

VCBC SLG—The Gospel of John
Lesson #12
Concluding Chapters—Purpose of Writing

As we come to the final chapters of the Gospel of John, we are reminded of his old age and his desire to present once again the gospel account of Jesus, in addition to the existing three Gospel accounts (the Synoptics), to a generation about 60 years removed from the time of Jesus, with he himself—the sole surviving eye-witness among the Apostles to the teachings and deeds of Jesus.

Because of time, we shall focus our lesson today on the uniqueness of John’s account concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, because in both cases, his accounts end with a very important message to his readers, emphasizing the truthfulness and trustworthiness of his first-handed, eye-witness accounts.

The Crucifixion (19: 17-42)

Jesus carrying the cross

. 17 Carrying His own cross, He went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

[Skipping the part of Simon carrying the cross of Jesus]

The two thieves

18 There they crucified Him, and with Him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

[Skipping the curses and repentance of one of the thieves]

The Sign: “King of the Jews”

19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

[Matthew mentions the sign was nailed above Jesus’ head, a likely reference to the “cross” shape of the Cross (contrary to modern scholarship). John adds that it was written in three languages (as much as Pilate might try to mock the Jews with the sign, the three languages powerfully convey the universal nature of Jesus’ salvation); plus Pilot’s refusal to change it.]

Dividing Jesus’ garment

23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them

and cast lots for my garment.”[Ps.22:18]

So this is what the soldiers did.

[John emphasizes that “This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled].

The Women at the Cross

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, He said to her, “**Woman, here is your son,**” **27** and to the disciple, “**Here is your mother.**” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

[John adds details that he personally witnessed and heard, while all other apostles had fled, and some church traditions had Mary followed John to Ephesus].

It is Finished

28 Later, knowing that everything **had now been finished** (*tetelestai*), and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “**I am thirsty.**” **29** A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. **30** When He had received the drink, Jesus said, “**It is finished** (*tetelestai*),” With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

[The saying of “I am thirsty” is not to fulfill Scripture, but rather the yielding of His spirit in dying is. The word, “finished” in v.28 and v.29 is exactly the same in Greek, which might be best translated, in this case, as “accomplished.”]

More Fulfillments of Scriptures—special to John’s account

31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. **32** The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. **33** But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. **34** Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled:

“**Not one of his bones will be broken,**”[Ex. 12:46—concerning Passover restrictions] **37** and, as another scripture says,

“**They will look on the one they have pierced.**”[Zech. 12:10]

[“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced and they will mourn for Him as one grieves for a first-born.”]

Purpose of writing this Gospel made plain:

35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

- As the last surviving eye-witness, John puts all doubts about the trustworthiness and accuracy of the Gospel they have heard to rest!
 - He has seen with his own eyes (I John 1:1)
 - He knows, and
 - He testifies truly

“That which was from the beginning,

- which we have heard,
 - which we have seen with our eyes,
 - which we have looked at and
 - our hands have touched
 - —this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life.
 - The life appeared,
 - we have seen it and
 - testify to it, and
 - we proclaim to you the eternal life
 - which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”
- (I John 1; 1-2)

The Burial

38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.

[Earlier, this is what John said of people like Joseph:

“Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue, for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” (John 12: 42-43)

- John was being absolutely honest with how he looked at Joseph
- But now he also honestly reported his courage to identify with Jesus—better late than never, I guess!]

With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.[e] 40 Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

[Some opine that because of John’s reference to a Special Sabbath (v.31), there perhaps were two Sabbaths occurring consecutively. But the accounts of all four Gospel seem to paint the picture of one Sabbath and not two consecutive Sabbaths, making the arrest of Jesus being our Thursday night, followed by an all-night trial, leading to the official sentence early Friday morning and His immediate execution at 9 AM, with Jesus giving up His spirit about 3 PM...But the exact dates and times are the least important, but the actual events are all true, as witnessed by and testified to, by the Gospel Writers, as inspired by the Holy Spirit.]

