

Studies on John's Gospel

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In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: The Message of John by Bruce Milne, Luke for Everyone, John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 and John for Everyone part 2 chapters 11-21 by Tom Wright, The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock, The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, lecture series at Macquarie University on Deuteronomy by John Walton, August 2013, "On Jesus as Attuned to Life, not Good and Evil" an essay by Mark Strom May 2010, talks by Mark Strom on Paul 9/4/2011 and Paul and the Open Cosmos/Society/Heart 15/8, 19/9, 24/10/2014 available at www.gospelconversations.com, talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University 4, 5, 11, 12/7/2014, John's Gospel by Chris Ekins (2007), Roger Green's booklets on John's Gospel chapters 1-6 (1998) and chapters 7-12 (2001), The Final Farewell John 13-17 by Tracy Lauersen, John The Way to True Life by Douglas Connelly, the Bible Brief on John chs 1-6 by Tony Payne from The Briefing #345 June 2007 and The Briefing #350 November 2007.

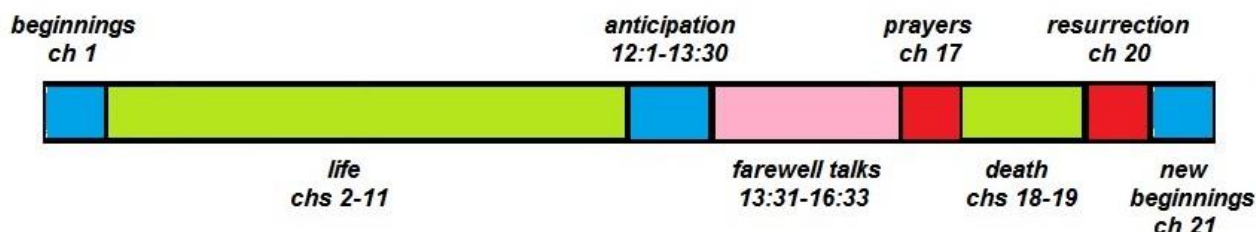
[T]oday, we are invited to approach reverently within the walls of the Word of God, to gaze wonderingly and adoringly upon the glory of the everlasting Son made flesh, and then go forth to live for him amid the realities of our everyday world. John's gospel helps us to do that. But who the Son is in himself remains a mystery beyond our comprehension.

It is this mystery which lies behind the revelation in this gospel, as in all the gospels. It is also the explanation of the effect of a study of John's gospel, for while by the end of it we sense we know Christ better, at the same moment we find ourselves having to acknowledge that he is even further beyond our grasp. This should not surprise us. If the ancient theological maxim is valid, *Deus comprehensus non est Deus* (a God who is comprehended fully is not God), then it is equally true to assert, *Christus comprehensus non est Deus* (a Christ who is comprehended fully is not divine).

The mystery of Jesus Christ is the theme of this gospel; always beyond us, yet always summoning us to explore it more fully. The exploration and service of the Godhead will be our endless, though blissful, task in the world to come; but we can begin it now, and there can be no better place to launch out into the depths of it than to study, and expound, this great gospel by John.

From The Message of John by Bruce Milne pp 26-27.

John's Gospel



Study 1, John ch 1, beginnings

Getting started

1. What was it like when you first learnt to read?
2. What effect have words had on your life?

Bible

3. Read John 1:1-5.
What is the connection (a) between the Word and God?

(b) between words and creation (John 1:3, Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)?

(c) between words and life/light (John 1:4-5, 9)?
4. Read John 1:6-15.
(a) Who is the Word?

(b) How is it that the Bible is also described as “the Word” or “the Word of God”?

(c) What connection does the Bible have with Jesus (see John 5:39-47, Luke 24:25-27)?

(d) In Heb 4:12 the word of God is described as living, active, sharper than any double-edged sword etc. Is this “word of God” Jesus or the Bible? Give reasons for your answer.
5. What are the 3 meanings for “world”?
6. What does the “true light” enlighten everyone about?

7. How does someone get born of God (v13)?

8. Read John 1:16-18.
What is (a) the law?

(b) grace?

(c) truth?

(d) What is the connection between law and grace & truth, if any?

(e) Do we have any need for law now that we have grace and truth through Jesus?

9. (a) How has Jesus made the Father known (v18)?

(b) What does it mean to know God?

10. Read John 1:19-34.
Why is John the Baptist important?

11. Read John 1:35-42.
How is Jesus' question in v 38 answered?

12. Read John 1:43-51.
(a) How does Nathanael's attitude change?

(b) Is Nathanael "jumping the gun" in v 49? Why/why not?

Study 2, John ch 2, wine and the Temple

Getting started

1. Have you ever fallen into “traps for young players”?
If so, give an example?

2. What is the difference between being naïve and being trusting?

Bible

3. Read John 2:1-11.



From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright p xii.

(a) What do you make of the conversation between Jesus and his mother (vv 3-4)?

(b) What does this event say about (i) Jesus?

(ii) parties?

(iii) wine?

[W]edding feasts could last for a week, or maybe two. It was expected, at a wedding, that guests would contribute to the marriage feast, and as their leader Jesus would be expected to be responsible for the contributions of his group. To Mary, therefore, this is a perfect opportunity to fulfil his duties as a guest. Initially, in fact, she is not after a miracle, she is asking for Jesus to do what is expected of guests: to contribute something to avoid the embarrassing situation.

Jesus, of course, does the unexpected. Initially he seems distant from his mother, dismissive even. 'Woman,' he says of her worries about the wine, 'it's somebody else's problem.' His mother, as mothers have across the centuries, pays no attention to her son's objections and just tells the servants to do as he says. And Jesus orders that six stone jars should be filled with water, which he then turns into wine.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page p 91.

4. Read John 2:12-25.

[U]nder David and Solomon, Israel had been a safe and prosperous nation. According to his promises to Abraham, God had planted them in the Promised Land, subdued their enemies, and blessed them with prosperity. This was the historical high point of Israel as a nation.

From that point on, things went downhill. Israel was destroyed because of its chronic apostasy and rebellion against God. By the time of the Exile to Babylon in 587 BC, the everlasting kingdom promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 was in ruins (see Ps 89).

But all was not lost. God's promise to Abraham still stood. As Israel's fortunes declined, the prophets emphatically declared that God would restore his kingdom. . . .

The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . .

Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand.

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 pp 9-11 by Phillip Jensen & Tony Payne.

(a) Why did Jesus react like he did in the Temple?

The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. It was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC and rebuilt by the returning exiles. Desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC. Rebuilding and beautification began by Herod the Great in 19 BC and completed in 63 AD. The Court of the Gentiles contained the thriving markets in sacrificial animals and sacred money for the temple offerings. Here too men would gather in the shaded porticos to listen to any teacher who cared to set up his stand. The Temple was not only the place of sacrifice, it was believed to be the unique dwelling of YHWH on earth, the place heaven and earth met. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright p 178 and The Lion Handbook to the Bible article by Richard France p 494.

(b) What connection is there between a temple and Jesus' body (vv 19-22)?

(c) What do you think it was that Jesus didn't trust about people (vv 23-25)?

To finish

5. How do we decide if someone is trustworthy or not?

Study 3, John ch 3, Nicodemus

Getting started

1. In layman's terms give a definition for evangelism.

2. Outline a method of evangelism that you are familiar with, that is, what would you ask or what would you say or in what general direction would you try to lead the conversation.

Bible

3. Read John 3:1-21.

The Pharisees have been frequently characterised as holier-than-thou people who spent their time loading rules and regulations onto other people. Call someone 'a Pharisee' and we cast them as a sanctimonious hypocrite: pompous, self-satisfied, smug. Of course, such a caricature owes its origins to Jesus' stinging criticism of the Pharisees as recorded in the Gospels. They were 'whitewashed tombs' (Matt. 23:27), looking pious but full of evil. No doubt there were some Pharisees like that — as there are in any religious movement — but what is interesting about the Pharisees is that they were, at heart, a kind of grass-roots holiness movement. They were popular in the rural areas and the poorer parts of the cities, precisely because they were attempting to redefine Judaism in a way which the ordinary Jew could follow. They did create a mass of rules and regulations which, judging by Jesus' criticisms, caused difficulty and confusion, but they did so because they wanted to help people observe the Jewish faith. Their rules and regulations, complex though they are, were an attempt to deal, with the complexities of Torah law in everyday life. Their rulings reflect life in the villages and hamlets of Palestine, with all its myriad conflicts and difficulties. If they were trying to help, though, to solve the problems of observing Torah law in everyday life, why did Jesus lay into them so much? The answer seems to lie in the nature of that solution. The Pharisees solved the problem of obeying the laws by weaving a web of even more intricate laws and decisions. Reading the Mishnah — the code which was developed from this tradition — one is struck by the sheer complexity of everything.

Jesus' solution was simpler: don't do it. Cut throw the religious red tape. . . . Jesus had no time for the minutiae of religious observance if it got in the way of real repentance and real relationship. He ate with the wrong people, he did not wash properly (Mark 7:15), he did not see the need for fasting (Mark 2:19), his Sabbath observance was questionable (Matt. 12:1-8). He did not even acknowledge the priority of Moses' instructions (Mark 10:2-9).

Both the Pharisees and Jesus wanted to democratise holiness, but they went about it in different ways. Jesus' approach was to shatter the taboos.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 93-94.

(a) What do you think might be the significance of coming to see Jesus at night (v 2)?

(b) What do you think it means to be born again (vv 3-6)?

(c) What does 'born of water and the spirit' mean (vv 5-8)?

(d) What does the wind analogy teach us about the Holy Spirit?

(e) In v14 Jesus refers to an event in the Old Testament (Num 21:1-9).
How is Jesus like the bronze snake?

(f) What is eternal life (vv 15-16)?

4. What does Jesus say is essential for entering God's kingdom / having life in . . .

Verse 3 ?

Verse 5 ?

Verse 16 ?

Verse 21 ?

5. How is light significant in Jesus' speech?

6. (a) Would you describe Jesus conversation with Nicodemus as evangelistic?

(b) If so, outline the method he uses?

7. Read John 3:22-36.

(a) Why did John baptise people (see also Luke 3:1-6, Is 40:3-5)?

"The old prophets had spoken of a time of renewal, through which God himself would come back to them. . . **Baptism**, plunging into the river Jordan, was a powerful sign of this renewal. When the children of Israel had come out of Egypt – a story they all know well because of their regular Passovers and other festivals – they were brought through the Red Sea, through the Sinai wilderness, then through the Jordan into the promised land. Now they were in slavery again – in their own land! . . . John was doing what the prophet Isaiah had said: preparing a pathway of the Lord himself to return to his people. This was the time. Rescue was at hand."

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 32-33.

