us for our transgressions (Galatians 3:10-13). After Jesus propitiates God's wrath and takes away our sin, then we are given his righteousness by faith. We are baptized by his Spirit, so that we will be partakers in the New Creation to come.

Jesus is cursed and baptized in wrath, so we can be baptized by his Spirit. His Spirit is the refiner's fire spoken of in Malachi 3, the "judgment that begins with the household of God" in 1 Peter 4:16ff, and the ultimate down payment or foretaste of all of the heavenly blessings to come! Jesus baptizes all of us when we believe by his powerful Spirit so that we can know his grace and walk in love, thus loving God and neighbor and so fulfilling the Law!

You will remember in the beginning of our study, we looked at the Apostle John's purpose in writing his gospel. It is found in John 20:31. The Scriptures say: "...but these [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Do you have life in his name? These are the most important questions you will ever ask yourself. Jesus has been revealed as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world- -receive him by faith, and when you are united to Jesus and believe, you will receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-12).

If you reject him, you have rejected your only hope for salvation and you will experience the awful reality of a full baptism of God's wrath on the Day when He returns for His own. On that day, He will separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25). The sheep will come into his presence and experience life with God eternally, while the goats will be cast away into utter darkness, where the worms that eat their flesh will never die, and the torment of God's wrath will never cease.

Be warned, repent and turn to Jesus Christ! Realize that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Soli Deo Gloria!

Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

NEW COVENANT "FIRST THINGS" REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Introduction

In last week's study we learned of the ministry, message, manner and Messiah of John the Baptist from John 1:19-34. We considered John the Baptist's ministry as he was closing the end of the Old Covenant (Matt. 11:1-15) and pointing forward to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, as the New Covenant is actually dawning in Jesus.

This week's study is on New Covenant "First Things" as we reflect upon John 1:35-51. We will consider the "first things" that happen as the Apostle John records for us in his gospel the "decreasing of John, and the increasing of Jesus" (cf. John 3:30). You could also say that these "first things" show the beginning of thinking about time in that there is the "decreasing of the Old Covenant way of doing things, and the increase of the New Covenant way taught by Jesus".

[Interpretation Note: Remember from our verses today that it teaches us something about the relationship between the Old Covenant/Testament and the New Covenant/Testament. There should always be a distinction between the two covenants or testaments, but never a separation or confusion. Notice how John the Baptist is part of the Old Covenant/Testament as the last prophet, yet he passes the "revelational baton" on to his disciples, who then follow Jesus who is the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Covenant/Testament hope. So, we learn that there should be a distinction between the two covenants/testaments but never a separation or confusion. This will prevent overemphasizing Old Covenant/Testament ways of doing things that perhaps have passed away or been fulfilled in Jesus, while realizing that Jesus in the New Covenant/Testament is THE INTERPRETER (par excellence) of the Old (cf. Luke 24:24-49; John 5:24ff).]

First Things

In today's study, we will look at these first things: (1) the first gospel preached in the New Covenant- -the Lamb of God is actually "with us"- - come and see; (2) the first disciples are replacing the 12 tribes of Israel and submitting to the Lamb's discipleship to follow him- - come and see; (3) the first Christology or the first realization of who Christ is by the Apostles- - come and see; and (4) the first self-revelation of Jesus- - come and see -- and "you ain't seen nothing yet!"- -greater things shall you see.

In John 1:35-51 we have many "first things" that are taking place in the New Covenant. These first things, or priorities in our passage and context is that the Apostle John wants to establish the faithful witness of John the Baptist as well as God himself. Then he wants to show how this faithful witness of Jesus was passed on by John the Baptist to Jesus' first disciples (who include the Apostle John as well, he is just too humble to admit himself and is happy to stay in the shadows as it were).

Let us first remind ourselves of the conversation of John the Baptist with the Jews in 1:19-27. Then there is the transition of 1:28-34, followed by verses 35-51 as John the Baptist begins to decrease in importance as Old Covenant prophet while some of the Jews come to believe in Jesus the New Covenant Rabbi and Final Prophet. Remember that in John 1:19-34 John is questioned by the Jews concerning his identity. He points

them to Jesus and they do not believe. There is an agonizing "silence" as to their response (1:19-27).