The Resurrection—Chapter 20

If you are interested in the chronological account of all that happened on the Resurrection morning, you can read the following summary by Scofield:

“Combining the four narratives, the order of events on the resurrection morning would seem to be as follows:

In the early morning, the woman went to the tomb of Jesus (wishing) to anoint His body, even though they did not know how they could get into the tomb (Mk. 16: 2-3)

There were the three, Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James, Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:10), and Salome, followed by other women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee (Lk. 23:55-24:1)

The three women found the stone had been removed by an angel (Mt. 28:2).

Mary Magdalene hurried to tell Peter and John, who ran toward the tomb (Jn. 20: 2-4).
Meanwhile, Mary, the mother of James, Salome and then the other women arrived at the tomb, entered it and saw angels who assured them Jesus had risen. They ran from the tomb in fear and joy to inform His disciples (Mt. 28:8).
Peter and John arrived at the tomb, entered, observed and left (Jn. 20:4-10).
Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb, stood weeping, and Jesus revealed Himself to her (Jn. 20: 11-18).
As the other women were on their way to tell His disciples, Jesus appeared to them (Mt. 28: 9-10)
(Scofield Study Bible, 1020)

John continues with his eye-witness account

“20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.”

The uniqueness of His eye-witness account:

- Only He and Peter, of all disciples went to the tomb
- Peter was obviously more courageous, he went inside and looked, while John did not dare to go in—it was a tomb!
- What they saw amply proves that Jesus’ resurrection was a bodily resurrection—which would be ours too at the Last Day
 - The head piece was “folded” (*S1794*) separate from the rest, “the strips of linen lying there.”—denoting not being unwrapped or unfolded if one was to wake up from say, a coma!
- However, John was honest enough to admit that while they believed the word of Mary Magdalene that Jesus’ body was missing, they still could not recognize that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as He said.

The Significance of Jesus Appearing to Mary Magdalene First among all

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking He was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get Him.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary (*Maria*).”

She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, “*Rabboni!*” (which means “Teacher”).

17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that He had said these things to her.

In terms of reliable testimony, Mary Magdalene’s serves as yet another trustworthy independent testimony: “**I have seen the Lord!**”

In terms of theological significance, these words of Jesus: “**I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God**”—serve to affirm more than our “right to be become children of God” (John 1:12), but our intimacy with Father God—He is not just Jesus’ Father, but ours, not just Jesus’ God but ours!

In terms of such intimacy, the fact that Jesus chose to appear first among all His followers to Mary Magdalene, reflects the reciprocal love between Mary and the Lord—She was the only one who hanged around, refusing to leave the empty tomb until she could find His body, and it seems that He felt so obliged to appear to her right away, not wanting her to grieve unnecessarily for an extra moment. Indeed, “**He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him (or her in this case), and show myself to him (her).**” (John 14:21)

Jesus’ 1st Appearance to His Disciples

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20 After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22 And with that He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

As a first-handed eyewitness, John supplements the Synoptic Gospels with splitting Jesus’ appearance to the disciples before they ventured to meet Jesus in Galilee into 2 parts:

The 1st was behind closed doors on the very evening of Jesus resurrection.

It is noteworthy that the Lord greeted them twice saying, “Peace be with you” which should be said only at the beginning of meeting one another. So, this was more than a social greeting, but a blessing from the Lord, knowing that “peace” was what they desperately needed, as they were gripped with fear.

And what better way to turn their fear into joy by proving that He has bodily resurrected, just as He said, proving that He has defeated death, the consequence of sin that all men are subjected to—

the showing of His hands (with the nail-pierced scars) and His side proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is who He claims He is—the Son of God!

The other significant detail supplemented by John is the timing of the reception of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus has promised earlier:

- It's not the time of Pentecost in Acts 2, but right here that very 1st night of His resurrection that the disciples received the Holy Spirit —**“to be with you forever”** (John 14:16)
- From then onwards, whoever believes in Jesus Christ has the same indwelling of the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples did that very night—the inaugural indwelling of the Holy Spirit in and among believers.