[B]aptism was the rite by which Gentiles would become 'Jews'; those who were already within the Israelite family did not need it. By preaching baptism to the latter (Luke 3:3), John places Jews in the category of Gentiles. Physical relation to Abraham is of not avail.

'All the people' who responded to John's preaching 'were baptized' (Luke 3:21), for all needed to acknowledge themselves to be in a wrong relation to God."

From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 55.

(b) Have you been baptised? Why/why not?

(c) What does John the Baptist think of Jesus?

To finish

8. (a) Do you think people feel condemned when we focus on sin in evangelism (see v 17)? Why/why not?

(b) How would your method of evangelism change if you focused on life (vv 15-16) or light (vv 19-21) instead of sin?

- life

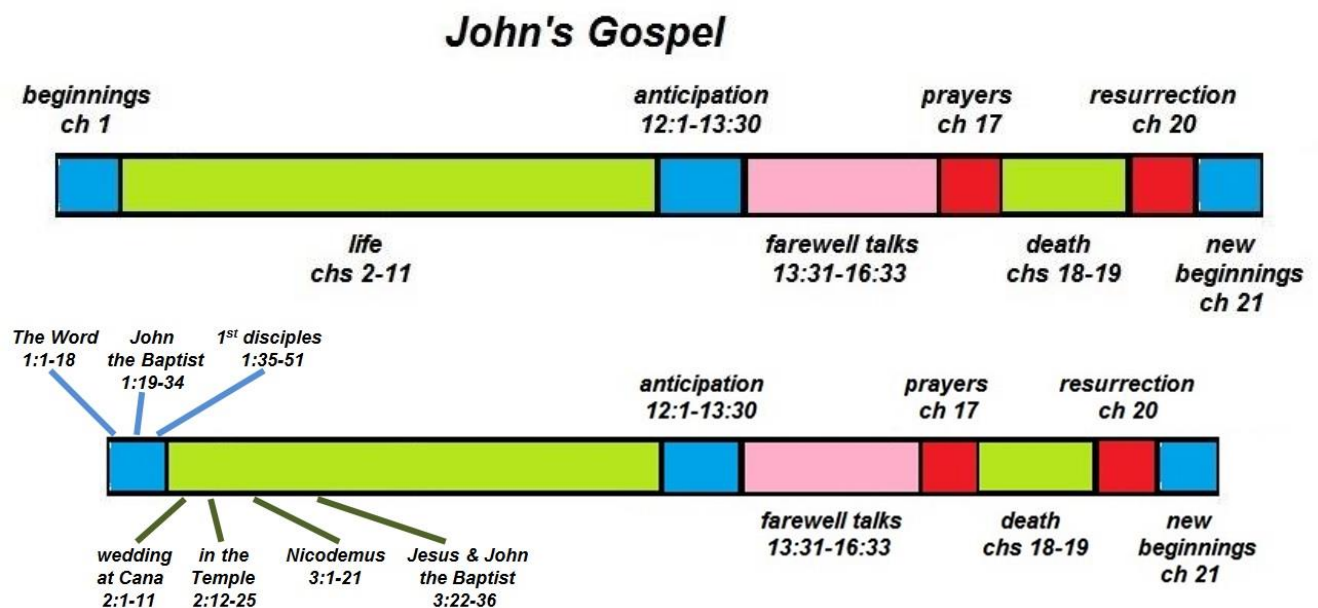
- light

Study 4, John ch 4, the woman of Samaria

Getting started

1. How do you engage someone in conversation when you meet them the first time?
2. What are your deepest needs?

The story so far . . .



Bible

3. Read John 4:1-18.
People usually went for water in the cool of the day. Why do you think she was there at midday ('the sixth hour')?
4. What was unusual about Jesus talking to her (vv 7-9)?
5. What do you think Jesus means by 'living water'? How is it different from water from the well?
6. Compare v15 with v16. Why does Jesus ask about her husband?
7. Read John 4:19-26.
(a) Compare vv 16-18 with vv 19-20. Why does the woman change the subject?

(b) How does Jesus deal with the side-track (vv 21-26)?

8. The **enmity between Jew and Samaritan** was centuries old. Nearly five hundred years earlier, when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon, he considered Sanballat the Samaritan to be a Gentile and refused any contact with him. When Sanballat's daughter married Joida the high priest, Nehemiah banished the pair immediately (Neh 13:8). During the Maccabean era, John Hyrcanus burned the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim to the ground and utterly destroyed the town of Shechem — the ruins were still visible during Jesus' day, near the town of Sychar. Hyrcanus had destroyed the temple because it was seen as an abomination by the Jews. There was only one true temple and it was in Jerusalem, not on Mount Gerizim. To Jews this proved an insurmountable problem. 'When shall we take them back?' asks a later rabbi about the Samaritans. 'When they renounce Mount Gerizim and confess Jerusalem and the resurrection of the Dead.' Unsurprisingly, the Samaritans concluded that there could never be any reconciliation between the two sides: they were a separate people, and they would always be separate.

Politically both Samaritan and Jew were under the same master: Rome. When Pompey captured Palestine he gave control of the city of Samaria and the surrounding region to the province of Syria. It returned to Jewish control during the reign of Herod, who, in a typically shrewd diplomatic move, invested heavily in the infrastructure of the city of Samaria. He renamed it Sebaste, the Greek version of the name Augustus, built a temple dedicated to the emperor and settled the city with his veteran soldiers and neighbouring peoples. According to Josephus, some six thousand colonists were settled in Sebaste. One of Herod's wives, Malthace, may have been Samaritan; at any rate she came from the area, and was a Gentile.

There were still sectarian outrages and attacks. Josephus records that during the early years of Roman rule some Samaritans infiltrated the temple and put dead bodies in the courts, an act which rendered the entire building unclean. To Jerusalem Jews, Samaritans were renegades, unclean, impure mutant Jews who spread false teaching about the temple and engaged in underhand, dirty tricks. Probably Galilean Jews had a slightly better relationship with Samaritans — they might have to travel through the territory to reach the temple. Even so, there was hatred, deep hatred, and nothing would ever change that.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 97-98.

(a) According to vv 20-25 what does Jesus say is important for worship?

(b) How do you do that type of worship?

9. The woman changes tack again (v25). How would she have felt after Jesus' answer?

10. Read John 4:27-42.
What did the woman do as a result of her encounter with Jesus?

11. What (if any) significance do you see in her leaving her water jar behind (v28)?

12. (a) What are the different meanings for food in vv 31-38?

(b) What are the disciples focused on?

(c) What does Jesus want them to open their eyes and see?

(d) How does this relate to what is happening among the Samaritans?

13. What did the woman mean by v39?

14. What do vv 39-42 tell us about faith in Jesus?

15. Read John 4:43-54.
Does Jesus' statement in verse 48 hold true in our society? Why/why not?

To finish

16. How does the woman's attitude change over the course of her encounter with Jesus?

17. A story which started with Jesus' need finishes with the woman's (and our) deepest needs being revealed.
(a) What were the woman's deepest needs? How did Jesus meet them?

(b) How does Jesus meet our deepest needs (use your answers to question 2)?

Study 5, John ch 5, healing at the pool**Getting started**

1. What is one superstition you have or that you've heard other people have?
2. What is superstition?
3. What is the difference between superstition and faith?

Bible

4. Read John 5:1-15.
 - (a) Is the invalid superstitious (see v 7)?
 - (b) What are the Jews (v 10) concerned about?
 - (c) What is Jesus concerned about?
 - (d) Is Jesus saying that bad things will happen to you if you sin (v 14)?
5. Read John 5:16-30.
What does Jesus say about life?
6. Read John 5:31-47.
 - (a) What does it mean to testify in Jesus' favour (v 32)?
 - (b) Who or what testifies in Jesus' favour?
 - (c) What does Jesus say about (i) the Scriptures (v 39)?

(ii) Moses (v 45-46)?

(iii) Why don't either of these arguments work for the people Jesus is addressing (see John 5:16)?

To finish

7. How do we know what Jesus says is the truth (John 5:24) as opposed to superstition?

Study 6, John ch 6, bread of life

Getting started

1. What do you need in order to have a good life?

Bible

2. Read John 6:1-15.
What do you think is the most remarkable thing about this event?

3. What do you make of verses 12-13? What might Jesus be teaching his disciples?

4. (a) How did the crowd respond to the miracle? Why?

(b) How does Jesus react? Why?

5. How is Jesus testing Philip in vv 5-7?

6. Read John 6:16-21.
(a) What do you think non-Christians would make of this story?

(b) Why do you believe this story (assuming you *do* believe it)?

7. Read John 6:22-40.
What is Jesus claiming about himself in . . .
V27?

V33?

V35?

Vv 37-40?

8. (a) What does God require of us (v29)?

(b) What does “believing” mean?

(c) What does this say about Jesus?
9. What promises are there for the believer in vv 35-40?
10. How would you explain v 35 to someone who’d never read the Bible before?
11. Read John 6:41-71.
When Jesus speaks of ‘eating his flesh and drinking his blood’ (vv 51-59) is he talking about the Lord’s Supper or something else (vv 51, 53, 56-57)? Give reasons for your answer.
12. How did the Jews respond to this teaching?
13. Why did many disciples leave Jesus after the events in this chapter (see vv 60-71)?
14. Why was what Jesus taught, so hard to accept then and now?

In John's account, after the crowd find him at Capernaum, Jesus gives a speech during which he states, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35-40) and the range of response is illuminating. Most of his listeners are simply baffled: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (John 6:52). Even his disciples were perplexed. 'This teaching is too hard,' they complain. Then John drops in a little bombshell: 'Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him' (John 6:66).

Things have changed. While the Synoptic Gospels do not state this as overtly, there are unmistakable signs of discontent. Mark records that the disciples 'did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened' (Mark 6:52). They have almost become like Jesus' enemies: Mark uses the same phrase to describe the Pharisees (Mark 3:5; 10:5) and Jesus repeats the accusation in frustration at the disciples' lack of understanding (Mark 8:17). Why would their hearts be hardened? (The implication is that this goes beyond simple misunderstanding into an almost wilful incomprehension.) Perhaps it was because their hopes, too, were being confounded. Jesus had clearly and definitively rejected the kingship pressed on him by the crowds. But the disciples, too, had bought into the idea of the Right Messiah. Now they were beginning to question when exactly Jesus was going to fall into line. He had all that power — when was he going to use it?

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 172-173.

15. What teachings of Jesus either offend you or make it hard for you to stand apart from the crowd (vv 60-66)?

To finish

16. Read Exodus 16:1-8.
(a) What similarities are there between the manna and Jesus, the bread of life?
- (b) What differences are there between the manna and Jesus, the bread of life?
- (c) How was the response of the people similar on both occasions?
17. This is the first of several 'I am' claims that Jesus makes about himself (see also John 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1). What is the significance of the 'I am' statements for Jews (see Exodus 3:13-15)?
18. What part does Jesus play in giving you a good life?