However, after John the Baptist has pointed Jesus to other Jews who have been listening to his teaching, they begin to believe and begin witnessing to their family and friends that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Rabbi, the King of Israel, the Son of God, the Son of Man, and many other titles).

**First New Covenant Gospel Message Preached (vv. 29-36):
Old Covenant Lambs are Fulfilled and Replaced by THE Lamb of God...Come and See!**

Some hear the message and believe, some do not- -same with us today (compare the response of John the Baptist's disciples with the priests, Levites and Pharisees sent by the Jews from Jerusalem in 1:19-34). Oftentimes we think we are failures with friends and family who do not believe, but we must remember God's sovereignty in giving grace as we preach and live for Jesus and His gospel.

We are called to witness/testify to the Jesus Who has come, we are not to worry about results. Also, the Jews from Jerusalem have been God's visible "church" or authority for God's people under the Word. However, over time they have drifted out from under the word and now cease to be God's authorized authority or visible Church. When a congregation, or church altogether ceases to submit to God's authority in His Word, this congregation and church ceases to be God's authority on earth.

We must remember that every congregation, every church is only effective, sent from God and with authority as it derives that authority from God's Word alone. The early church, the Sanhedrin (made up of priests, scribes, Levites, Pharisees, and Sadducees), did not recognize John the Baptist or Jesus (John 1:11-13). (You might say what Jesus will say to Nicodemus in John 3: "You are Israel's teachers and you don't know 'these things?!'")

But to those who receive him, he have them authority (important!) to become children of God! (1:12-13). Some of John the Baptist's disciples do believe and tell others about this Jesus! What we see on the human level is a willingness to follow, a willingness to be a learner, or a disciple submitted to God's authoritative Word. At this point, the disciples who begin to follow Jesus know a little about him, but they will learn so much more - in fact, they will see so much more (1:51).

First Disciples (vv. 37-51)- Old Covenant Israel's 12 Tribes being Fulfilled and Replaced by 12 Apostles...Come and See!

With the passing of John the Baptist, the last of the Old Covenant prophets, we now have the beginning of the new as we are introduced to the New Israel, as Old Covenant Israel is being fulfilled. As Israel had 12 tribes, they are now being replaced by the New Covenant Israel of 12 disciples.

What are Disciples? They are "learners", or "followers" (lit.).

Disciples are followers of Jesus who are learners, lovers, and lives

Jesus invites the first disciples to "come and see" when they ask him "where are you staying?" The Word John the Apostle uses for "staying" is the word for abide, remain, dwell, stay, etc. The point John seems to be point us to is this. Jesus says: "Come and See" (vv. 38-39) because they have asked Where are you staying/abiding/remaining/dwelling?

Jesus does not answer this question, but seems to implicitly say through John the Apostle's writing that it doesn't matter WHERE (that's not important), but WITH WHOM - those who are seeking and following him, and thus staying, remaining, or dwelling (cf. 1:14)- Ridderbos...In other words, God is dwelling, abiding, remaining, or what we would say "staying" (in English), "chillin" (in slang- I couldn't resist 'chillin' :->) -- with man! God is indeed "with us"!

Verses 38-39 are revealing about the fact that God is truly abiding, staying, remaining, dwelling with man and man is face to face as Jesus "exegetes" or teaches the disciples about the Father (cf. John 1:18; 5:24ff).

This is the hope of all of the Old Covenant, that God would dwell with man. Remember Genesis 28? Jacob receives a revelation of God where he reminds him as the son of the promise to Father Abraham, that God will one day dwell with man. Notice in these verses God's promise to dwell with Jacob/Israel, but also read carefully for a later application of these verses as well.

Genesis 28:10-22: Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸ So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

In this passage in Genesis, we see in 28:15 that God says he is covenantally present, or with Jacob and will keep him. Jesus is God in the flesh and he is now with his people as he promised to Jacob. In fact, with the 12 disciples, we see Jesus as the Creator and Redeemer of the New Israel.