Another theological significance is that of being sent by Jesus

- While this was presumably reiterated right before His ascension, Jesus seemed to remind them at this point that while it was really great that He has risen again and He has accomplished His part of the salvation of humankind, their work has just begun—there is a very important mission ahead of them, and
- And He clarifies that this mission of bringing forgiveness is not given just to Peter, but all who, like Peter, acknowledge Him as **“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** (John 16:16)
- Remember what Jesus told Peter upon him making such an acknowledgement:
- **“Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”** (Matthew 16: 17-19)
- While these words were addressed to Peter earlier, Jesus makes it clear now, it is given to all of them, in fact, not just all of them, but all who acknowledge Him as they did. Allow me to quote from Calvin concerning such authority to loose (or forgive) or to bind (not to forgive)

“The substance of this statement is, that Christ intended to assure his followers of the salvation promised to them in the Gospel that they might expect it as firmly as if he were himself to descend from heaven to bear testimony concerning it; and, on the other hand, to strike despisers with terrors, that they might not expect their mockery of the ministers of the word to remain unpunished. Both are exceedingly necessary; for the inestimable treasure of life is exhibited to us in earthen vessels (2 Co. iv. 7,) and had not the authority of the doctrine been established in this manner, the faith of it would have been, almost every moment, ready to give way... (i.e. their faith would easily give way)

This is a great honor, that we are God's messengers to assure the world of its salvation. It is the highest honor conferred on the Gospel, that it is declared to be the embassy of mutual reconciliation between God and men (2 Co. v. 20.) In a word, it is a wonderful consolation to devout minds to know that the message of salvation brought to them by a poor mortal man is ratified before God. Meanwhile, let the ungodly ridicule, as they may think fit, the doctrine which is preached to them by the command of God, they will one day learn with what truth and seriousness God threatened them by the mouth of men. Finally, let pious teachers, resting on this assurance, encourage themselves and others to defend with boldness the life-giving

grace of God, and yet let them not the less boldly thunder against the hardened despisers of their doctrine...

But it will be said, Christ addresses Peter alone: He does so, because Peter alone, in the name of all, had confessed Christ to be the Son of God, and to him alone is addressed the discourse, which applies equally to the rest. And the reason adduced by Cyprian and others is not to be despised, that Christ spake to all in the person of one man, in order to recommend the unity of the Church.” (Excerpts from Calvin’s Commentary, Vol. XVI. pp. 294-296)

- In other words, it is not we who have such authority, but the Word that we preach and testify to has, the acceptance and refusal of which carries eternal consequences!
- As Paul would say in 2 Cor. 2: 15-16
“For we are to God the aroma of Christ, among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death, to the other, the fragrance of life. And who are equal to such a task.”

Jesus’ 2nd Appearance—for sake of Thomas

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

In Defense of Thomas

Although, Thomas is often portrayed as one who had the least faith among the eleven disciples and was dubbed, “Doubting Thomas”, I do not think that he was necessarily of less faith than the other ten disciples, and for that matter, you and me.

All eleven disciples were hiding in fear after the crucifixion of Jesus, thinking that they might be next. In addition to fear, it is not too far-fetched to say that their faith in Christ was greatly shaken, if not shattered:

- They had devoted three years of their lives following Jesus; and in their words they had given up everything to follow Him (Matthew 19:27) — now with His cowardly death, their Messianic dream was shattered and they had now become a laughingstock of their friends and loved ones;
- As much as they had been warned by Jesus of His suffering, and have been foretold of His resurrection, the suffering of Jesus, and especially His crucifixion was just too human and did not and could not befit the Messiah, let alone the Son of God — they were totally thrown into confusion; and
- They truly loved the Lord — the arrest, the kangaroo court, the beating, the spitting and finally the nailing to the cross — just too horrific and heart-broken.