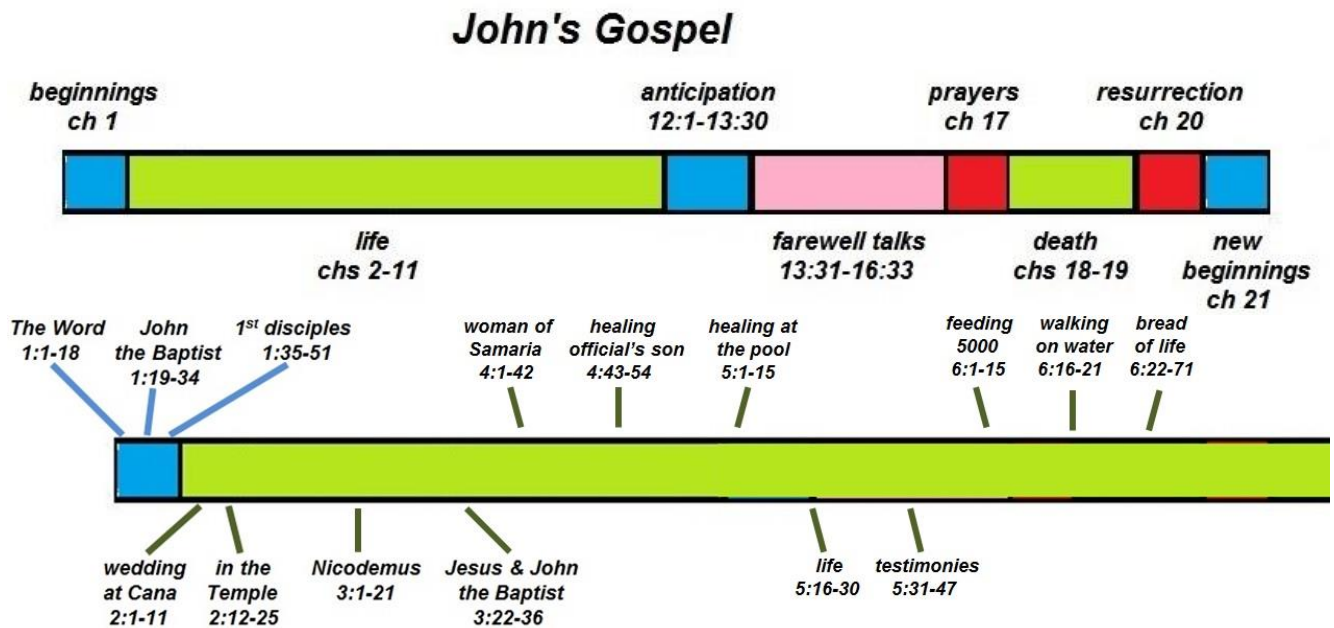
Study 7, John ch 7, opposition and unbelief

Getting started

1. Can you remember a time when you were criticised?

What happened and how did you handle it?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 7:1-11.
(a) Why do you think Jesus' brothers suggested that he go public (vv 3-4) and yet they didn't believe in him (v 5)?

(b) Why do you think Jesus goes to Jerusalem in secret (v 10)?
3. Read Mark 3:20-35, Luke 14:25-27, 18:28-30.
What do you make of Jesus' relationship with his family?

You do not hear this fact in churches very much, but Jesus' family thought he was mad, and they tried to stop him: 'When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind"' (Mark 3:21).

This is another tick to the credibility of the Gospels: such a fact would have been very embarrassing to the early church, and yet they kept it in, so we are undoubtedly dealing with a true story here. It is easy to understand the family's point of view. Jesus was attracting the attention of both the religious and the Herodian civil authorities. He was a hero to the poor and the marginalised . . .

Whether or not his family agreed with the accusations of madness, they certainly agreed that he needed to be restrained. The word Mark uses here, *krateo*, is the word for taking control of someone, by force if necessary. It is the same word used elsewhere by Mark to describe those who want to arrest Jesus. It's a family arrest.

The arrival of his family indicates that Jesus is still in the southwest part of Galilee, perhaps at Nain or Magdala. Close to Nazareth, anyway, and the family have an opportunity to take charge of him. But they have two difficulties. The first is the sheer weight of numbers. They cannot get to him because of the crowd (Luke 8:19). The second is that he refuses to let them in anyway.

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you: And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother. (Mark 3:31-35)

For Jesus' first audiences, it is one of those sharp-intake-of-breath moments. To treat your family this way was outrageous. Jesus' family — his mother, especially — should have been accorded an honoured passage through the crowd. They should have been VIPs. At the top of the guest list. Instead Jesus makes them wait outside, and he uses them to make a point. He gestures at his disciples — and clearly they are male and female — and says 'You are my family, my sisters and brothers.'

The language of family conflict is found several times in Jesus' teaching. He tells his followers, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life' (Luke 18:29-30). Again, 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26).

'Hate' is hyperbole. The point is that Jesus was aware of how the family or clan was a tie that bound people — for good and bad. He was not anti-family. His followers clearly had families. He lived with them and helped them. But in a society where everything was defined by the kinship structure, Jesus was suggesting a radical break with tradition.

The fact is that, throughout his campaigns, Jesus' family did not really understand what he was doing. His mother is with Jesus at the cross, but his brothers clearly are not (and we shall soon see them in conflict again). . . .

John gives us another story of dissension among Jesus' family, a story which must have taken place just before Jesus left Galilee for Samaria. The incident took place in the autumn of AD 32. We know that Jesus' brothers were not among his disciples; they certainly were not present at the crucifixion. But they may have been with him at this time, on the first stage of his tour in south Galilee/Samaria, because they were going up to Jerusalem for the festival. The natural route from Capernaum to Samaria would take Jesus towards Sepphoris and past Nazareth where his family lived. Naturally then, Jesus' brothers would join his group, as their route lay in the same direction. They were all going south. This may be why the Samaritans reacted so strongly. Jesus' party contained pilgrims. It contained, specifically, his brothers.

Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' (For not even his brothers believed in him.) (John 7:2-5)

It is the old temptation. Show what you can do. Only they do not really believe that he will. And Jesus refuses. He tells them to 'go themselves' if they want to. 'My time has not yet fully come' (John 7:8). So his brothers set off without him.

Then Jesus abruptly changes his mind: 'After his brothers had gone to the festival, then [Jesus] also went, not publicly but as it were in secret' (John 7:10).

Once again, none of the disciples feature in the episode as recounted in John's Gospel. The implication is that, just as he had at the festival in winter AD 31, Jesus takes the opportunity to go to Jerusalem, while they are off evangelising.

John's picture of Jerusalem is of a city abuzz with rumour. The crowd is alive with argument and speculation about Jesus. Some say he is a good man, others that he is 'deceiving the crowd'. There is, however, no open discussion of Jesus, 'for fear of the Jews' (John 7:13). It is a scene out of a modern dictatorship. The streets of Burma or Iran. Is the people's champion going to show his face? And is he really their champion, or just another failed wannabe king? Or worse, a government stooge?

Worryingly, the Jewish authorities are already expecting Jesus. They are on the lookout, saying, 'Where is he?' How did they know he was coming? It has been nine months, perhaps a year, since he last showed his face in Jerusalem. Most of that time he has spent up north, some of it even outside Galilee. Two major festivals — Passover and Pentecost — have passed without him appearing. The crowd's fervour may have been stoked by stories of the feeding of the five thousand. But the worrying suspicion is that somehow this is linked with Jesus' brothers urging him to go to Jerusalem. Had they told the authorities that Jesus would be there? After all, considering that they did not believe in him, they were very keen for him to act in a very public way. This might sound like sacrilege — especially since at least one of his brothers was a leader of the Jerusalem church — but even we accept that Jesus' brother Jude authored the letter which bears his name, that still leaves two brothers

unaccounted for. Two brothers who, for all we know, never followed Jesus, never believed their brother was anything other than a madman. It is a disturbing thought, perhaps, but maybe Judas was not the only mole in the camp.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 142-191.

4. Read John 7:12-31.

(a) What are the different reactions to Jesus?

(b) How does Jesus defend himself?

5. Read John 7:32-52.

(a) What are the different reactions to Jesus in this section?

(b) What is the answer to the question in verse 36?

(c) What is the connection between “streams of living water”, Jesus and the Spirit (vv 38-39)?

(d) How far has Nicodemus come (see also John 3:1-10)?

To finish

6. Is criticism good or bad? Give reasons for your answer.

7. Why are Christians more prepared to criticise other Christians but not the minister?

8. Are we judging people if we criticise them?

manuscripts of John's Gospel and is written in a different style. It is possible that it comes from a now-lost gospel, the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. The few fragments we have from this lost gospel include a slightly different version of the Lord's Prayer and an account of Jesus' resurrection appearance to his brother James. Papias, writing around AD 130, wrote, according to Eusebius, of 'a story about a woman accused falsely of many sins before the lord, which the Gospel of [the] Hebrews contains'. So this story may originate from a different Gospel.

It certainly fits into the general atmosphere of the city at the time. Technically only the Romans had the right to execute people, but one doubts the Romans would worry about a Jewish woman being stoned by a mob. In the end, Jesus completely undermines their self-righteous fury and they slink away. But the woman, the sinner, is told to go and 'sin no more'.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 195-196.

3. (a) What does it mean to have faith in science?

(b) What does it mean to have faith in progress?

(c) What does it mean to have faith in politicians?

(d) What does it mean to have faith in TV presenters?

(e) What does it mean to have faith in the Church?

(f) Have you lost faith in any of those 5 above? If so, why?

(g) How does our faith in Jesus compare with faith we may or may not have in science or progress or politicians or TV presenters or the Church?

4. I'm going to play a song by Sting called "If I Ever Lose my Faith in You" which refers to some of the things we have already thought about concerning faith.

You could say I lost my faith in science and progress
 You could say I lost my belief in the holy church
 You could say I lost my sense of direction
 You could say all of this and worse but

If I ever lose my faith in you
 There'd be nothing left for me to do

Some would say I was a lost man in a lost world
 You could say I lost my faith in the people on TV
 You could say I'd lost my belief in our politicians
 They all seemed like game show hosts to me

If I ever lose my faith in you
 There'd be nothing left for me to do

I could be lost inside their lies without a trace
But every time I close my eyes I see your face

I never saw no miracle of science
That didn't go from a blessing to a curse
I never saw no military solution
That didn't always end up as something worse but
Let me say this first

If I ever lose my faith in you
There'd be nothing left for me to do

(a) What does Sting mean by faith?

(b) What does Sting mean by the possibility of losing faith in his wife (presumably)?

(c) Sting's faith in his wife is so all encompassing that if he lost it there would be nothing left for him to do. Is our faith in Jesus like that?

