

The Mind of Christ



Teacher's Notes

THE MIND OF CHRIST MANUAL TEACHER'S NOTES

By Bob Stone

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Introduction

*"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?"
But we have the mind of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 2:16*

Much has been written over the years about Jesus the Christ. Many volumes line the bookshelves of both religious and secular libraries discussing and dissecting everything that can be said about the historical as well as the cosmic Christ. Many of these works are very valuable and will help the honest seeker in their quest to better understand Jesus, His place in our world, and their own relationship to Him.

This study manual and these resources are different than most in that they look at Jesus, the world He came to live in, and the people who inhabit it through the eyes of the Christ Himself. This is an examination of the Mind of Christ. And by examining His mind, we hope to transform our own.

This study could be broken into two parts. The first seven lessons deal with the "I Am" statements of Christ. These are the self-declarative, or self-identification claims of Jesus. Here Jesus explains in much detail exactly *who* He is. Lessons 8-14 examine the purpose statements of the Savior. These are the claims Jesus made concerning His reasons for coming to planet earth. Here Jesus explains *why* He is.

Our goal is to learn as much about Jesus as we can, and then to allow Him to transform our lives so that we start acting, and thinking, more like Jesus Himself!

The KEY VERSE can be used as a memory verse each week. The discussion questions at the end of each lesson can be used in class, as a small group meeting at another time, or for individual study.

LESSON ONE

I AM

KEY VERSE: *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"* – John 8:58

The fundamental question in Christianity is a personal one. The question is, *What do you believe about the Christ?* Since Jesus' earthly ministry began people have been asking, "Who is this Jesus?"

In Luke 5:20 we find Jesus making a startling statement to a paralytic, *"Friend, your sins are forgiven."* The Pharisees and the teachers of the law immediately react with a question, *"Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* Jesus stilled a tempest on the Sea of Galilee and His astonished disciples asked, *"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"* (Mark 4:41). Those who sat at a table with Him one day were amazed to hear Him grant pardon to a prostitute and they remarked, *"Who is this who even forgives sins?"* (Luke 7:49). When Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee heard details of the ministry of Jesus he was puzzled and asked, *"I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?"* (Luke 9:9). When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, Matthew states that, *"the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'"* (21:10).

This question, "Who is this?" in relation to Jesus is still being asked today. As we begin our journey through the great "I AM" statements of Jesus we hope to answer this question. Jesus is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life"; "The Resurrection", "The Light of the World", "The Door", and "The Good Shepherd". But in the text before us, Jesus simply identifies Himself as "I AM."

If we are to experience the Christ of the Bible then we must believe in the Christ the Bible presents. Look with me as we consider Jesus' claim to the title, "I AM."

The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds – John 8:48-59

1. "I AM" IS EQUAL WITH GOD

Jesus claims for Himself the title "I AM." The name "I AM" is the same name God the Father designated for Himself in Exodus 3:14. God had appeared to Moses in a burning bush that wouldn't burn up. God told Moses that he was the man to lead the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt. When Moses requested that God give him a name to tell the Israelites who had sent him we learn that, *"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God went on to say, "This is my name forever, the name by which I AM to be remembered from generation to generation" (v. 15).* And here we find Jesus, who is God in the flesh, claiming His rightful name, "I AM."

This is the reason the Jews wanted to stone Jesus (v. 59). To the Jewish leaders it was unthinkable that a man would take upon himself the name of God. They knew that God had commanded that, *"anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the*

Name, he must be put to death" (Lev. 24:16). This is why the Jews were picking up stones to take the Savior's life – because Jesus claimed the name "I AM," and to their understanding He had committed blasphemy.

To the non-Jewish mind what Jesus said would not be construed as anything to get that upset about. But the Jew knew that this name "I AM" was reserved for God alone and by using it Jesus was claiming to be equal with God the Father.

In John 5:18 we find another instance where the Jews seek to kill Jesus because they said He, *"was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."* To the Jewish mind there was no doubt whom Jesus was claiming to be.

The Bible plainly teaches that Jesus is equal to God the Father because He is God in the flesh. Sometimes this doctrine gets confusing when other passages are considered.

Although Jesus is equal in every way to the Father and the Holy Spirit, Paul writes concerning Him, *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped"* (Phil. 2:6). The word translated "grasped" means to securely hold onto something that is already in your possession. What the passage is saying is this: Jesus is in every way equal to God Almighty, but He voluntarily chose to become the Son of God and did not hold onto all that He possessed before He came to earth. In other words, He chose to subordinate Himself to the Father so that He could redeem mankind from their sins.

Does this make Him less than the Father? No, not in any way. It simply means that He was willing to give up heaven for a time, so that we might be able to enjoy it for eternity. When the whole of the Bible is considered, there can be no doubt that Jesus claimed full equality with the other members of the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all equally God. They have voluntarily chosen to take on specific roles for the redemption of mankind. This Jesus who identifies Himself as "I AM" is equal with God because He is God.

2. "I AM" IS ETERNAL WITH GOD

Jesus claims to have eternally existed. He, like the Father and the Spirit, have always been. There has never been a time when they were not. In His controversy with the Jews, Jesus asserts, *"I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death"* (v. 51). This is too much for Jesus' critics to handle so they protest, *"Abraham died and so did the prophets...Are you greater than our father Abraham?...Who do you think you are?"* Jesus replied, *"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad"* (v. 56). The Jews become even more perplexed: *"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"* (v. 57). Jesus then makes the boldest claim of all, *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"* (v. 58).

Here Jesus clearly claims to have lived before the great patriarch Abraham. Notice that He does not say, "Before Abraham was, I was," but, *"Before Abraham was, I am."* In other words, "I not only lived before Abraham, but I have always been." Jesus is without a doubt claiming to have existed eternally before Abraham.

This eternal nature of Jesus is taught throughout the New Testament. The apostle John emphasized the pre-existence of Jesus by declaring that, *"in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God"* (John 1:1). The apostle Paul refers to Jesus' pre-existence in heaven in Philippians 2:6. At that time, Paul declares, Jesus *"existed in the form of God."* The word translated "form" conveys the idea of possessing all the attributes of the subject being discussed. So in this phrase, found in Philippians 2:6, Jesus is said to have possessed all the attributes of God – and one of those attributes is pre-existence. In Colossians 2:9 Paul claims concerning Jesus, *"in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."*

Jesus Himself claimed pre-existence with God with absolute clarity. In John 6:38 He said, *"For I have come down from heaven."* Jesus declares, *"You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world"* (John 8:23). In John 10:30 is the amazing statement, *"I and the*

Father are one." During Jesus' high Priestly prayer He petitions the Father, *"Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began"* (John 17:5).

Now let me explain to you why I've stressed this so much. Jesus undeniably claimed to have existed eternally in the same way that God the Father has. If He did not exist as He has said then the rest of the Bible becomes meaningless. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection are invalidated, as far as our redemption is concerned, if Christ is not an eternal being.

The whole point of the cross is that God became man and lived a sinless life and died in our place. If Jesus did not exist forever then it wasn't God who died in our place, it was simply a man like us. If Jesus was a created being like we are than He could not be God. Thank God He is not created, but has existed eternally, and has come to earth for our benefit.

3. "I AM" IS ESSENTIAL WITH GOD

We find that in this life some things are essential, while others are not. In this day and age I believe we could say a car is essential, but a Rolls Royce is not. Shelter is essential but none of us really need a mansion. We cannot survive without bread and water, but we can make it through without filet mignon. There are many things we can do without, but the great I AM, Jesus Christ, is essential for life, specifically for life eternal.

Jesus is essential to our salvation. In John 11:26 Jesus promises, *"He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* Even though all will at some point experience physical death, those who have placed their faith in Christ will never experience a moment of separation from Him. They have eternal life as a present possession. Concerning Jesus, Peter declares *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). If a person is searching for salvation through any means other than Jesus, their search will be in vain. Jesus is essential to our salvation. Without Him we are lost.