As a result, although they had heard from the women about the empty tomb and even John and Peter had verified the words of the women, their sorrow, their bewilderment, and their shattered dreams (not to mention a sense of betrayal by Jesus, perhaps) — all have prevented them from entertaining the idea that perhaps, Jesus had really risen just as He said!

If Jesus did not show Himself to them that first Sunday evening, they would not have believed any report of Jesus' resurrection. The fact that Thomas was not hiding with them that first evening might suggest that he had given up on the Lord and on himself and had decided to part company with these disciples. So, he must have laughed at the words of these ten disciples of having seen Jesus. At best, in his mind, they had seen a ghost, that was why he sneered at them and said, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."(John 20:25)

In fact, I admire his honesty. At the same time, I also admire his instant repentance. I do not believe he dared put his fingers to touch the Lords' scars. All it took was the Lord's appearance, and his repentance was complete and total as he said, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

According to church traditions, Thomas was the one who brought the gospel to India and died as a martyr.

The significance of this account, apart from being yet another first-handed reliable eyewitness account, it speaks directly to the generation to whom John was writing that **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**(20:29)

Q. But can one who has not seen believe?

A. Here is John's answer:

The Purpose of Writing this Gospel Account reiterated:

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

This is essentially the final word that ends his gospel account and he urges his readers to believe Jesus as He has claimed to be—the Messiah (Christ), the Son of God

- Because by believing in His name, they will have life (which is eternal life, as clearly explained throughout the gospel), and
- That all he has witnessed are true—first-handed account of what he has seen together with the other disciples,
- And that these miracles performed by Jesus are "signs" that prove Who He is!

Perhaps, it is fitting that we re-read the Prologue which basically sums up the message that John, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit seeks to convey with his gospel account:

The Creator God

"In the beginning (Gen 1:1)

- **was the Word (*Logos*), and**
- **the Word was with God, and**
- **the Word was God.**

2 He was with God in the beginning. (*inclusio*)

- 3 Through him all things were made;
- without him nothing was made that has been made.

The Life and Light of man

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[*or received*] it.

The Preparer of the Road—John the Baptist

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (*John the Baptist has been effective*)

“The Light of the World”--rejected

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

To those who would receive Him—Children of God would become

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

The Word Incarnate (tabernacle—“Shekinah--glory”)

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Chapter 21

- It appears to be an after-thought to John’s original purpose of writing this gospel account
- The content is obviously more pastoral than apologetic, addressing to those who are believers
 - To the leaders: Love the Lord is paramount to any spiritual leadership and our love for the Lord is expressed in taking care of whom He loves—His sheep!
 - To all believers: just as Peter denied Christ three times, he is given a chance to return, and is asked afresh, to “follow me” (21:20)
 - The message to the early churches under state persecution is very timely as many had chosen to deny Christ and pledged allegiance to Caesar under the threat of death—even so, if they choose to repent and return, like Peter, it’s never too late and the church should accept them, as Jesus did Peter.
- Perhaps, there is also one very practical issue John wishes to address and that is: being the sole survivor of the Apostles and at his age (likely over 90), it’s rumored that he would not die (perhaps like Elijah). He seeks to dispel such a rumor.

Finally, after this after-thought, he ends his book once again, with the purpose of his writing this gospel account:

“24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

With all the chaos and urgent needs of the world, this gospel account by John reminds us of what is most important in life and hence our (the church's) most important, essential focus of our mission as being sent by Jesus, just as He was sent by the Father

- The bringing the world to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior
- So that they may have life eternal!

The Social Gospel Movement (in the early 1900's) that steered away from this focus and sought to usher the quality of God's Kingdom on earth has proved to be an experiment that failed miserably. Let's not try to repeat its mistakes—we cannot put the cart before the horse. God's kingdom, from day one, is being entered into one soul at a time—not by them being impressed with our good work (though we should do so to the glory of the Father), but by the conviction of the Holy Spirit of their sin, righteousness (right relationship with God) and (the coming) judgment (John 16: 8-11).