So, you could say true disciples of Jesus are followers who are learners, lovers, and lovers -- who dwell with God! What a great encouragement for us all. We understand more of what John 1:14 was teaching in light of this passage:

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

He is "with us" (John 1:14) and thus there is no reason for fear of man preventing us from witnessing, nor any questions about why some believe our witness and some discount it—that is God's concern, not ours!

Witnessing the Lamb of God- In reach and Out reach!

When we think of being disciples who are learners, lovers and liverers who dwell with God, we often first think of outreach. But I would encourage us first to think of in reach. In reach is important for us as families and as congregations of Christ under the Word to be about building each other up, encouraging each other each day (Heb. 3:10ff; Eph. 4:29ff), as we reach in to one another with the gospel of grace. Remember: the gospel is for Christians too!

What is In reach (vv. 35-42)- Witness within our families, our congregations, being instruments of his grace to each other. Notice how in John's Gospel, after Jesus has Andrew and the other disciple (the Apostle John) to dwell with him, Andrew immediately the next day reaches into his own family by witnessing to Peter. One of the implications we can learn from this testimony in John, is that our family should be a priority in witnessing the Gospel message.

Remember that with John the Baptist's ministry, it was one primarily of in reach. Reaching in to those in Israel who had ears to hear, would repent of their sins, be baptized, and prepare for Messiah who was among them and about to begin his ministry. Jesus' ministry to the disciples was for three years, and this was in reaching long before he sent them to outreach. They were to be first learners, lovers, and liverers from within. They were to learn of God's truth and get it right before they got it out; they were to learn to love one another as Christ loved them so that they could love their neighbor as themselves; and they were live as Jesus lived as they lived before the world.

One of the great benefits of dwelling with Jesus and in His Word even today as his disciples is that we are captivated by His grace, love and mercy for us as his people. We can as true disciples learn from him, love one another, live with and for one another, then overflow out of love for God as we outreach to the rest of the world! When we have dwelled with Jesus under his Word, we get a true sense of His grace and goodness and we are compelled to share it with family, each other, and to reach out to the rest of the world.

From In reach to Outreach (vv. 42ff)

Then, notice in our passage, how after Peter is called, Jesus and the disciples go to Galilee and Jesus calls Philip. This is outreach. Philip is called, then Nathaniel - then the outreach continues, at a wedding (chap. 2:1-11), to the Jews in Jerusalem (chap. 2:12-25), then to Nicodemus who is "open" as a Teacher of Israel, then to a Samaritan woman (4:1-26, then to Galilee of the Gentiles (4:43ff). You could say that Jesus sends his disciples later with the same pattern: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We need to get the gospel right on the "inside" before we can get the gospel out! "Getting it right before getting it out!" Learning of the Christ; Loving one another; Living according to the truth...THEN getting it out!

Conversionism or Decisionism

In an age of conversionism and decisionism, this is important to remember "making disciples" and placing just as much emphasis on in reach as out reach. These movements of conversionism or decisionism are zealous for converts and so-called "decisions for Jesus". They want to see congregations grow into the hundreds, thousands over night! They use marketing techniques and think of effective

salesmanship as they think about what their audience would like to hear (Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-12 knew this would happen because it was happening in his time as well).

Conversionism and decisionism are perversions of the Reformation. The Reformation taught that God made converts- -God converted people by His grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:1-10)- - Christians were called to make disciples (followers of Jesus who were learners, lovers and liver in a community under authority and accountability in the Word of God). Yet a couple of hundred years later, influenced by democratic, good-old-fashioned, American ingenuity and individualism, men began to desire "to get people saved!"

The emphasis shifted from God's sovereign grace to man's so-called sovereign decision in his own conversion. This robs God of his glory and grace! This eventually became the roots for heretic preachers who preached what they felt God had called them to preach that was inconsistent with the Church's confessions for two thousand years. Conversionism and Decisionism became the seed bed in the 19th century for Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Christian Science, and a host of other holy horrors that still to this day come to our door asking for a decision!

This also influenced evangelicalism as we see so sadly today around us in our own circles. People want numbers- -they want decisions, converts- -but where are Jesus' radically committed, blood-bought, Spirit-filled works of God's grace and creation- - followers who are learners, lovers and liver! We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand for us to do! [Read more in an excellent book: 'The Democratization of American Christianity' by Nathan Hatch].