Jesus is essential to give us a way to God. In John 14:6 Jesus makes an all-inclusive claim: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Without Jesus we have no way to approach the Father. He is the only path we can walk down. He is the only way to heaven. There is no other way for Jew or Gentile, slave or free. Without Jesus we can never experience the eternal joy of the Father's presence.

Jesus is essential to our peace, hope, and assurance. A wonderful promise is given in John 10:28, *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."* Jesus is our source of life both here and hereafter.

During Jesus' ministry many asked, "Who is this man?" Many today are asking the same question, "Who is Jesus – who did He claim to be?" And the answer from the Word of God is this: He is the Great I AM – He is fully God in every respect. Jesus is equal with God; He is eternal with God; He is essential with God; He is God! He is everything.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the fundamental question in Christianity?
2. Why is it so important to be able to answer the above question correctly?
3. If you were a Jew at the time Jesus claimed to be "I AM", do you think you would have tried to stone Him? Why or why not?
4. How would you explain Jesus' equality to God the Father to a non-Christian?
5. If Jesus was not fully God what would that say about the salvation of those who have placed their faith in Him?
6. Write out a short personal statement concerning what Jesus' eternal nature means to you:

LESSON TWO

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

KEY VERSE: *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* – John 14:6

As we come to our text we find Jesus with His disciples. In the previous chapter Jesus explained to them, *"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come"* (John 13:33). Jesus was preparing his disciples for the cross, and resurrection, and his ascension into heaven. The disciples were noticeably bothered by this revelation. So Jesus speaks these words of comfort to them – and to us today.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
– John 14:1-6

Many of us can relate to Thomas' query, *"how can we know the way?"* Most of humanity is searching for answers to their spiritual questions whether they realize it or not. Our contemporary society has become more spiritually sensitive than in decades past.

The problem is that most are open to many different avenues of spirituality. Our consumer mentality guides us to view one spiritual path to be as relevant and legitimate as any other as long as we believe that our needs are being met. Whether you choose Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Scientology, or any other religion, as long as you are sincere and you feel good about your choice, then that alternative is as good as any other.

One of the difficulties of this approach is that these different belief systems are often contradictory of each another and make mutually exclusive claims. When Christianity is viewed in light of these other religious systems we find that it is the only belief system that makes the claim that Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father. In fact, every other religious group would deny that Jesus' statement is true.

You cannot believe in Christ's exclusive claim and at the same time believe that there are other ways to gain entrance to the Father. To do so would, in effect, deny the very claim of Christ you are claiming to uphold.

Jesus' answer to Thomas' question is a radical claim to both His Deity and His exclusive right to grant access to the Heavenly Father as well as all that entails. Rather than deal with what other religious systems teach, it would be more helpful for us to better understand exactly what Jesus was claiming in His answer to Thomas and see how it is inconsistent with the inclusive view so many hold today.

1. I AM THE WAY

Every path that a person walks down to find truth winds up a dead end unless that path is the one that leads them to Christ. We are all guilty of taking the wrong turn, spiritually speaking, and finding ourselves far away from God. The prophet Isaiah put it like this: *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..."* (53:6). Paul said, *"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23).

Now, why is this true? – because we have all taken the wrong road in life. We have chosen to follow self instead of pursuing God's will and His way for our lives. The good news is that Jesus came to this planet specifically, *"...to seek and to save what was lost"* (Luke 19:10). Rather than leaving us standing indecisively at the fork in the road, or worse yet, following the wrong path entirely, Jesus has come to clearly show us which path we must go down if we are to have eternal comfort and security in the arms of the Father. We can pray with King David, *"You have made known to me the*

path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:11).

Christ is the only way to be saved. *“I am the way,”* Jesus said, *“No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* Let’s notice what Jesus does not say. He does not say, “I am one of many ways to the Father”. He does not say, “You can choose Me if you like, but there are other choices that are just as viable.” Jesus did not say, “Whichever spiritual path you walk down will be fine with Me.” No, Jesus never hinted of anything of the sort. He stated very clearly that He is the only path available that leads to the Father.

If you try to reach Heaven by any other means you will never reach your intended destination. There is only one way to the Father, and it is through Christ. He is the only way to be saved. According to Jesus' own words there is not a person who has ever existed, no matter how pious or religious they might be, who will be in heaven without coming through Jesus Christ.

2. I AM THE TRUTH

When Jesus stated, *“I am the truth,”* He made one of the most profound theological declarations in all of Scripture. Jesus is not simply claiming to be an agent of truth. He is claiming to be truth incarnate. In these words He is claiming that all knowledge about God, about nature, about humanity, about all that is or that ever will be is found in His person. Jesus is not only the path that must be walked down for salvation; He is the embodiment of everything we need to know about life.

There is no doubt that many people know a great deal of truth in certain respective areas of life. A person could be an expert in one of the many fields of science, or mathematics, or even religion, and still not know the truth, who is Jesus Christ. Yet, all of these different areas of truth are reliant on the truth of Jesus, whether those who study them are aware of this fact or not. All truth is God’s truth. Concerning the Christ, Paul writes, *“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were*

created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17). Jesus' role as Creator and Sustainer of the universe is evidence of the fact that Jesus is truth in every single respect. He is the truth of all scientific, historic, philosophic, religious, as well as every other area of knowledge. There is no truth outside of the person of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the truth because He is the self-revelation of God that has been revealed to us. The author of Hebrews informs us that, *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word..."* (1:3). Paul writes, *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"* (Col. 2:9). Being the perfect revelation of the Father, Jesus combines in Himself and manifests all divine reality. He embodies what everyone needs to know and believe concerning God, and how they should live as God's children.

Jesus claimed to be truth embodied in the inspired Word. Jesus is the "Word" spoken of in John chapter 1. He is both the living Word of God and the written Word of God. He is the Word of the Old Testament as well as the witness of the New Testament. Jesus said, *"You diligently study the scriptures because you think by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me"* (John 5:39). Christ's truth is embodied in the inspired Word of God, both Old and New Testaments for He is the Word. The Holy Spirit taught the apostles directly through inspiration and speaks to us just as directly when we open the Word of God.

3. I AM THE LIFE

Jesus' promise of life incarnate is exactly what we need to hear. Before coming into a relationship with Christ we were, *"dead in (our) transgressions and sins"* (Eph. 2:1). Even though our hearts were beating, and blood was coursing through our veins, and electrical signals were being sent from our brain to the various parts of our bodies, in the spiritual sense of things, we were as dead as a lifeless corpse. Only through Jesus Christ do we have any hope of life.

Jesus could say with complete confidence, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10). Jesus is not only promising

us a life with purpose and meaning, He is promising us a life while still on this earth that brings complete satisfaction.

So many today are looking for life in the physical realm and in the pleasures derived from material goods, but it simply cannot be found. The full life that Jesus promises comes from an assurance that no matter what happens to us in this life, our relationship with Him will never come to an end. If our loved ones are taken away, if our financial house crumbles to the ground, if we are beaten and bloodied, we still have life in Christ. We can say with Job, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God"* (19:25-26).

The life that Jesus embodies is not only enjoyed in the temporal, but in the eternal. The spiritual pleasures derived from a relationship with Christ extend throughout and beyond time as we know it. The most famous verse of the Bible promises that, *"...God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

It is important to note that this gift of life eternal is the present possession of the believer in Christ. If you are a Christian, you have eternal life right now. While the full ramifications and benefits of eternal life cannot and will not be experienced in this life, the reality of its existence is currently in our possession. Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life"* (John 5:24). The person who hears and believes "has eternal life." This life has already been granted to the one who commits their life to the Lord.

Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life."* Thomas Kempis said: "Without the Way there is no going; without the Truth there is no knowing; without the Life there is no living." Find your way, understand your destiny, live your life to its fullest through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Jesus' words in John 14:6 bring comfort to His disciples? How do they bring comfort to you?