5. Read John 8:12.

(a) What does it mean to walk in darkness?

(b) How likely is it that you would never walk in darkness?

(c) What kind of faith would you need to follow someone who said you would never walk in darkness?

(d) Why would you follow someone who said this?

6. Read John 8:12-30.

(a) In your own words what is the challenge (v 13) that the Pharisees make on Jesus?

(b) How does Jesus answer that challenge?

- (c) Jesus bases his arguments on his relationship with his Father rather than the Law.
 (i) What does this say about the Law (see also the previous passage vv 1-11)?

(ii) How does Jesus bring the Law into his argument?

(iii) Christians are “in Christ” so how are we to relate to the Law?

7. Read again John 8:30.
 Why would they put their faith in Jesus?

8. Read John 8:31-59.
 (a) Make notes on how the argument progresses through this section.

(b) What happens to the Jews who believe Jesus in v 31 but want to kill him in v 59?

(c) How would Jesus have felt during the argument?

(d) How would the Jews have felt during the argument?

(e) Why is Jesus’ final comment (v 58) so provocative for the Jews?

To finish

9. From John chapter 8, or otherwise, what things prevent people from believing in Jesus?

Study 9, John ch 9, healing a man born blind

Getting started

1. What do people do if they don't want something to be true?

2. Describe your most vivid childhood memory involving darkness?

Bible

3. Read John ch 9.
 - (a) What is the Pharisees' dilemma (v 16)?

 - (b) What are the Pharisees trying to do?

 - (c) What are the blind man's parents trying to do (vv 18-23)?

 - (d) What is Jesus trying to do?

 - (e) Why would the blind man think his healer was a prophet (v 17)?

 - (f) Why was it bad to be thrown out of the synagogue (vv 22 & 34)?

Son of Man. In Hebrew or Aramaic, this simply means 'mortal', or 'human being'. . . In the New Testament the phrase is frequently linked to Dan 7:13 where 'one like a son of man' . . . is vindicated after a period of suffering, and is given kingly power.

From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright p 178.

When Jesus speaks of himself as "Son of Man" [in Mark 2:10 and 28] nobody reacts to this like "Wow, you are the Daniel 7 Son of Man!" No-one asks which kind of son of man do you mean? Jesus uses "Son of Man" because of its ambiguity. Jesus keeps his identity of Messiah secret because the people have such expectations of the Messiah that this could subvert his program.

From talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University July 2014 (3.4 & GC2.1.6).

(g) Which meaning for “son of man” is Jesus referring to in vv 35-38?

But why the mud [vv 6, 11, 14, 15]? Jesus could quite easily have healed the man with a word, as he did so spectacularly with the official's son a few chapters earlier. So why the rigmarole with the saliva and the mud?

We get our first hint well into the chapter when John happens to mention in passing, “Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes” (v. 14). And in the ensuing Jewish interrogations of the formerly blind man, the exact manner of the healing and its implications for Sabbath-breaking are a constant issue. The Jews keep asking the ex-blind man how Jesus did it and the ex-blind man keeps hedging his answers.

So the thought begins to form in the reader's mind: is it possible that Jesus deliberately made the mud (which would be construed as Sabbath-breaking) to provoke the Pharisees? He could so easily have avoided offending them either by healing without making mud, or by coming back and making mud the next day. Was he trying to wind them up? And if so, why would he do this?

The answer comes in Jesus' final conversation with the ex-blind man where he summarizes the meaning of the sign he has performed: “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind” (v. 39).

Jesus' mission was not only to save and rescue and heal and restore, but also to expose and divide and harden. He came to give sight, but also to give blindness. His parables and teachings and miraculous signs all had this twin effect. For those who had ears to hear – or, in this case, eyes to see – his words were the words of eternal life; for those who closed their eyes and stopped their ears, the ministry of Jesus only pushed them further into hardness of heart and unbelief. They thought they were sitting in judgement of Jesus and his message. But in reality, the judgement was all running in the opposite direction.

From “Here's mud in your eye!” by Tony Payne from The Briefing #350 November 2007.

To finish

4. (a) How hard is it to change your mind about something?

(b) What needs to happen for you to change your mind?

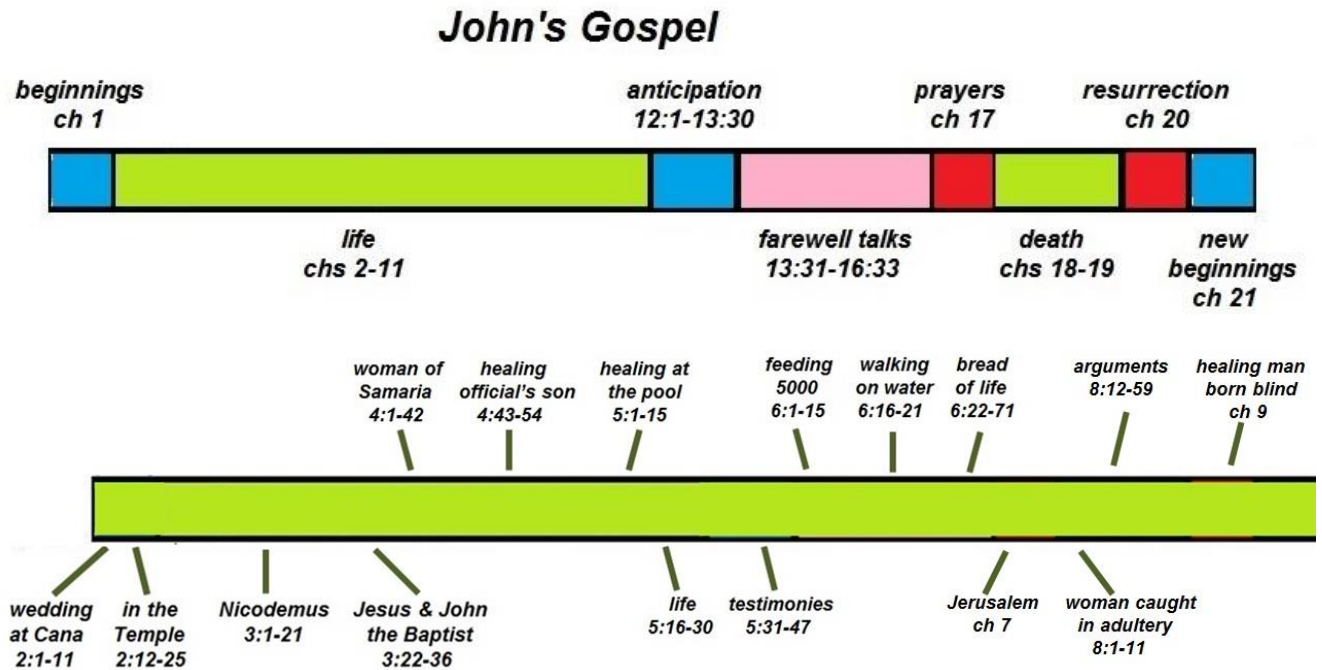
(c) Does this make it any easier to understand the Pharisees?

Study 10, John ch 10, the good shepherd

Getting started

1. What qualities does someone need to have to be a good leader?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 10:1-13.
What does Jesus mean when he claims "I am the gate" (vv 7, 9)?
3. Who is Jesus talking to in . . .
John 9:40?
John 10:6?
John 10:19?
4. What are false shepherds / hired hands like?
5. What is Jesus implying about their leadership?

6. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16.
(a) Who are the shepherds?

(b) What does God promise to do?
7. Read John 10:14-33.
Who is Jesus claiming to be?
8. How does Jesus back up his claims (v25)?
9. What are the characteristics of Jesus in . . .
Vv 11-13?
Vv 14-16?
Vv 27-28?
10. What are the characteristics of Jesus' people in . . .
Vv 3-4?
V 14?
11. Describe the relationship between the Good Shepherd and his sheep?
12. Who are the 'other sheep' in v16 (see also John 11:49-53)?
13. What do we learn about Jesus' death from vv 17-18?
14. Are there any bad shepherds today? How can you spot them?
15. How and when do you listen to Christ's voice (vv 3, 5, 16, 27)?

16. Read John 10:34-42.
What is Christ saying about himself and God the Father (vv 36-38)?

To finish

17. In what sense do you lead other people?
18. Which of Jesus' qualities can we adopt in leading others?

Study 11, John ch 11, Lazarus**Getting started**

1. What is the most memorable funeral you've ever been to? Did it change you?

Bible

2. Read John 11:1-16.
How does Jesus respond to the news of his friend's sickness?
3. Why does Jesus delay? What purpose does he see in it (vv 4, 15 and see John 7:6)?
4. (a) Can you think of a time when God's timing was different from yours?

(b) How did you respond / what did you learn?
5. What does Christ mean in vv 9-10?
6. Read John 11:17-45.
Knowing what was about to happen, why did Jesus weep (vv 28-39)?
7. How does Jesus show the glory of God (v40)?
8. Who does Jesus declare himself to be?

9. What promises does he make?
10. How would you explain vv 25-26 to someone who has never heard of Jesus?
11. How does this affect the way you feel about your own death?

[T]he household consisted of Lazarus — the head of the household — and his two sisters. And that all three were young and unmarried, and both parents were dead. This is a family of single people.

In this reconstruction, Lazarus would be the sole provider for the household. They may not have been poor — evidently the house had enough room for Jesus and his followers, not to mention their possessing a large, expensive bottle of perfume. But the girls were in a perilous position. If Lazarus died, the girls were in danger of being disinherited. Torah law about inheritance protected daughters but not sisters: '[If a man dies, and] has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it' (Num. 27:8-11).

What wealth they had would have passed to their uncle or to the nearest male relative. So the death of their brother has huge implications for the sisters. No wonder they were so desperate for Jesus to come to them. This catastrophe meant not just the loss of a beloved brother, but the loss of house, money and status. If women were second-class citizens, unmarried women were third class.

So Jesus and his followers went up to Bethany, and there, in the graveyard just outside the village, Jesus did what he had done in Galilee: he raised Lazarus to life. Before that, however, he asks Martha a question. He gives the last of John's famous 'I am' sayings: 'I am the resurrection and the life.' And then he asks Martha a question: 'Do you believe this?' (John 11:25-26).

It is a question we have encountered before, in Caesarea Philippi, surrounded by the temples of the various gods, when he asked his disciples, 'Who do you say I am?' Now Jesus allows Martha to answer the same question. He is, by implication, including her in the disciples. Martha, who complained about Mary acting the part, gets to answer the same question as any other disciple, and she answers the same way: 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' She is right up there with Peter, this girl.