When we are merely seeking converts or decisions "for Jesus" we are not being obedient as disciples!

Jesus never calls us to make converts or decision, he calls us to make disciples! These disciples are then taught by the grace of God how to be learners, lovers and liver before they "GO!" and make more disciples.

When Jesus teaches us all what has been called the "Great Commission" (Matt. 28:18-20), he speaks to disciples who have learned from him for three years, loved with him and lived for him BEFORE he sends them out! [Note: This is not to say that a simple "come to Jesus" by a new Christian cannot be used by God for his glory. It just means that our normal emphasis should be on discipleship for those who are awakened to the truth of God's love, rather than on merely counting them as another "fish we have caught" only to be sent out to get more fish. The emphasis is on quality, that is, being someone who is growing and maturing, more than on quantity, just how many numbers you have on a given Sunday in a worship service].

Then there is Outreach (v. 37; v. 43; v. 45)- Response from effectual calling of the Spirit (2 Tim. 1:9)- Reaching out to others with the hope we have in Jesus.

Remember: "Providential Placement for Proclamation"

You have been placed in a certain place in the world with certain unique friends and contacts. These are the ones you are to invite to "come and see". These are the ones by God's grace you can tell (knowing Jesus is "with you" and dwelling with you by His Spirit so that you will not fear) that Jesus has come and that they can know him.

Remember: "Don't Rationalize, but Relationalize".

This means that you should remember that just because someone because of their outside appearance seems to be at odds with the gospel, this does not mean God

has not begun a work in their hearts. Don't say: "I don't think that person is ready to hear the gospel- - look at them, long hair, scruffy face, loves to party, has a face piercing that causes me to wince when I look at them!" This may be a person who is ready to hear the gospel.

The message and the results are God's! He adds to his church daily those who are being saved- - we do not (Acts 2:41ff)- -we testify and witness to the reality of God with us. So, don't rationalize, but relationalize. Make a relationship with the strange people who you are surrounded by. If you were honest with yourself, you were pretty strange yourself when you came to the gospel (and maybe you are still pretty strange, who knows?!).

Remember, what Paul said to the Corinthians: "And such were some of you!" (1 Cor. 6:11a). Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthian church that his outreach by God's grace reached homosexuals, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, swindlers, idolaters, fornicators, witches and prostitutes- - most of us would not be seen with people like this, but then again, perhaps we don't know we are with people like this! Don't rationalize, relationalize!

People "like this" dress up in ties, nice shoes, fix their hair, put on dresses and high heels and surround us in our office place, the market place, and wherever else we find ourselves. Remember: "such were some of you!" No one is as they seem on the outside- -they have sin dwelling in their hearts causing them sometimes to display their sins outwardly so that all can see, while some are secretly keeping their sins private! But all need the gospel! Don't rationalize, relationalize!

People want to know about why you live a certain way as learners, lovers, and lovers of Jesus. Think about how you can interpret for them God's grace in your life through the following:

Your Life- Interpretation of Life. When someone asks why or how you live the way you do as a disciple of Jesus, interpret for them the reality of God's grace- -tell them to "come and see" what Christ can do in their lives! With Blessings- Interpretation of Blessings. Whatever blessings or difficulties you've been given by God, when you are asked how you managed by God's grace, interpret for them from where your strength comes! With Deeds- Interpretation of Deeds. When you do something nice for a neighbor or friend, visit them when they are sick, bake some cake or Carmella's famous baked ziti, tell them why you do what you do. Interpret for them God's grace and work in your heart. When Jesus did signs, he always interpreted them for the people to understand who God is. When we witness and outreach, may we interpret for others from where this grace comes -- we invite them to "come and see". All of our outreach in a normal day is witnessing to the reality of WHO JESUS IS!

"So, you've made a mess of your witness..." There is grace for today!

Some of you are reading this and thinking: "I used to have a good witness for Christ, but I've blown it!" Well, apologize to those you have offended and interpret that for them. Let them know that you want forgiveness because you have been shown mercy and been forgiven by Jesus. If you have acted inconsistently, join the club, you're a bigger sinner than you realize (I had a friend who used to say in a characteristically "Luther-like" way: "Smile. You're a bigger sinner than you realize!").