2. Do you know of anyone asking a question similar to Thomas' (John 14:5)? Would Jesus' answer be satisfactory to that person (John 14:6)? Why or why not?

3. Describe in two or three sentences how Jesus shows us the "way" to be saved:

4. Explain what it means to say that Christ is, "the self-revelation of God":

5. How has Jesus imparted life to you? List some ways you can share that life with others:

LESSON THREE

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

KEY VERSE: *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12*

The men of a certain Indian tribe rise early every morning to perform an ancient ceremony that they believe causes the sun to come up. They believe that if they failed to perform this ritual, they would plunge the world into utter darkness. Never have they dared to skip a day just to find out if what they believed was true. The risk would be too great.

It is true that without sunlight, life on this planet would quickly cease to exist. No plants would grow, the temperature would rapidly drop, and in just a short time we would all be dead. But as vital as sunlight is to our physical existence, there is a light that is even more vital to our spiritual existence. It is the light that John describes as, *"The true light that gives light to every man..."* (John 1:9). This vital life-giving and sustaining light is Jesus.

Consider what Jesus has to say to the people and the religious establishment of his day.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12

1. THE CLAIM

"I am the light of the world." This claim was made not long after the Feast of Tabernacles. A very spectacular part of this feast was the use of the great candelabras. There were four candelabras in all and they were filled with oil by young men who had to climb ladders that were 50 cubits high. A cubit is considered to be about 18 inches – 50 cubits would be around 75 feet. So if these young men had to climb 75 feet to put oil in the candelabras, the candelabras themselves must have been at least 75 feet

tall. The light from these lamps was so brilliant that the Jewish writers of the *Mishna* say that, "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light." The brilliant illumination from these candelabras was a great occasion in the city of Jerusalem. But when the feast was over, the great candelabra would no longer be lit. And the great darkness formed a marked contrast with the brilliant light from before.

It was in the darkness of this post-festival period that Jesus made His claim. He spoke not only of being a light to Jerusalem, but of being a light to the entire world. The imagery implies that the world is in darkness, the darkness of sin. Men left to themselves cannot overcome this darkness. But Jesus claims that He can bring them the illumination necessary to banish the darkness in which they live.

The Old Testament prophesied of this light that was to come. In Isaiah 42:6, 49:6; and 51:4 Isaiah tells about the Servant of the Lord who would be, "*a light to the Gentiles.*" Jesus' claim is that He is that light. Jesus is not only the light for His followers, nor even of Israel, but He is the light of the entire world. That means He is the light for the poor, the rich, the black, the white, the Jew, the Gentile, the American and the Iranian. There is no one outside the light which is Jesus. Jesus is the light of the world and without Him the world remains in the darkness of sin.

2. THE CONDITION

There is a condition to enjoying this light. Jesus said, "*Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" – John 8:12b)

People are expected to react to the light. There are two basic reactions to the light. One reaction is to hide from the light. If you've ever been sitting in a darkened room for a couple hours and then someone turns on the lights your first reaction is to cover your eyes. The light is too much to take. You've been in the dark so long that it is hard to adjust to the brightness.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's book *The Hobbit* he tells of a creature named Gollum who lived far below the surface of the earth in the caves of goblins. It hadn't always been that way – at one time Gollum had lived above the surface just

like most people. But he moved underground to escape the outside world, and he lived there so long that he couldn't remember how many years it had been. In fact, he couldn't remember ever having been anyplace else. He became so accustomed to the darkness that it became his friend. He grew to be repulsed by the thought of light, and of goodness and laughter. Many of us become like this creature Gollum. We live in the world of sin so long that we begin to enjoy it. We begin doing things we never would have considered before. We start to think thoughts that at one time would have shocked us. And we find that we are very comfortable in this new world, where right is wrong and black is white, and there is no longer any moral standard by which we must abide. And when the message of Jesus, the light of the world comes into our lives, we cover our eyes and say, "No, no, turn off the light, I can't take it." And we crawl back down into our comfortable world, a world of darkness and sin. That is one reaction to the light of Jesus; but thank God, it is not the only reaction.

The second possible reaction is to run to the light, embrace it, and make it your own. Let's return for a moment to our darkened room. We've been sitting there for a long time and someone flicks the light switch. Again, our immediate reaction is to cover our eyes. But instead of keeping our eyes covered, we find that our eyes are rapidly adjusting to the light. And in a short time we find comfort in the light. It helps us to see what we're doing. It gives us warmth. It shows us how to get from here to there. And after we've grown accustomed to the light we find that we no longer desire the darkness.

When Jesus Christ, the light of the world, first comes into our lives His light oftentimes makes us recoil because it exposes the life of sin we've been living. But if we will run to the light, instead of running from the light, we will find that in a very short time we will become accustomed to it. And not only that, we will begin to desire the light, and we will not want to go a moment without enjoying the light. Because the closer we draw to the light of Jesus the more clearly we're able to see. Jesus says that to enjoy the light we must meet a certain condition.

We must come to the light and we must follow. In first-century Palestine a teacher like Jesus moved about from place to place and his disciples went with Him. So to "follow" Jesus, for people like His immediate disciples, meant literally following Him as He went from place to place.

But the word is also used in the sense of following Jesus as His disciple. While there was often in Jesus' lifetime a literal, physical following, the term was used from the first to mean becoming an adherent of Jesus and seeking to live according to His teaching. Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12b).

Jesus' claim is to be the light of the world. The condition to experiencing the light is following Jesus.

3. THE CONSEQUENCE

We live in an age of scientific enlightenment. We can pick up our telephone and talk to someone on the other side of the world. We can turn on a computer and watch it do the work of 100 men in minutes. We can receive a transplant if an organ fails. We can be counseled for any problem we are suffering through. The world waits at our doorstep and runs when we call.

Although we live in this scientific age we find ourselves in one of the darkest periods of history morally and spiritually. We have become so enlightened that we now believe it's a woman's right to have a baby murdered in her womb. We have allowed violent crime, drug abuse, sexual perversion, broken homes, political corruption, and international terrorism to be the order of the day. And in the midst of it all the Light of Jesus Christ shines ever more brightly.

But with the brightness of the light comes the two reactions we discussed earlier. Some will back away from the light and some will run to it. What are the consequences for these two sets of people?

Those who reject the light will experience darkness for eternity. It is not that God does not love these people or that He doesn't want them to experience the light. They have made a choice to reject God and His way. So God, being a just God, honors their choice. We are told that those who reject Jesus will spend eternity in hell. Paul writes, "*They will be punished*

with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9).

In this life even those who don't follow Jesus know something of the presence of the Lord. They are able to enjoy His creation, His provisions, His love. But in the end, if Jesus is not followed, they will be completely cut off from the presence of God. Many like to stress the agony of the fires of hell but fire is nothing compared with the thought of being eternally separated from Almighty God. Again, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 that those who reject Christ will be, *"shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power."* When we reject the light of Christ we reject God's presence. We are saying to God that we want nothing to do with Him. And if we make the decision to reject Him now we are making an eternal decision to reject Him forever.

There is a positive side for those who follow the light. They are promised that they will always have the light. As certainly as there is an eternity of separation from God for those who don't want Him, there is an eternity of communion for those who accept Him.

The unity we now experience with God is but a shadow of the personal relationship we will have with Him in eternity. Jesus describes us as possessing the *"light of life."* That is the life that comes from God, the life that is experienced by following God, it is the life that is God. If you are a Christian you are already experiencing the light of Christ, but you are still living in a very dark world. The day is coming when darkness will be no more for you, and all you will know is the pure light of being in the presence of God.

A woman named Rose Crawford had been blind for 50 years. "I just can't believe it!" she gasped as the doctor lifted the bandages from her eyes after her recovery from delicate surgery in an Ontario hospital. She wept for joy when for the first time in her life a dazzling and beautiful world of form and color greeted eyes that now were able to see. The amazing thing about the story, however, is that 20 years of her blindness had been unnecessary. She didn't know that surgical techniques had been developed, and that an operation could have restored her vision at the age

of 30. The doctor said, "She just figured there was nothing that could be done about her condition. Much of her life could have been different."