Jesus calls Mary and then they go to the tomb. And there, Jesus weeps. Indeed, the whole passage is full of agitation. The Greek implies that Jesus gets progressively more moved. Most translations describe Jesus as 'greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved' (John 11:33), but there is more here. The word 'indicates an outburst of anger', writes one expert, 'and any attempt to reinterpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain, or sympathy is illegitimate'.

The anger and frustration grows in him until he bursts into tears. It is a stunning moment: one of the few times in the Gospels when we see Jesus distraught. Even in his frustrations with his disciples, his anger with the Pharisees and the scribes, even during the intense pressure brought on by the attention of the crowds, there is nothing like this sense of breakdown, of emotional release.

Why the tears? Not, surely, for Lazarus, although that is how the onlookers perceived it. And not, as many commentators have rather smugly suggested, because of the lack of faith of the women. How on earth were they to know what Jesus was going to do? No, Jesus is angry because the whole situation is appalling. Something is so wrong about this.

Although this is the most extreme example, we see this kind of feeling many times in Jesus' mission. When Jesus sees the harassed, exhausted crowd, when he sees the leper excluded from society, when he is greeted by blind men, when he sees the widow in Nain mourning the loss of her only son, when he drives out the demon at the foot of the mountain, the Gospels use the rather wonderful Greek word *splanchnizomai*. This is translated as 'to have pity, show mercy, feel sympathy'. But the root of it comes from *splanchnon*, which meant the 'inward parts' or 'entrails' of an animal or even a human (when Judas dies, his bowels — his *splanchna* — burst out). The English words do not capture the gut-wrenching nature of Jesus' feelings. He is gutted. He is stomach-wrenchingly moved. Bland English translations fail to capture this about Jesus: he felt things incredibly deeply, viscerally. Here, in Bethany, faced with the grief, the hopelessness, the despair, Jesus weeps. The whole situation stinks.

Unlike Lazarus. For when Jesus comes to the tomb — again 'greatly disturbed' — and the stone is rolled away, there is no stench. Which is why, at that moment, Jesus prays a prayer of thanks: he knows his prayer has been answered. Another command: 'Lazarus, come out!' And Lazarus staggers, shuffles, somehow makes it to the entrance of the tomb.

John describes his appearance in detail: his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, his face wrapped (John 11:44). Lazarus would have been placed on a long, wide strip of linen, with his feet at one end. The cloth would then have been drawn over his head, wrapping him end to end. The feet would have been bound at the ankles, and the arms secured to the body with linen strips. The jaw was bound to stop it falling away from the face during decomposition. Walking would have been incredibly difficult. But if you are in a tomb and you wake up, I doubt you worry too much about keeping your dignity on the way out.

Wealthier Jews did not cover the face, because they could afford necessary embalming. Poorer Jews tended to cover the face because the skin would go back and it was thought shameful. Perhaps this indicates that the family were not that rich. Enough money to bury Lazarus properly, but not enough to embalm him. It certainly explains why Martha thinks he might stink. They simply did not have the money to have him anointed with spices and expensively embalmed.

The raising of Lazarus, for all its miraculous nature, had some down-to-earth consequences. Jesus' disciples had been right to be wary about returning to the Jerusalem region so soon. There were Jews there from nearby Jerusalem — and they went back and reported the incident to the Pharisees who, in turn, took it to the council, the Sanhedrin.

They took it to Caiaphas, the high priest.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 210-213.

12. Read John 11:46-57.
How did the religious leaders respond to this miracle? Why?

13. In what way are the High Priest's words truer than he realised?

14. What does this teach you about God?

To finish

15. What comforts are there in this passage for people who suffer and trust in Christ?

16. How would respond to someone who said: "I'll believe in Jesus if I see a miracle."?

Study 12, John ch 12

Getting started

1. When you know something is going to happen soon how do you cope with the waiting?

Bible

2. Read John 12:1-11.
 - (a) How do you think Mary felt about Jesus (see also Luke 10:38-42)?
 - (b) Was Judas right in wanting the money given to the poor (v 5)? Why/why not?
 - (c) Is Jesus an easy-going, live-and-let-live sort of bloke? Why/why not?
 - (d) What does this passage say about the chief priests?
3. Read John 12:12-19.
 - (a) What are the crowds saying about Jesus?
 - (b) What might the crowds be hoping for?

Early on the Sunday, Jesus sent two unnamed disciples to fetch a colt from the village (Mark 11:1-6). There is nothing in the Gospel text to indicate that this was some kind of miraculous provision. In fact it was all part of a prearranged plan, organised either the night before, or in that surreptitious visit to Jerusalem in the winter of AD 32. The disciples even have code words to indicate to its owner who needs the colt.

Once Jesus mounted the colt — probably near the crossroads on the main Jericho—Jerusalem road, where the road to Bethphage goes off to the south — he was ready. Time to make the grand entrance, over the Mount of Olives, cresting the hill and then down into the Kidron valley and a sea of people. It was Passover, and everywhere there were pilgrims sleeping in tents, under makeshift shelters, or wherever they could. No wonder the excitement catches, like a spark to the dry grass: soon there is a mass of followers, cheering, shouting, caught up in the moment, waving branches and joining in the chanting.

Throughout his campaigns in Galilee and Samaria, Jesus avoided making overt statements about his messianic status. Not so now. Nothing Jesus ever says is more of a signal than this donkey ride into Jerusalem. Jesus is using the symbolic vocabulary of Zechariah: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey' (Zech. 9:9).

It is his clearest statement yet of his messianic credentials. 'I am the king' is the message, and the people respond. Greeting him according to a custom usually associated with royalty, they throw their cloaks on the ground. But Jesus is giving out other messages as well. Because, as Jesus was entering Jerusalem, another procession was taking place on the other side of the city.

Pilate lived in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem. A week before each major festival he came into Jerusalem, both to authorise the handing over of the ceremonial vestments and to ensure that order was kept. The festivals were, in Josephus's words, 'the usual occasion for sedition to flare up', so it was important for Pilate to be present. Accompanied by his retinue, his family and, of course, extra troops, he would have entered on the other side of the city, along the road from Joppa (past the crucifixion site and burial ground), and towards the former Palace of Herod the Great, the most splendid building in Jerusalem and Pilate's headquarters for his visits.

Two processions, then. One from the east, tumbling down the Mount of Olives, wild with cheering and rich with messianic symbolism. The other coming from the west, but just as symbolic: gleaming armour and burnished leather, cavalymen on horseback and the imperial eagle leading the way. From the west comes the kingdom of the world; from the east comes the kingdom of God.

Jesus' entry to Jerusalem was not only a statement of his messianic claim. It was also a politically charged act, a two-fingered salute to the empire, the world and the Gentile ways of power.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 226-227.

4. Read John 12:20-36.

(a) What is Jesus anticipating?

(b) How will the crowd's dilemma in v 34 be reconciled?

(c) How are the expectations in this passage so different from the crowd's expectations in the previous passage?

5. Read John 12:37-50.

(a) Why have some people believed in Jesus?

(b) Why have some people not believed in Jesus?

(c) What is the major problem for the believers in this passage?

(d) What do you think they actually believed?

Salvation in the Old Testament

Salvation from what? For Moses it was about deliverance from slavery in Egypt. For Isaiah salvation is about deliverance from the nations who were oppressing them and eventually salvation from their exile. God will bring them back to their land and re-constitute them as his people.

Did they have a concept of being saved from their sins? They may have thought of being saved from the consequences of their sins (e.g. being sent into exile) and eventually being saved from that but this is not the same as we understand being saved from our sins.

From a lecture series at Macquarie University on Deuteronomy by John Walton, August 2013.

To finish

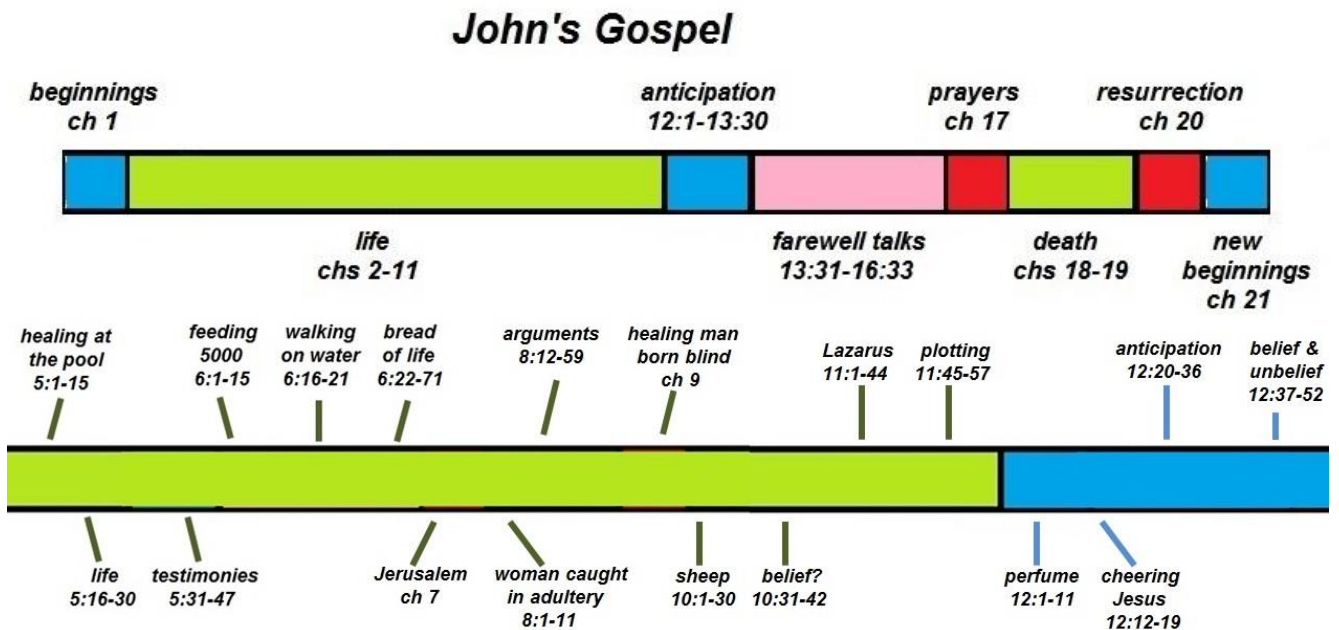
6. What are the major problems believers today have in expressing or living out their faith?

Study 13, John ch 13, foot washing

Getting started

1. On a small piece of paper write the household chore you most dislike doing.
2. Put the pieces of paper in a bowl and take turns in picking one out and guessing whose it is.

The story so far . . .



Bible

3. Read John 13:1-5.
What's about to happen to Jesus and how do you think he might have been feeling (vv 1-3)?
4. Why do you think Jesus washed the disciples' feet? What was he trying to teach them (see Luke 22:24-27 for more background)?
5. What do we learn about Jesus?
6. Read John 13:6-11.
What was wrong with Peter's reaction?
7. What will the disciples come to understand later (v7)?