What this means is that we all blow it, we all fall short as Christians. We are saved, but still sinful, therefore that should cause us humility and more love, and that we can interpret for others as well! If others see the grace that we have because of Christ alone, then perhaps they would realize that it is not works, or their own working for perfection

and approval that will cause them to be accepted by God. If you have blown it, turn to Jesus for help and grace, then extend that help and grace to others. You are not inviting people to see you, you are inviting them to see Jesus through you- - you are inviting them to "come and see" Jesus!

First "Christology", or "exegesis" of Who Jesus is- Old Covenant Promises are Fulfilled and Replaced by Jesus...Come and See!

These are merely the first understanding of the disciples of Jesus in this passage, but it is a very good start. Notice how all of the Old Covenant promises of the Person, or the One (the Matrix has misused this term "the One" so now more think of Neo than Jesus, but I will use it anyway) who was to come in the last days to save Israel from sin. Jesus is called by the first disciples the following titles, but they will come to learn much more as they follow him, learning, loving and living!

The Lamb of God (v.35)

Rabbi-Teacher (v. 38)

Messiah-Christ (v. 41)

The One Who Moses and the Prophets Wrote Concerning (v. 45) (cf. Luke 24:24-49)

Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Joseph (v. 45)

Son of God (v. 49)

King of Israel (v. 49)

First Self-Revelation of Jesus- God's Final Word of Revelation Begins in Jesus...Come and See!

Jesus calls Nathaniel when he meets him an Israelite 'Indeed' (or a "true one"). This is an allusion to Jacob and the "first family" of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, truly Israel compared to merely "the Jews" who do not believe (1:19).

Notice how Jesus knew him before he followed him- -important for evangelism- - we are known by God before we know God (Galatians 4:9). It is important to remember that when in reaching as well as out reaching!

Jesus says basically, "You ain't seen nothing yet!" You shall see me as the great LADDER between heaven and earth. Remember in the Genesis 28 passage we read earlier that God promised to be with Israel. Now this passage draws again from Genesis 28. Jacob in Genesis 28 saw a ladder with angels descending and ascending on it (or him according to the translation). This was a gate, an opening into heaven itself where God lives! Jacob called the place "Bethel" meaning "House of God".

Many times we have heard or sung the spiritual: "Climbing Jacob's ladder". But we should never sing this song again! NO man has ever climbed Jacob's ladder! The only time man ever wanted or desired to climb a ladder up to God was to dethrone him in Genesis 10-11 at the Tower of Babel! Man does not seek after God to know him.

Rather, God comes down the ladder- -he has come to dwell "with us"- - come and see! Jesus is the Ladder; Jesus is the connecting point between heaven and earth (in the Old Covenant there are altars, stones, tabernacles and temples that were, if you will, points on earth where heaven had broken through- -a place where 2 dimensions of time and space came together).

In Jesus, he is that Ladder, the mediator between the earth of man and the heaven of God, because he is the Man who is God and able to bridge the two in himself. Jesus comes down so that whoever believes would never perish, but have everlasting life!

Jesus tells Nathaniel and the rest of the group: "Greater things" are coming. There will be more signs that have yet to come (that will begin in the next chapter- - chapter 2 next week).

John 20:31 says: "...but these [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Do you have life in his name?

Believe upon this Jesus John reveals by the Holy Spirit to us- -believe him every day- - He is your life and your only hope for salvation with God!

Remember when we partake in the Lord's Supper as the people of God, what is chiefly part of our in reach to one another as Jesus' disciples. It is also out reach, for others observing it by faith can "come and see" and hopefully believe. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus shows forth his body and blood that was "for us" because he is "with us" and communicates his grace to us by faith- - come and see!

Soli Deo Gloria!

For Further Reading

D. A. Carson, 'Gospel According to John'

H. Ridderbos, 'The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary'

L. Morris, 'The Gospel According to John' (NICNT)

J. Calvin, 'Commentary on the Gospel of John'

R. Brown, 'Commentary on the Gospel of St. John'

J. Dennison, Articles on John's Gospel at www.kerux.com

J. Boice, Commentary on John's Gospel

Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."