As I heard about her case for the first time, some questions came to mind. Why did she continue to assume that her situation was hopeless? Had no one told her about the wonderful advances in eye surgery? Then I thought of the plight of those unreached by the Gospel. How many will go on living in spiritual blindness because they have not seen the light of the Savior? How many will never see the true light that has come into the world? How many have yet to have the bandages removed from their eyes?

Discussion Questions

1. In what way does Jesus use the Feast of Tabernacles as a teachable moment?

2. Why do you think sin is often described as *darkness*?

3. Describe some ways Jesus has illuminated your life?

4. Is it easier to run to the Light (Jesus), or from the Light? Explain your answer:

5. Name several ways you could use Jesus' illustration of light as a witnessing tool:

LESSON FOUR

THE GATE

KEY VERSE: *Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."* – John 10:7

To properly understand Jesus' words that we'll be examining it will be beneficial for us to understand a little bit about sheep tending in the Middle East. In the Western world, methods of sheep-tending differ in general with those in the Middle East. In the West, the Shepherd, along with a sheep-herding dog or two, usually follows the flock. But shepherds in the East walk out in front, leading their sheep.

In the Holy Land, a shepherd leads his sheep all during the day from pasture to pasture. Then, in the evening, he calls them to him. The sheep follow after their shepherd to a watering place and then to the sheep-fold, where they bed down safely through the night. According to Eastern custom, the pens are always composed of rock to provide safety from such enemies as thieves and wild animals. They often place sharp thorns or briars on top of the rocks to keep out wolves and other predators. An opening, or gate, is left in the middle of one side of the rock-walled pens. At night the shepherd stands at this entrance and examines each sheep as it enters into the fold. The shepherd next builds a fire outside the entrance to scare off wild beasts. Then he eats his dinner, and lies down for the night. He places his body across the entranceway to the pen, satisfied that his sheep are safe. In essence, the shepherd is the gate, and no one or no thing can pass into the sheepfold, unless it walks through him.

In John 10:1-10 we learn that Jesus is the gate, and if we will become His sheep we will gain entrance to many wonderful things.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all

his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." – John 10:1-10

1. ENTRANCE TO SALVATION

"I am the gate," Jesus said, "whoever enters through me will be saved." When we come to Jesus we are both saved from something and saved for something. We are saved from sin. We are saved from sin's penalty and also its power. We notice in Mark 2:5 that Jesus not only healed a paralytic of his physical problems but Jesus said to him, *"Son, your sins are forgiven."* In Second Corinthians 5:19 we learn that for those who have come to Christ, God is no longer counting their sins against them. And Second Corinthians 5:17 teaches that, *"...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

When we come to Jesus we leave our sinful life behind us. Everything that we have done in the past, the thoughts we shouldn't have had, the things we shouldn't have done, the words we shouldn't have said, all are wiped away from our record when we come to Jesus Christ. There is nothing that you have ever done that is beyond forgiveness. When we come to Jesus we are saved from all our sin.

When we come to Jesus we are also saved from death. We are not saved from physical death, but what we are concerned about is what happens after physical death. The Bible teaches us that those who reject Christ will be experiencing spiritual death for eternity. Those who are in Christ will never experience spiritual death, but will be spiritually alive forever.

Consider the following words from Jesus:

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." – John 5:24

"I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."
– John 8:51

The Christian needs to understand that his physical death is better understood not as death, but as rebirth. We are born once physically, we are born again spiritually when we accept Jesus, and we are born into eternity when we pass from this life. We are not really dying; we are actually living life in its fullest sense for the very first time. When Jesus saves us He saves us from death.

When we come to Jesus we are also saved from hell. In Matthew 25:46 Jesus explains what will happen to those who haven't entered into salvation: *"they will go away to eternal punishment"* and then he tells us *"but the righteous to eternal life."* When Jesus saves us He saves us from an eternity in hell.

Jesus also saves us for some things. We are not simply saved from sin, death, and hell, but God has a purpose for our lives. He has saved us for some very wonderful things. He has saved us to live lives of holiness. God expects us, as saved people, to live lives of purity. Peter writes, *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'"* (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Our common goal should be to become more and more like Christ. God doesn't say, "Now that you're saved, just keep living like you always have." Instead He calls us to a higher standard. As Christians we are not to give in to the flesh as those in the world do. The next time you start to watch a movie, or listen to some music, or go out on the town, ask yourself this simple question – "Would I do this with Jesus?" And if your answer is "No", then you know that this particular activity doesn't fit in with the life of

holiness God calls us to. You might ask, "Do you expect me to give up things in my life that don't live up to God's standards?" And the answer is, it doesn't matter what I expect, what matters is what God expects. God has saved us so that we might become imitators of His holiness.

Jesus has saved us for eternal life. Again, in John 5:24 Jesus informs us, *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."* Our salvation is not temporary, but eternal. We are not saved for a moment, but forever. Paul tells us that, *"our citizenship is in heaven"* (Phil. 3:20). We don't even really belong on this earth, because our names are written in the record books of heaven. The line to the old hymn says, "this world is not my home I'm just a'passin' through", and in light of eternity, that is a correct statement. We're only here for a moment, but we'll be in heaven forever.

2. ENTRANCE TO SECURITY

Jesus said, *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture"* (v. 9). Many today are desperate for some kind of security. The crime rate goes up so fast we can't keep track of it. Many have bought home security systems to ward off burglars or worse. Businesses hire security guards to protect both people and their place of business. Some of you may have even purchased "The Club"® security device for your car. But with all the security we have tried to purchase we find that no one really feels any more secure. When we come to Jesus we find real security.

We are secure because Christ is our Shepherd. We learn in verse 3 that Jesus knows each of us by name. No matter how many people come to Jesus He still knows each and every one of us on a personal basis. No matter where we go, no matter what we do, Jesus knows us and watches over us. Jesus leads us to where we must go. Consider verse 4: *"When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."* Jesus leads us by setting an example for us to follow. He shows us how we are to treat each other, how we are to live our lives and how we are to worship God. Jesus leads us by showing us how to be the people God wants us to be.

Jesus never loses a sheep. Jesus said concerning His sheep, *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one"* (John 10:28-30).

No one can come and take us away from Jesus, because we are securely held in His hand. We are secure because Christ is our Shepherd. We are also secure because Christ is our Lord. Those who are Christ's sheep know His voice (vv. 3-4). They do not run when they hear Him call. They do not ignore Him, but run to Him to hear what He has to say. We also learn from verse 4, that if we are truly His sheep, we will go wherever He leads us. When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we must also accept Him as Lord. We will go where He wants us to go, we will say what He wants us to say, and we will do what He wants us to do. He is our Shepherd, He is our Lord, He is our Master.

3. ENTRANCE TO SATISFACTION

Jesus said of the shepherd, *"He will come in and go out and find pasture"* (v. 9). The shepherd leads His sheep to the place where they can eat and where they can find satisfaction for their physical needs. The need that we most often have is not physical, but spiritual.

I remember the Rolling Stones singing, "I can't get no satisfaction." They said that they tried and tried and tried and tried, but they still couldn't get any satisfaction. Many of us have tried, like the Rolling Stones, to find some satisfaction, but we find we keep coming up empty.

The problem is that we keep going to the wrong sources. Some try to satisfy themselves by getting more money, and they find that they only want more. Some try to satisfy themselves through drugs and alcohol, and find that their dissatisfaction only grows worse. Some try to satisfy themselves by becoming successful, but they find that success is subjective and they never know when they've really made it.

True satisfaction only comes when we find spiritual pasture. Jesus will satisfy our spiritual needs. He will take that hollow feeling and fill it with His grace. Jesus will satisfy our emotional needs. His will be the hand that wipes away our tears. Jesus will satisfy our need for community. He points to our brothers and sisters in Christ and shows us we never need to be lonely again.