8. So what does Jesus mean when he says “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me”? What must we be cleansed from?
9. Read John 13:12-17.
What do you think is the key verse in this section?
10. What do you learn about following Jesus? Does Jesus really mean we should wash each other’s feet?
11. What lowly tasks do you struggle to do? What does this tell you about yourself?
12. What opportunities do you have to serve others like this?
13. Jesus even washed Judas’ feet. If you were to follow Christ’s example what would that look like for you?
14. Read John 13:18-30.
(a) Have you ever been betrayed or “stabbed in the back” by someone?

What happened? How did you feel?

(b) How would have Jesus have felt?

Two days to go. The imminence of Passover meant that Jesus had to be arrested soon. Once the festival was over he would be away, out of their reach. But Jesus still has protection. The crowd are still on his side and any arrest will cause a riot. They need a plan. They need someone on the inside.

Enter **Judas**.

We do not know much about him. Just his father's name, Simon (John 6:71), and probably the town he came from, Kerioth. (Even that is a bit of a guess. In the Greek, the Gospels spell his identifying name, Iscariot, in ten different forms.) He is a man of mystery, and the greatest mystery of all is, 'Why did he do it?'

We know *what* he did. He did not so much betray Jesus as give away the optimal location for an arrest. Jesus' enemies already had enough to form charges against him. What they needed was a place and time when the arrest could be made.

As to 'why?', there have been many ideas put forward. Perhaps he had grown frustrated at Jesus' rejection of the 'right' way of being the Messiah. So he was trying to force his hand. Jump-start the revolution. Or maybe he was disillusioned. Maybe he had had enough of Jesus' flagrant shattering of social and religious mores. I think, however, that just like most other sordid little betrayals, it was all about money. The disciples, after all, were poor. 'Look, we have left everything and followed you, said Peter (Mark 10:28). And now they were in the richest city in Judea, and all Jesus was doing was telling stories and arguing and getting into trouble. No revolution. No takeover of the temple and the treasury. No seats of honour. It was clear that, despite Jesus' promises of some kind of reward, nothing was going to happen. He might be the Messiah, the Anointed One, but he was doing it all wrong.

And even when he was anointed, he got that wrong as well. . . .

Judas, according to the Gospels, gave back the money and went out and committed suicide. There are two accounts of his death and the only thing they have in common is a place: *Akeldama*, or 'the field of blood'. According to Luke, Judas bought the field with the money he had earned for betraying Jesus. In the field he seems to have exploded: 'falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out' (Acts 1:18). Matthew depicts Judas as bitterly regretting what he had done. When he saw Jesus condemned, he threw the money back into the temple and went and hanged himself. It was, in Matthew's account, the chief priests who took the money and bought the field with it, on the grounds that it was now impure, so could not be returned to the temple. Whatever the case, to ancient readers, Judas's suicide would have been seen as an additional sign of disgrace, rather than being viewed with compassion. Jewish attitudes to suicide were harsher than in our day. For suicide, one did not mourn openly. A suicide's body was not buried - it was exposed until sunset. He had made, it seemed, a terrible mistake. And no one would even mourn for him.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 240-250.

15. Read John 13:31-38

(a) Where is Jesus going and how will it glorify God?

(b) If Jesus' disciples can't follow him there yet, how are they to live in the mean time?

(c) What can we do to show love for one another?

(d) What barriers exist that make it hard for you to show your love?

(e) How can you overcome these barriers?

(f) What should loving one another result in?

(g) How is your church going at this?

To finish

16. (a) How do we decide whom to serve and whom not to serve?

(b) Do we serve non-Christians? Do we serve them like we serve Christians?

(c) When do we serve ourselves?

15. Serve the person in your group whose chore you selected at the start, by doing the chore for them within the next two weeks.

Study 14, John ch 14, I am the way

Getting started

1. What are the things that worry you most?

Bible

2. Read John 14:1-11.
 (a) Why are the hearts of the disciples troubled?

 (b) How does Jesus comfort them?
3. What does Jesus mean about preparing a place for us?
4. Explain verse 6 in your own words.
5. What is Jesus claiming in verses 9-11?
6. Read John 14:12-14.
 How did the disciples do even greater things than they saw Jesus doing (v 12)?
7. Read John 14:15-31.
 Does Jesus ignore Judas' question (v 22)?

 If not, what answer does Jesus give?

 If so, why does Jesus ignore the question?

Study 15, John ch 15, vine

Getting started

1. (a) How often do you pray other than when you are at church?
(b) What do you pray for?

Bible

2. Read John 15:1-17
What is Jesus saying about himself when he says 'I am the vine' (see Psalm 80:7-15, Isaiah 5:1-7, Ezekiel 15:1-8)?
3. Who are the branches?

Within Jewish tradition, the vine was a picture of Israel. God brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it in the promised land (Ps 80:8-18). It had been ravaged by wild animals and needed protecting and re-establishing. The vineyard of Israel, said Isaiah in ch 5, has borne wild grapes instead of proper ones. Other prophets used the same picture.

Now Jesus is saying that *he* is the 'true vine'. This can only mean that he is, in himself, the true Israel. He is the one on whom God's purposes are now resting. And his followers are members of God's true people – if they belong to him and remain 'in' him. The picture of the vine isn't just a clever illustration from gardening. It is about who Jesus and his people really are, and what is now going to happen to them as a result.

From John for Everyone part 2 chapters 11-21 p 70 by Tom Wright.

4. What kind of fruit is Jesus talking about?
5. Why does he want us to bear fruit?
6. What is the key to bearing fruit?
7. What does it look like practically to 'remain in Jesus' love' (v10)?
8. (a) How can you tell if someone loves Jesus?

(b) What is the relationship between love, obedience and joy (vv 9-11)?

9. What commandments of Jesus do you find hard to obey?

10. (a) Does obedience mean keeping all the rules? Why/why not?

(b) What is obedience if it is not rule keeping?

11. Who can empower you to live Jesus' way?

12. Read John 15:18-26.
(a) Who or what is "the world" in verses 18-19?

(b) Who is "they" in verses 20-25?

(c) Does the world hate you? Why/why not?

(d) *Should* the world hate you? Why/why not?

To finish

13. Jesus says he will give us whatever we ask in his name (vv 7, 16, see also John 14:12-14, 1 John 5:14-15).
(a) Did he mean *anything* we ask for?

(b) What is important about how we ask?

(c) How will this effect what and why you pray?

14. (a) Consider this scenario: St Faiths decides to have a prayer meeting. There is no particular issue to focus on but it is thought that the whole church needs to spend more time in prayer. So a prayer meeting is called on a week night at the church building. Would you go?

(b) If St Faiths had a prayer meeting once a year, every year, would you go?

(c) If St Faiths had a prayer meeting once a month, every month, would you go?

(d) If St Faiths had a prayer meeting once a week, every week, would you go?

Why/why not?

Study 16, John ch 16, Counsellor

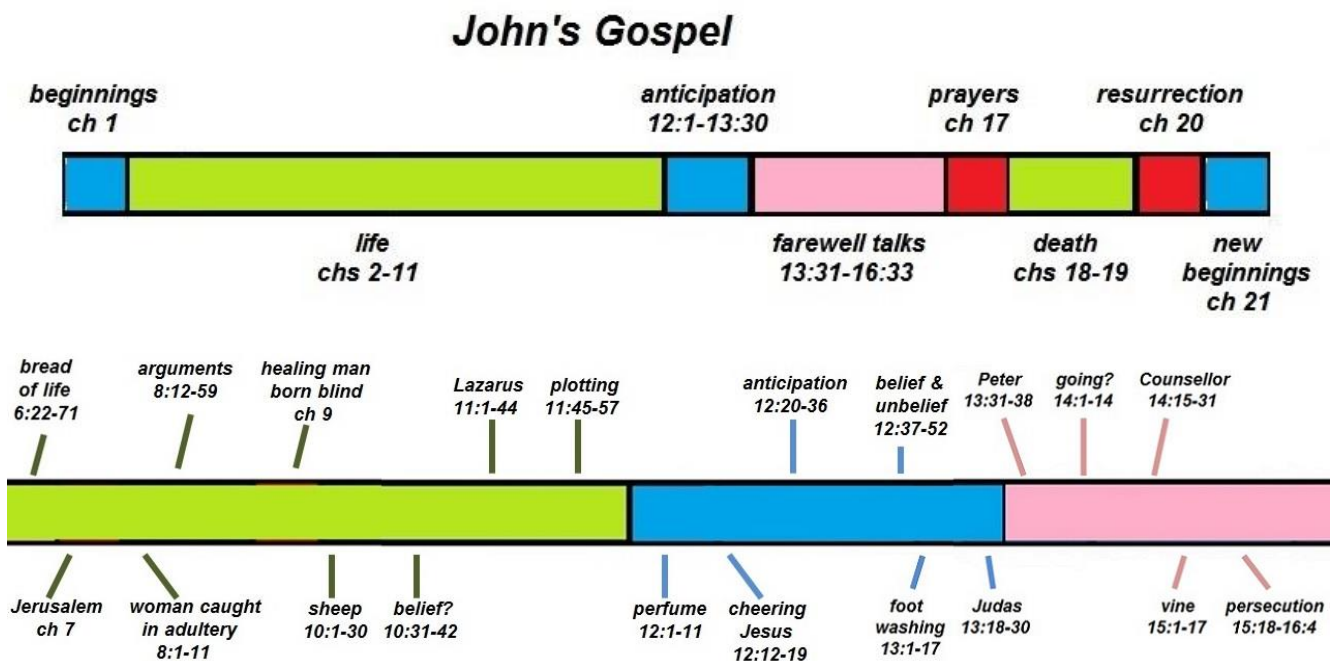
Getting started

1. What do you think of when you hear the words sin?

righteousness?

judgement?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 15:26-16:16.

(a) What does Jesus say the Counsellor will do?

(b) How much of what Jesus promises his disciples also applies to us?

(c) Sin relates to not believing in Jesus (v 9), judgement relates to Satan ("the prince of this world") being condemned (v 11) but how does righteousness relate to Jesus going to the Father (v 10)?

(d) Why is (c) so different to our answers to question 1?

3. Read John 16:17-33.

(a) Why don't the disciples understand what Jesus is saying in verses 17 to 18?

(b) Jesus answers their questions not by giving them an explanation but by making them promises (vv 19-24). What are the promises?

(c) What does Jesus' resurrection do for us?

(d) What does it mean to "ask in Jesus' name" (vv 23-24, 26)?

(e) What do the disciples "believe at last" (v 31)?

(f) How has Jesus overcome the world (v 33)?

To finish

4. In John 16:17-18 the disciples don't understand what Jesus is talking about.

(a) How do we understand Jesus?