4. ENTRANCE TO SUFFICIENCY

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (v. 10).

When we come to Jesus He gives to us the gift of abundant life. Jesus gives us a life that is abundant with meaning. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters. John informs us that we are the *"children of God"* (John 1:12). Paul tells us that we are *"co-heirs with Christ"* (Rom. 8:17). When we realize this newfound status it gives our life a whole new outlook. We can go through life knowing the special place that we each hold in the heart of God. We now belong to God. God gave us life, and through our sin we took it back. But now through Jesus Christ we are giving ourselves back to God. He has a right to us and we belong to Him. When we realize that, our life takes on new meaning.

Jesus also gives us a life that is abundant with purpose. We are now headed in a specific direction. Without Jesus we didn't know where we were going. But now Jesus points the way for us, and that way is straight up. We live our lives with purpose because we now know for whom we live. We now have a standard by which to live by. The decisions we have to make in life are no longer such a struggle. We bounce everything that we do or say off of Jesus. He is our standard for living, He is our purpose, He is our God.

We've all seen the scientific experiment with the rat in a maze. The rat has to find the right door to get cheese. Our world is like that maze, and many of us wander around it trying to find the way out. Jesus stands as both the way out and the way in. He is the way out of the confusion of the world and the way into the peace of God.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been locked out of the house? How did you feel?

2. Does the picture of Jesus, our Shepherd, placing His body across the entrance to the sheep-fold help you to better understand His nature? Explain:

3. Name some things we are saved *from*, and some things we are saved *for* when we come to Christ:

4. If you are a Christian, explain what it feels like to know you will never experience death:

5. Do you feel safe and secure knowing Christ is your Shepherd? If so, explain why:

6. Explain how you can have satisfaction in this life:

LESSON FIVE

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

KEY VERSE: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* – John 10:11

In research laboratories, biologists often base their studies on mice or rats, since their bodily functions are somewhat similar to that of humans. Other scientists comment that we are like ants or bees because they, too, are social creatures that live in highly structured societies.

Psychologists have sometimes compared humans to dolphins because of the similar ratio of brain mass to body size. However, the Bible most often compares mankind to sheep. David, a shepherd himself, employed this comparison repeatedly in the Psalms; *"we are his people, the sheep of his pasture"* (100:3); *"You led your people like a flock"* (77:20); *"Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture"* (79:13). Isaiah the prophet wrote, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray"* (53:6). In Matthew's gospel we read that when Jesus, *"saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (9:36). And in Luke 12:32 Jesus consoled His disciples with these words, *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."*

I don't know about you, but I don't find it particularly flattering to be identified with sheep. From what I understand they are notoriously dumb creatures. So it is not necessarily a compliment to be compared to a sheep – that is, until we find out about our shepherd. In the text below we find that Jesus is our shepherd. And not only is He our shepherd, but He describes Himself as the "Good Shepherd." If we're willing to look we will find that the difference between Jesus and all other shepherds is that the Good Shepherd, Jesus, truly loves His sheep.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is

not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." – John 10:10-18

1. THE GOOD SHEPHERD'S LOVE IS DISPLAYED ON A CROSS

Four times in the above verses Jesus states that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Now that is a very unusual thing for a shepherd to do. A Palestinian shepherd faces many dangers. The Bible gives us examples of different wild animals that would threaten a flock. David mentions his fight with a lion and a bear while he was looking after sheep. Amos speaks of the shepherd who rescued two legs or a piece of an ear from a lion's mouth. At an earlier time Jacob said to his father-in-law Laban, *"I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself"* (Gen. 31:39).

So it is plain that there were many dangers that could arise for the shepherd. But the Palestinian shepherd didn't plan on dying. The job certainly had its dangers, but nothing that the shepherd thought he couldn't deal with. Allowing for the fact that there would be problems as he looked after the sheep, he thought he could cope. Otherwise he wouldn't be a shepherd. He knew that there was always the possibility that he could be seriously hurt, or even die, but he knew that death would be an unlikely result of his profession. No man willingly dies for animals like sheep.

Jesus explained that what made Him different than any other shepherd is that He would voluntarily give up His life in order that His sheep might live. That for Jesus was the central issue. It was His purpose. He had come to this planet to bring salvation, and that meant death on behalf of His sheep.

Usually, the sheep would serve as a blood sacrifice for the shepherd. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd in that He served as a blood sacrifice for the sheep. Jesus emphasized the substitutionary nature of His death for the sheep. He specifically says that He lay down His life *"for the sheep."* That word "for" is the most important word in history. Jesus died "for" us, that is, He died in our place. His death was substituted for the death of the sheep. A blow is about to fall on the sheep, but the Shepherd steps in front of the cross with His body and takes the punishment.

That is what we mean by the theological term "substitutionary death" – Jesus substituted Himself for us. We deserve death, but Jesus died in our place. Jesus showed He was the Good Shepherd, by loving us enough to die on the cross. We show our love back to Him by accepting what He did in our place, dying to ourselves, and asking Him to live through us.

2. THE GOOD SHEPHERD'S LOVE IS PROVEN BY AN EMPTY TOMB

Jesus emphasized the ultimate purpose in His death. In verse 17 He stated that He lays down His life, *"only to take it up again."* The resurrection was not some chance circumstance, but the ultimate purpose of His death. Jesus died so that He might live again.

Jesus' desire is for all of us to experience the resurrection. The death of a Palestinian shepherd would be a disaster for his sheep. But not the death of the Good Shepherd, because He comes back to His sheep. He experienced death so we wouldn't have to. He experienced resurrection so that we might share in it ourselves.

The resurrection is proof of the Good Shepherd's love. Jesus said concerning his life, *"I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again"* (v. 18). Jesus did this by His own power. He chose to die and He chose to rise from the dead all for you and for me. No one made Him do it. He did it entirely of His own accord. Sometimes the Bible teaches that it was the Father who raised the Son. But here Jesus states that He had the authority to take up His life again. Both are true, for the Father and Son

work together in perfect harmony. The Son is not greater than the Father, and the Father is not greater than the Son. They work together for the same purpose, to save us from death because of their love.

3. THE GOOD SHEPHERD'S LOVE IS MANIFESTED WITH OPEN ARMS

In John 3:16 we learn that, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* We need to concentrate on two specific things in that famous verse: First, God loves the whole world, not just a part of it. Second, whoever believes in Jesus will receive eternal life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a universal Gospel.

Here in John 10:14 Jesus says, *"I know my sheep and my sheep know me,"* and He was talking about the people of Israel. In Matthew 15:24 Jesus said, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."* But the wonderful news for us is found in verse 16 of the text under consideration, *"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."* Jesus was speaking of all the non-Jews of the world who would be called to salvation. Notice He says, *"There shall be one flock and one shepherd."* Jesus was saying that there was coming a day when there would be no division between Jew and Gentile, or black and white, or yellow and red.

We all are one in Jesus Christ. There are no longer any divisions to be made between the people of Israel and the rest of the world. We can all be one through our relationship with Jesus. God holds no special place in His heart for any nation or tribe. His chosen people are all people who will come to the Son regardless of nationality. That's why Paul could write to the Galatians, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (3:28-29).

Understand that the ones who are from Abraham's seed are not those who have inherited his blood. Abraham's seed consists only of those who have given their lives to Christ. The true Israel has been manifested through the Church. We are no longer Jews, or Greeks, or Americans. We have become one flock and we have only one Shepherd – His name is Jesus.

And the love that comes from the Good Shepherd is shown in that His arms are open wide. What was once made available only to the people of Israel has now been given to everyone who believes. Israel was once considered God's chosen people but Peter informs all believers in Christ that, *"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..."* (1 Pet. 2:9). Jesus says *"there shall be one flock and one shepherd."* His arms are open wide.