(b) How do we understand the Bible? Is it any different to understanding Jesus?

(b) What problems do we have in understanding Jesus or the Bible?

(c) What can we do that might help us overcome these problems?

Study 17, John ch 17, prayer

Getting started

1. Should church be for non-believers as well as believers? Why/why not?
(See 2007 Forum Booklet Response and 1 Cor 14:23-25.)

Bible

2. Read John 17:1-19.
 - (a) Jesus makes only one request for himself – that the Father would glorify him so he might glorify the Father. Why do you think that was so important to Jesus?

 - (b) What does it mean to glorify the Father?

 - (c) How can we bring glory to God?

3. What is surprising about the way Jesus describes eternal life (v 3)?

4. What will it mean for Jesus to finish the work his Father assigned him?

5. What do you think the Father has assigned you?

6. Twice Jesus asks the Father to protect his disciples from the evil one (vv 11, 15). Why would that protection be so important in Jesus' mind as he faces the cross?

7. Often Christians are consumed with their need for protection – from harm, from sickness, from evil spirits. How does this compare to Jesus' agenda for prayer?

8. (a) What does "sanctify" mean (v 17)?

 (b) Jesus asks the Father to sanctify his disciples through his Word (v 17). How can we allow God's Word to have that kind of effect on our lives?

9. Read John 14:6, Eph 4:21, John 8:32, 17:17, 18:37-38a.
What does “the truth” mean when it is used in the Bible?

10. Read John 17:20-26.
What are the biggest threats to your spiritual safety and growth as a Christian?

11. (a) Who is Jesus praying for in verses 20-26?

(b) What does he want for them?

12. (a) Why is it so important that they get it right? What's at stake if they get it wrong (see also John 13:34-35)?

(b) How is it tied up with what Jesus says he will continue to do (v26)?

(c) What would it look like to get it right?

13. What does Jesus mean by unity?

To finish

14. “Jesus called us to be one – so all denominations should unite into one big church.”
Do you agree or not? Why/why not?

Prayer

Construct your own prayer based on Jesus' model in John ch 17. Pray for yourself, the people closest to you and the people whom you influence in the workplace or neighbourhood. What do you want God to accomplish long-range in each person? Now pray the prayer regularly. Refine it as God gives you direction. Watch God work!

Study 18, John ch 18, arrested

Getting started

1. What is your favourite TV show?

According to the Sun Herald 24/5/2015 the most watched TV shows for the week ending 18/5/2015 were Seven News Sunday (1.45 million viewers in the mainland capitals), Catching Milat (1.39 million), Nine News Sunday (1.26 million), Master Chef (1.21 million) and House Rules reveal (1.15 million). Perhaps this says something about how much we like bad news, violence, gossip and food.

Bible

2. Read John 18:1-14.
(a) Why did Peter want to fight?

(b) Why did Jesus not want to fight?
3. Read John 18:15-27?
(a) What were they asking Jesus?

(b) What were they asking Peter?

In 1990 archaeologists found twelve ossuaries — bone-boxes — in a cave in the northern Talpiot area of Jerusalem. Six of these were untouched, and one of them even contained a coin from the days of Herod Agrippa (AD 42-3). Two of the ossuaries bore the name of **Caiaphas**, one of which contained the bones of a sixty-year-old-man. We cannot be certain that this was the high priest mentioned in the Gospels, the man running Jerusalem and its environs during the time of Jesus. But it was a fancy tomb, and he was a very wealthy man.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, in the spring of AD 33, Caiaphas had been high priest for around fifteen years. Given the volatile nature of politics in his day, and given the fact that the Romans appointed the high priest, this was quite a remarkable feat of longevity. In all, he was to remain in post for nineteen years. When Pilate was recalled from Judea, it was only a matter of months before Caiaphas went as well. Clearly this is why he stayed in post so long. Pilate trusted him, or, at least, distrusted him less than any of the alternatives.

To attain the position of high priest — and to make a success of it — required a number of things. It required significant personal wealth, for one thing, since the high priest had to pay for certain key sacrifices, such as those on the Day of Atonement, out of his own pocket. But that was OK. Although we do not have any data about the income of the high priest, it must have been significant and it was probably drawn from the temple treasury. The fact that, as high priest, he appointed his own relatives to key posts such as temple treasurer would have given him access to a huge amount of capital.

This is borne out by archaeology. Excavations in Jerusalem have uncovered a weight measure from a home in the Upper City with the name 'Bar Kathros' on it. Kathros, as we saw earlier, was the name of one of the high-priestly families and the remains of other monumental houses nearby indicate that the neighbourhood was a wealthy one. And a religious one. One mansion — the so-called 'Palatial Mansion' — covers 600 square metres and contains a number of *miqvaot* for ritual bathing. This, then, was a house of wealth, but also of scrupulous attention to ritual purification: the kind of house, in fact, that might be owned by a high priest.

So you needed to be wealthy. And you certainly needed to use all the force associated with collaborationist regimes. You also needed a great deal of political nous. In particular, you needed the ability to compromise.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 213-214.

4. Read John 18:28-40.
 - (a) What is Jesus' kingdom (v 36)?

(b) What is truth (vv 37-38)? See question 9 of previous study.

Pilate as we have seen, was under pressure. The one thing he could not afford was any major trouble. So one imagines that he was not best pleased when, on the morning before Passover, he received a deputation from the temple with a prisoner. And his mood cannot have been lightened when, due to their concerns about Gentile impurity, the priests accompanying the prisoner refused to enter the palace itself for fear of being contaminated (John 18:28).

This explains why Pilate is, initially, reluctant to grant their request. The charge against Jesus was different depending on which body was trying him. For the high priest it was the threat against the temple. For the Sanhedrin it was the claim to be the Messiah. For Pilate, now, it is a straightforward bit of revolution: 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king' (Luke 23:2).

No blasphemy, nothing about the temple; just a direct challenge to Roman rule. The charge is one to which Pilate has to respond: the refusal to pay taxes and the claim to be the real ruler. By now, though, Jesus hardly looks like a king. Deprived of sleep, beaten, spat upon. Pilate's question, 'Are *you* the King of the Jews?' is clearly sarcastic (Mark 15:2). But his sarcasm is met with Jesus' deadpan response: 'You say so.'

Pilate's immediate response is to reject the request (Luke 23:4). There is a strong sense of irritation in Pilate's words in this first encounter. But the temple authorities persist with their accusations and Pilate hears a word which offers him an easy way out: 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place' (Luke 23:5).

Galilee. Those Galileans again. The ones who caused problems at the last festival. Possibly the delegation mention Galilee because they know Pilate had some Galileans killed last time. But they miscalculate. Pilate has a score to settle with those annoying Herodian princes, who forced him to climb down.

Jesus is from Galilee, so let the ruler of Galilee deal with it. Send the man to Antipas. . . .

The idea that Pilate is an innocent party in all this is not one which is entertained by any of the Gospels. It is actually an idea which is promulgated by those who would rather that no Western European could be blamed for Jesus' death. But all the Gospels agree that Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified. Pilate was afraid at points, and he was, to a certain extent, manipulated. But he was also manipulating others. His overriding concern throughout this is not that an innocent man would be killed, but that he, Pilate, would be blamed.

In John's account, Pilate's dialogue with Jesus consists almost entirely of questions: 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (John 18:33); 'What have you done?' (John 18:35); 'So you are a king?' (John 18:37); 'What is truth?' (John 18:38). The cynical *realpolitik* of this statement shows us the truth about Pilate's world. This is not about the truth; it is about what is effective, what is best for Pilate, for Rome. Pilate does not care about Jesus, whatever his wife may have dreamed (Matt. 27:19). If he wanted to release Jesus, he could have done. He could have held him in custody until after the festival. He could have ridden out the storm. But what would that have gained him?

The fact is that Pilate wants to use this opportunity to strengthen his position, but he has to find out whether Jesus has any popular support. The way to do that is to give the people in the courtyard a choice. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection ... (Mark 15:6-15).

There is no known precedent for this: provincial governors do not seem to have had the right to grant a pardon. However, amnesties are not unknown in the Greco-Roman world. Matthew and Mark suggest that it was a regular custom at Passover, but John implies that it was a Jewish custom. In that case, it may be a custom dating back to Herod's rule — or even before. The strongest argument for the historicity of the event is that it is in all the Gospels and the historical details in the Gospels must, at least, have been credible to their readers and listeners. If prefects never released a prisoner on amnesty, then one would have thought that the

story would not appear so prominently in all the Gospels. The fact that it is there means that it was not impossible. . . .

The different Gospels have different 'decision' points. Matthew implies that Pilate feared a riot was about to start (Matt. 27:24). John shows Pilate still uncertain, and still affected by something about Jesus. Which is when the temple leaders play their trump card: 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor' (John 19:12).

It is the perfect leverage. This is a specific threat. Caesar's Friends — *amici Caesaris* — were an informal grouping whose membership was reserved for high-ranking Romans awarded this status. Loss of the rank *amicus Caesaris* led to political and social ostracism, even suicide.

So Pilate makes a decision. As far as he can see, Jesus is without popular and political support, and the Jewish leaders are threatening to take their complaint to the emperor. Time for action. Or inaction, if you prefer. 'So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves"' (Matt. 27:24).

Nothing to do with me, guy. My hands are clean. Having given into the crowd, Pilate absolves himself of personal responsibility. He has Jesus brought out and gives them one last chance: 'Shall I crucify your King?' The question is deliberately mocking. That is the point, he is *not* their king. Pilate is winding them up. And it works, for the chief priests answer, 'We have no king but the emperor' (John 19:15).

Brilliant. Back of the net. Despite the precariousness of his position, despite his appearance of being manipulated, Pilate has secured from the chief priests a proclamation of loyalty to Rome and the emperor.

That's Pilate for you. What a cunning, highly attuned political manipulator the man is. Just when you think he is down and out, just when you think the grizzled old soldier is beaten, he pulls this out of the bag. He has mended his relationship with Antipas, secured a declaration of loyalty from the Jewish leadership, maintained order, quelled a potential riot and freed himself of responsibility, even though it will be his troops who carry out the sentence. And all it cost was the death of one Galilean peasant.

Not bad for a Friday morning. And it's not even nine o'clock.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 251-256.

To finish

5. (a) Besides God, what 3 things are you the most sure about?

(b) Why are you so sure about these things?