As we learn of the Good Shepherd, I am still somewhat uncomfortable with being called a sheep. That is, until I begin to understand of what infinite value I am to God. The Good Shepherd loves us so much that He died in our place, He rose from the dead, and He welcomes us into His fold with open arms. When I know that I find that my only desire is to be one of His flock.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do people need a Shepherd?
2. Name some ways that Jesus is unlike any other shepherd? How do you benefit from those differences?
3. In what way has Christ served as your substitute?
4. How can you show gratitude for what Jesus has done?
5. Jesus said, “I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:14). Explain how Jesus identifies with His flock:
6. What action is necessary to be one of the “chosen people”?

LESSON SIX

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

KEY VERSE: *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."* – John 11:25

*If death ends all, then evil must be good,
Wrong must be right, and beauty ugliness.
God is a Judas who betrays his Son,
And with a kiss, damns all the world to hell—
If Christ rose not again.*

That haunting poem was penned by an unknown soldier killed in World War II. Its tone almost reminds us of Paul's reasoning in First Corinthians 15:12-19 which begins, *"But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* and closes, *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."* Job, writing several thousand years ago articulated a question that has bothered mankind for centuries: *"If a man dies, shall he live again?"* (14:14)

Human beings are fascinated by the mystery of death. Rodin, the French master sculptor best known for "The Thinker," attempted to capture the emotions provoked by the first human death in a sculpture of Adam and Eve embracing the dead body of their son Abel. Instead of reflecting pain and sorrow, their faces seem inquisitive about the mystery of death.

Curiosity about death has persisted throughout the ages. And even more than this, a curiosity about life after death. As a background leading up to the text under consideration, allow me to summarize what has taken place so far: Jesus is sent word that his dear friend Lazarus, the brother of both Mary and Martha, has become ill. After hearing of Lazarus' illness Jesus stayed where He was for two days, and then, along with His disciples, headed for Bethany where Lazarus and his sisters lived. When they arrived in Bethany they were given the sad news that Lazarus had been dead for

four days. Many had come to comfort Mary and Martha and to mourn over Lazarus' death. As Jesus approached, Martha heard that He was coming and ran out to meet Him. And that is where we pick up the story:

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" – John 11:21-26

1. FROM THE DARKNESS TO THE LIGHT

The Old Testament definitely speaks of the resurrection. There are three accounts of people that were raised from the dead. In 1 Kings 17 it is recorded that Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son from the dead by calling out to the Lord and then stretching himself across the boy three times. In 2 Kings 4 we read that Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son by laying on him until his body grew warm, and then lay on him again. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes – he was alive. In 2 Kings 13:21 the story is told about a man's dead body that was thrown into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones it came to life and stood on its feet. Those are the only recorded accounts of resurrection taking place in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament does teach of a future resurrection. Job wrote, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* (19:25-27). David wrote, *"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand"* (Psalm 16:9-11). In Isaiah 25:8 we are promised that God, *"...will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces..."* Again

Isaiah promises that, *"...your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead"* (26:19). There are several other Old Testament passages that refer to resurrection, but these serve as examples of the Old Covenant teaching on the subject. If you will study these verses in light of the whole Old Testament revelation you will see that they are not very clear or complete. The teaching of resurrection has always been there, but it has been somewhere in the background.

Jesus brought the truth of the resurrection to the light. Jesus told Martha, *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha was aware of a coming resurrection for she said, *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* Jesus answered, *"I am the resurrection"* (John 11:24). By His teaching, His miracles, and His own resurrection, Jesus clearly taught the resurrection of the human body. He has declared once and for all that death is real, that there is life after death, and that the body will one day be raised by the power of God.

The New Testament teaches us that resurrected believers will be like the risen Christ. Consider the following passages:

"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." – 1 Cor. 15:49

"who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." – Phil. 3:21

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

– 1 John 3:2

Jesus brought from the shadows the truth that we who are in Christ will receive a body like His resurrection body. But what kind of body was Jesus' resurrection body? It was a body of flesh and bones. It was a body that retained the wounds of crucifixion. It was a body capable of eating fish

around the fire with His companions. But what made it different, and what will be different about our bodies, is that the resurrection body will never die. The resurrection accounts of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament were limited in that these people eventually died again. But the resurrection body we will receive will be like our Lord's in that it will never die. Jesus brought the resurrection from the darkness to the light.

2. FROM THE BIBLE TO OUR HEARTS

Through the years I have grown to love the Bible more and more. I am constantly amazed at the wonderful things God has chosen to reveal to us. Every time I read it I find something I didn't notice before. I stand in awe of a book compiled of 66 books, written over a time span of 1500 years, in 3 different languages, by 40 different authors from varying backgrounds, on 3 different continents – and yet it has complete agreement on every subject and doctrine it teaches. I have no trouble believing that a book such as this has the divine imprint of God on it, and for that I am grateful.

Sometimes I wish I could actually have been there when different things the Bible describes were taking place. I'd love to have been a witness to Adam and Eve's first day in the Garden. Or to have been with Moses and the Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea. Or to have been with the prophet Elijah when he had his showdown with the prophets of Baal. But most of all, I would like to have walked with Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. I am somewhat envious of John who wrote in his first epistle concerning Jesus, *"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"* (1 John 1:1). John and the others had heard, seen, and touched Jesus Christ.

Martha, Lazarus' sister, had had the same experience. In the Gospels it is clear that Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus were very good friends with Jesus. He had spent much time in their home, having a deep fellowship with them. And now a tragedy had struck. Lazarus was dead. Martha knew from the Old Testament that one day Lazarus would rise again. But when Jesus told her *"I am the resurrection,"* He took this

doctrine out of the Book and transformed it into a person. He made the words of the Scriptures come alive because He is the living Word.

When you are sick, you want a doctor and not a medical book. When you are being sued you want a lawyer and not a law book. Likewise, when you face the last enemy, death, you want a Savior, not just a doctrine written in a book. In Jesus Christ every doctrine taught in the book becomes personal. When you belong to Jesus the Bible goes beyond interesting stories and commands to follow. It comes to life because you have come into a personal relationship with the one who describes Himself as "Resurrection." When you belong to Jesus you have all that you will ever need in life, death, time, or eternity. While we thank God for what the Bible teaches, we realize that we are saved by the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and not by a doctrine written in a book. We believe every word in the Book is true, but our faith is not in a book as much as it is in the person of Christ. Jesus brings the resurrection from the Bible to our hearts.

3. FROM HOPE TO REALITY

We notice that Martha was looking to the future, knowing that one day her beloved brother Lazarus would rise again. Many Christians look forward to the future, to the day they will be fully united with the Savior. And this is, of course, a good thing. But Martha's friends were looking to the past. In verse 37 we learn that they were wondering why Jesus hadn't prevented Lazarus from dying. Many of us find ourselves looking to the past. Some remember better days gone by and they long to experience them again. Others look to their past and wish for some way to erase the mistakes they have made in life.

Although there is some benefit to examining our past, and a greater benefit in looking toward the future, we find that Jesus is trying to center our attention on the present. He said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies"* (v. 25). Jesus was talking about the here and now. He was saying that we don't have to wait till the end to experience resurrection; it is available to us in the present. Those who place their faith in Christ will never experience death but will live

forever in the power of the resurrection. The New Testament is filled with this teaching:

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." – Rom. 6:4

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." – Gal. 3:20

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." – Phil. 3:10-11

Jesus is concerned with where we are right now. Are we living a life dependent on Him? Are we experiencing the excitement of resurrection power? Are we daily expressing that power in our relationships? We need to look to the future and sometimes we need to examine the past, but what is most important is the present. Consider where you are right now in your relationship with Jesus Christ: Is He real to you? Can you reach out and touch Him? Is He making a difference in your life and the lives of those around you? He can, and will, if you'll only believe.

If you will read on in our text you will discover that Jesus indeed raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus stood before his tomb and loudly commanded, *"Lazarus, come out!"* And, *"The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go'"* (v. 44). No doubt there was great rejoicing that day in the town of Bethany. There can also be great rejoicing in your town today. Rejoicing because Jesus has brought the resurrection from the Darkness into the Light, from the Bible to our Hearts, and from Hope to Reality.

Discussion Questions

1. Does it bother you to discuss the subject of death? Why or why not?
2. How is the truth of the resurrection made clearer in the New Testament compared to the Old Testament?
3. In what way is the resurrection of a Christian similar to that of the risen Christ?
4. Explain the difference between knowing the facts about the resurrection and living out the resurrection in your personal life:
5. Is more benefit gained by focusing on the future resurrection or the resurrection reality of the present? Explain your answer:
6. If you know that the resurrection is real, is there any reason to fear death?

LESSON SEVEN

THE BREAD OF LIFE

KEY VERSE: *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."* – John 6:35

I love to eat homemade bread. I've found there are several ways to enjoy it: One of the best ways is right out of the oven with butter spread all over it. Or, you can have it on the side with spaghetti or some other pasta dish. I've also seen some people dip it into bean soup and eat it that way. I really do enjoy homemade bread, but I have to watch that I don't eat too much of it or I'll end up like that man who had so many chins, he had to be careful not to burp or it would start a ripple. The only thing I don't like about homemade bread is when it's all gone.

Bread brings satisfaction, but it is only temporary. One day the bread will be gone, or if I don't eat it right away it will become stale, and then moldy, and I'll have to throw it away. I know that when the bread is gone I'll soon become hungry again, and until I get something to eat I won't be satisfied. In the Bible, Jesus describes Himself as "Bread." The most intriguing thing about this bread is that it will last forever. I want you to keep that in mind as we examine Jesus' claim to be the Bread of Life.

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."
– John 6:35

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." – John 6:51

1. WE NEED SPIRITUAL FOOD

When we are physically hungry our stomachs growl. But if we will open our ears to the sounds of the world around us I believe we will hear the growling of peoples' souls. The people of Jesus' day experienced this

spiritual hunger. At the beginning of this chapter Jesus had fed the crowd of 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. And now they have come to Jesus wanting more food. Their physical hunger was only temporarily satisfied. Jesus told them, *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you..."* (John 6:27). Jesus knew that although these people had a real need for physical nourishment, their need for spiritual nourishment was even greater.

Is that truth not evident in the world today? Can you hear the cries of the masses who are living their lives without Christ? Can you hear their souls crying out for something to eat? Can you see the moral degradation of our world and see that it directly corresponds to the need for spiritual fulfillment? Why does the drug addict keep taking drugs? Why does the alcoholic keep drinking? Why does the prostitute sell her body? Why does the homosexual march through the streets of our cities declaring to have "Gay Pride"? Why do people turn to religious cults in droves? Why do men and women reject those they have committed their lives to in marriage and go out and have adulterous relationships?

It might seem like too simplistic of an answer, but I believe it is because they have a spiritual void in their lives. They walk through life with an empty spot in their heart and they don't know how to fill it. So they turn to the things they think will satisfy, things like alcohol, sex, and cults. And when these don't satisfy their craving they turn to another vice, and another. Do you want to know why depression is the most common mental problem in the world today? It is because people have hungry souls and they don't know how to feed them.

2. WHO CAN FILL OUR NEED?

Secular agencies and governments have been somewhat successful in feeding hungry people. During times of natural disaster or crisis different agencies are quick to come to the rescue. And no matter how you feel about our present welfare system we do know that there are not many poor people in the United States going without food.

But when it comes to spiritual hunger secular agencies and individuals have done more harm than good. Those outside of Christ seem to believe that all human problems can be solved through psychology and psychiatric treatments. In today's world psychology doesn't try to fix problems as much as it tries to give approval to them. Up until just a couple years ago Psychiatric journals listed homosexuality as a mental disorder. Now it is considered acceptable behavior. Have the facts changed? Have there been studies that have changed their minds? Has some evidence come to light they didn't have before? No, the facts about homosexuality have remained the same. But in our world it has become politically incorrect to point a finger and say, "that behavior is wrong." Psychology now points it finger and says, "That behavior is acceptable as long as it's acceptable to you."

It seems that our world is not trying to help people fill their spiritual void as much as it is trying to fulfill their need for self-acceptance. And that goes totally against the teaching of the scriptures. I can only fully accept myself when I have fully accepted Christ. Our world is so caught up in the psychological realm that we find we are beginning to accept concepts that are totally foreign to the Bible.

Here are some examples:

- Human nature is basically good – the Bible says it is inherently evil.
- People have the answers to their problems inside them – the Bible says we can find the answers to our problems through Jesus and His Word.
- The key to understanding and correcting a person's attitudes and actions lies somewhere in his past – the Bible teaches that understanding will come when our past is forgiven.
- Individual's problems are the result of what someone else has done to them – the Bible says our problems are a result of what we have done to ourselves.
- Human problems can be purely psychological in nature, unrelated to any spiritual condition – the Word of God shows us that almost all of our problems are spiritual in nature.

- Deep-seated problems can be solved only by professional counselors using therapy – the Bible teaches that the Word of God and the Holy Spirit is what we truly need to counsel us.
- Scripture, prayer, and the Holy Spirit are inadequate resources for solving certain types of problems – but the Bible teaches us that these are the only real ways to get the problems solved.

People are crying out to the world for help to fill the spiritual void in their lives. But the advice the world has to give only makes the void grow larger.

3. PARTAKE OF JESUS

The people Jesus fed wanted a sign from heaven. They said to Jesus, *"Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'"* (John 6:31). But Jesus replied, *"the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"* (John 6:33). He went on to say, *"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world"* (John 6:48-51).

Jesus was saying, "You want a sign from heaven? I am the sign from heaven. You want proof? I'm giving up my life for you. You want manna that will temporarily satisfy? I am the bread that satisfies forever." God saw the hunger of the world's soul. So He sent Jesus to satisfy that hunger. Jesus proclaimed, *"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:40). God has sent us His Son to fill our need.

We have all seen films of the starving children of the Third World. It is almost impossible to look at them very long. Their stomachs are protruding, there are flies stuck to their faces, and they are crying out for something to eat. Let's say we had a big grocery bag filled with nutritious food and we placed it in front of one of those children. But we put the bag inside a cage

that could not be unlocked. The child could see the food; and would have a great desire for the food; but until the cage was unlocked the food would do him no good.

The spiritually hungry of the world are in a very similar situation. They have a great hunger in their life but no way to fill it. But Jesus enters the scene. They learn who He is and begin to understand what He's about. They can look at Him and see that He is what is needed to fill their spiritual stomachs. But sometimes they find that Jesus, like our sack of groceries, is locked up in a cage and they can't reach Him. Is it because Jesus doesn't want them to have Him? No. It is one of two reasons: First, sometimes we Christians have locked Him up by not telling the world that He is available for their every need. And they can see us and they can see Jesus somewhere in the shadows, but until we tell them about Him we are just as cruel as someone who wouldn't share their food with a starving child. The second reason has to do with the spiritually hungry person. Some know without a doubt that Jesus will satisfy their need. But they themselves are unwilling to unlock the door. It isn't a door holding Jesus in; it is the door of their heart that is keeping Him out. The starving child wouldn't hesitate to partake of food if he was able, but for some reason many without Christ refuse to partake of Him even though He is standing at the door of their heart.

How do we partake of Jesus? Jesus tells us concerning Himself, *"If anyone eats of this bread He will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world"* (John 6:51). He goes on to say, *"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"* (John 6:53). Was He talking about cannibalism? No. Was He talking about the Lord's Supper? No, it has nothing to do with that. Jesus was saying, "To partake of Me is to make Me a part of you." He is saying, "Don't hold back, take all of Me, allow Me to work in your life."

A very thin man met a very fat man in the hotel lobby. "From the looks of you", said the fat man, "there might have been a famine." "Yes", was the reply, "and from the looks of you, you might have caused it."