Study 19, John ch 19, death

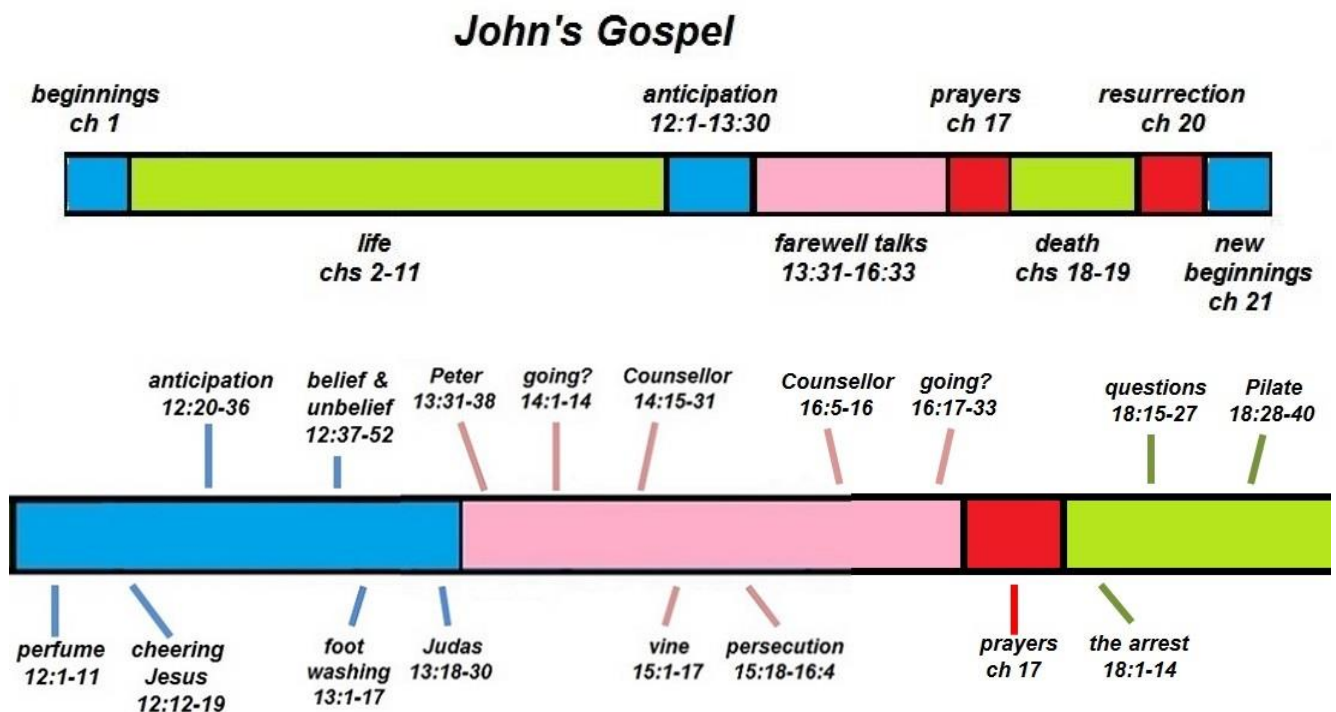
Getting started

1. Have you ever been in a pressure situation?

What was it?

How did you handle it?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 19:1-16.
What pressure is Pilate under?
3. Read John 19:17-27.
(a) Why didn't Pilate change the sign?

(b) Jesus had brothers (see Mark 3:31-35, John 7:2-5). Why didn't they look after their mother (v 27)?

4. Read John 19:28-37.
What was finished (v 30)?

He dies quickly, that was something. **Crucifixion** victims could linger for days - indeed, they were not intended to go quickly. Crucifixion was expected to keep them in sight, on display, as it were. The speed of Jesus' death - which came as a surprise to Pilate — indicates that he was actually badly injured before he even came to the cross. We have seen that he was unable to carry his own crossbeam to the site of execution, despite the distance from Herod's Palace to Golgotha being reasonably short.

He had simply lost too much blood. When the blood loss reaches a certain level, victims enter what is termed hypovolaemic shock, where the blood loss is so great that there is simply not enough to deliver oxygen to the organs. The external bleeding from the whips and the nails, and the internal bleeding from the beating, would have been more than enough. Many people sentenced to crucifixion actually died during the beating. Jesus died on the cross; that is certainly true. But that was not what killed him. He had, essentially, been beaten to death by soldiers that morning.

The bandits on either side of Jesus were dispatched by having their legs broken. This practice — what the Romans called *crurifragium* — did not mean that they could no longer support themselves. They were supported by the small peg on which they sat. What it did was induce more trauma into an already savagely traumatised body. Jesus, however, was already dead.

With Jesus' death, we go further into the twilight world of strangeness that began with the darkness. To be certain of Jesus' death, a soldier stabbed him through the side with a spear and, John tells us, blood and water came out (John 19:31-37). He links it with two Old Testament prophecies; probably it was 'haemorrhagic fluid' in the space between the ribs and the lungs. But it was not normal.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 261-262.

5. Read John 19:38-42.
What do the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus show?

There was not much time before sunset and the start of the Sabbath. **Joseph of Arimathea** made his way to Herod's Palace and persuaded Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus and give it a decent burial.

He is depicted as a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, although not, perhaps, an influential one. Arimathea, his town of origin, is unknown. It was not in Galilee, since Luke calls Arimathea 'a Jewish town' (Luke 23:51), meaning that it was in Judea. Wherever he had started, he was now permanently domiciled in Jerusalem, which is why he had bought a tomb there. Joseph of Arimathea may also have been a Pharisee. Mark and Luke tell us that he was 'waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God', which would mean that, theologically, he was not a Sadducee (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50). John says he had kept his interest in Jesus quiet for fear of the Jewish leadership (John 19:38). At this point, however, they were all on the other side of the city, in or around the temple, active in the Passover preparations.

Having been assured that Jesus was dead, Joseph was granted permission to take the body and bury it. There was no time for the usual rituals. No time for the complex wrapping of the body, the binding up of the chin as was done in Lazarus's case. Jesus was not even washed — the minimum one would expect, since blood on a corpse was considered unclean. Even in death he did not wash properly.

Jesus was placed in a new tomb, which Joseph had purchased for his family. A disused quarry made an ideal place for a Jewish burial ground, since it would have had plenty of rockface, where a cave could be excavated. Jewish tombs of the period were mainly what are called loculi tombs, consisting of a doorway into a central chamber, with loculi, or niches, cut into the walls to hold the bodies. The loculi were about sixty centimetres wide and tunnelled into the rock to a depth of around two metres. The arrangement is not unlike those drawers in a morgue. Inside the main body of the chamber there would often be a stone ledge or bench on which bodies could be laid. Other types of tomb had shelves or ledges for the bodies rather than loculi niches.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 263-264.

To finish

6. Woody Allen made this comment about death (you've probably heard it before):
"It's not that I'm afraid to die, it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens."

Another quote from Woody Allen that you may not have heard before comes from an article in *Esquire Magazine* called "Woody Allen wipes the smile off his face" and it goes:

"Death is absolutely stupefying in its terror and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless. It makes our lives look as irrelevant as waves breaking on the seashore. Our achievements seem to disappear with the aroma of the funeral flowers."

(a) What did Jesus achieve by his (i) death?

(ii) life?

(b) Do our achievements become meaningless when we die? Why/why not?

Study 20, John ch 20**Getting started**

1. Besides your conversion, what was a life changing moment in your life?

How did you feel?

Bible

2. Read John 20:1-18.
Trace how these people would have felt during the course of this event
 - Mary.



- Simon Peter.

- “the other disciple, the one who Jesus loved”.

3. Read John 20:19-23.
(a) Who did Jesus talk to?

(b) What did they feel?

(c) What is Jesus sending them to do?

(d) How are they equipped?

4. Read John 20:24-31.
(a) Trace the course of Thomas' feelings.

(b) The writer of this gospel makes a comment on the book he has written (vv 30-31).
What is he saying about (i) his selection of events?

(ii) his purpose in writing this gospel?

(c) What does it mean practically to have life in Jesus' name (v 31)?

To finish

5. What is the connection between how you feel and the decisions you make?

Use the event you described in question one as an example.

Study 21, John ch 21, on the beach

Getting started

1. What has someone said to you that made a big difference to your life?

It was customary in our congregation to encourage young men to enter into the privilege of worship by standing and praying aloud. That particular Sunday I sensed the pressure of the saints (not, I fear, the leading of the Spirit), and I responded by unsteadily leaving my chair, for the first time, with the intention of praying.

Filled less with worship than with nervousness, I found my theology becoming confused to the point of heresy. I remember thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave. Stuttering throughout, I finally thought of the word *Amen* (perhaps the first evidence of the Spirit's leading), said it, and sat down. I recall staring at the floor, too embarrassed to look around, and solemnly vowing *never again* to pray or speak aloud in front of a group.

When the service was over, I darted toward the door, not wishing to encounter an elder who might feel obliged to correct my twisted theology. But I was not quick enough. An older Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me, put his arm on my shoulder, and cleared his throat to speak.

I remember thinking to myself, "Here it comes. Oh well, just endure it and then get to the car." I then listened to this godly gentleman speak words that I can repeat verbatim today, more than twenty years later.

"Larry," he said, "there's one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I'm behind you one thousand per cent." Then he walked away.

Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being. My resolve never again to speak publicly weakened instantly.

From Encouragement The Key to Caring p24 by Larry Crabb and Dan Allender.

Bible

2. Read John 21:1-14.
Why is it surprising to find the disciples fishing (John 20:19-23)?
3. What happened when they were obedient to Jesus?
4. Why do you think John tells us the exact number of fish caught?
5. What do you think is the main reason John includes this incident in his gospel?
6. What is Jesus demonstrating to them in this encounter?

7. How do you think Peter might have felt about meeting Jesus again after recently denying him three times (see John 18:15-27)?

8. Read John 21:15-19.
In verse 15 why does Jesus ask Peter if he loves him more than the other disciples (see Matt 26:31-35)?

9. Why does Jesus ask Peter three times if Peter loves him (John 18:15-27)?

10. How do you think Peter feels now?

11. (a) Who are Jesus' sheep and how is Peter going to feed them?

(b) What's it going to cost Peter to do that (vv 18-19)?

12. Read John 21:20-25.
Why do you think Peter asked about John in verses 20-21?

To finish

13. Make notes on what you can say to particular people you know, who need help and encouragement.

One possibility is that the author was getting near death, and knew that there was not reason, in anything Jesus had said, why he should not die as all the other original apostles had died. But a rumour had gone around in the early church, based on a misunderstanding of what Jesus had said to Peter, that John would be the one original apostle who would remain alive until the lord returned.

We may suppose, then, that the elderly apostle, or someone else at his dictation and suggestion, wrote ch 21 and added it to the book that had already been finished. Indeed, verse 24 looks, liked a note from somebody else, either a scribe or a close friend, to certify that the beloved disciple really was the author, and

could be trusted. The new version of the book could then be circulated, after the death of the beloved disciple, to make it clear that this had not upset Jesus' intentions.

From *John for Everyone* part 2 chapters 11-21 p 168 by Tom Wright.

John's Gospel