The good news of Jesus is this: The Bread of Life will never run out. It will last forever. No matter how many partake of it there is always more for the hungry soul in need.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a time when you had to go without food for a long period of time – have you ever felt as hungry spiritually as you have physically?

2. List some people that you presently know who are spiritually hungry:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

What can you do to help feed the people listed above?

3. In what ways does Jesus fill our spiritual needs?

4. Have you ever shut off your supply of “Bread” (Jesus)? Why or why not? If yes, what happened?

5. Explain in two or three sentences how a person can partake of Jesus?

LESSON EIGHT

THE LIGHT

KEY VERSE: *"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."* – John 12:46

As newsman Clarence W. Hall followed American troops through Okinawa in 1945, he and his jeep driver came upon a small town that stood out as a beautiful example of a Christian community. He wrote, "We had seen other Okinawan villages... down at the heels and despairing; by contrast, this one shone like a diamond in a dung heap. Everywhere we were greeted by smiles and dignified bows. Proudly the old men showed us their spotless homes, their terraced fields... their storehouses and granaries, their prized sugar mill." Hall said that he saw no jails and no drunkenness in this village. He was told that an American missionary had come there some 30 years earlier. While he was in the village, he had led two elderly townspeople to Christ and left them with a Japanese Bible. These new believers studied the Scriptures and started leading their fellow villagers to Jesus. Hall's jeep driver said he was amazed at the difference between this village and the others around it. He remarked, "So this is what comes out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus."

What these men were describing was a village that had been transformed by the light of Jesus Christ. One of Jesus' purposes in coming to this earth in human flesh was to show us how we might be transformed and subsequently, how we might transform our world.

Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." – John 12:44-46

1. THE LIGHT OF ACCESS

If I say I need to access something or someone, I am saying that I need to have a means of approach. I am seeking a right to enter. Up until the time that Jesus arrived on the scene mankind was searching for a way to

access God the Father. Of course there was a limited access through the sacrificial system of the Law and through the system of the priesthood. But it was limited in that there was always a great distance between man and God, and no matter how hard man tried to gain access, the distance remained.

Some time ago Barry Davis said he drove to the Asbury Seminary library in Wilmore, Kentucky to do some research. When he stepped out of the car he slammed the door behind him and instantly realized that he had left his keys in the ignition. He stood there looking through his car window at his keys dangling just a few inches away. He wanted to gain access to his car, but he couldn't. He didn't have the key.

This is the dilemma believers under the Law were experiencing. They could see God from a distance, and they wanted to gain access, but they didn't have the means to gain entry. Now there are two truths we need to note under this idea of Jesus being the light of access.

Truth 1: This Access is to God the Father

From John 12:44-45 we learn that God sent Jesus for the purpose of allowing people to gain access to Him. To gain access to his car he called his wife so that she could come to his rescue with another key. When she arrived he opened his car door, climbed inside, and drove away. When Jesus came to earth He came as the key that unlocked the door that allowed us access to God the Father. Jesus said, "*he who receives me receives the one who sent me*" (Matt. 10:40). In other words, "He who takes me as Savior receives the means to access and approach the Heavenly Father."

Truth 2: This Access Only Comes Through Jesus Christ

When Barry needed to gain access to his car he could have done it in several ways: He could have called the locksmith and had him make a key. He could have broken the window to his car. Or he could have called the

police to see if they could assist him. Although none of these choices were the best, he could gain access in any of these ways if he had chosen to.

This is not the case with gaining access to God the Father. The only way to gain access to the Father is through the Son. Jesus declared, *"No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). In John 10:9 He said, *"Whoever enters through me will be saved."* Jesus is the exclusive means to access the Father.

It is not unusual today to read of so-called Christian leaders stating that there are many paths to the Father. They say some come through Buddha, some through Confucius, some through Mohammed, or through some other spiritual leader. The claim is usually based on your level of sincerity. As long as you believe strongly that your way is correct, God is compelled to accept it. But the Bible clearly teaches us that Jesus is the light of access – and He is the only light of access.

2. THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE

We gain knowledge in several ways when we come to the light of Jesus Christ. The first way we expand our knowledge is in our awareness of God. We have already considered how we can gain access to God, but there is much more. When we come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord we also come to know God in a personal and intimate relationship. Concerning a person who believes in Him, Jesus states, *"When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me"* (John 12:45). In John 14:9 Jesus said, *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* We need to understand that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all have the same attributes. When we come into a relationship with Jesus Christ we have in reality come into a relationship with the Holy Trinity. Our eyes are opened, we see the light, and that light draws us into a supernatural knowledge of the Godhead. We don't just know God in the sense of being able to recite Bible facts about Him. We know Him in the sense of personal relationship. Paul writes, *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"* (2 Cor. 4:6). Through Jesus Christ God has fully revealed Himself to us.

A second way we gain knowledge concerns the way we begin to view ourselves. Once a small factory had to cease operations when a vital piece of machinery broke down. The firm's own mechanics couldn't get the equipment working again so an outside expert was called in. The expert looked the situation over for a couple of minutes and then took a hammer and tapped the machine in a certain spot and it started running beautifully. When he submitted a bill for \$100 the plant owner figuratively hit the ceiling and demanded an itemized bill, which subsequently was forthcoming as follows: \$1.00 for hitting machine; \$99.00 for knowing where to hit. God uses His Word to "hit" us where we need fixing.

The knowledge we gain of ourselves from the light of Christ can be either positive or negative depending upon what we do with the light. Consider the following verses:

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." – John 3:19-21

"Everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" – Eph. 5:13-14

The knowledge we gain of ourselves is this: we are inherently evil and are resistant to the light of Christ because that light exposes all of our sins and all of our rebellion. The good news is that we don't have to remain that way. This leads us to a third area of knowledge – knowledge of who we can become. Let's take another look at Jesus' purpose statement:

"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." – John 12:46

Jesus has come to take us out of where we are to show us what we can become. When we come to the light, we ourselves become sons of the light. Jesus urges all to, *"Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light"* (John 12:36). Jesus didn't come to earth to put us down and tramp on us. He came to earth so that we could realize our full potential in Him. In fact, the Apostle John makes the incredible promise that, *"to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12). This is the most important knowledge that you and I will ever gain.

3. THE LIGHT OF SALVATION

At age two a little girl began to learn all the traditional fairy tales, like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *The Three Little Pigs*. Her mother had also taught the little girl many of the familiar Bible stories. This little girl's mind was like a sponge and she took all of these things in. One day her mother read to her Revelation 3:20 from her Bible, *"Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* When the mother finished the verse, she asked her daughter, "If Jesus is knocking at your heart's door, will you open the door and let Him in?" Without a moment's hesitation the little girl responded, "Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin."

Sadly, in reality, many do refuse Jesus' offer of salvation. In fact, there may be some here today who are still walking in darkness. If you are not yet a Christian you need to understand several facts about Jesus' light of salvation. If you already are a Christian you need to understand these simple facts so that you can share them with others.

Fact 1: Jesus doesn't want you to remain outside of the light

Consider Jesus' words again: *"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness"* (John 12:46). All who are without Christ are in darkness, but Jesus came specifically so that you could come out into the light of His salvation.

Fact 2: Jesus provides a way for you to be saved

Let's consider a few verses from John's gospel to help explain: *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned"* (3:18). Trust must be placed in the person of Jesus Christ. A person cannot experience salvation unless they believe that He is truly the Son of God who died and has risen on their behalf. *Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (8:12). Once you have trusted in Jesus you need to "follow" – that means you become obedient to His desires for your life. *Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit"* (3:5). After you have placed your trust in Christ, your obedience involves being baptized into Jesus and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Fact 3: There is no reason for any of us to remain in darkness

Jesus has clearly stated that His purpose in coming was to take us out of darkness so that we could remain in His light. The light of salvation is the gift of eternal life. It is a light that comes in and illuminates our world.

In a certain mountain village in Europe several centuries ago, a nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. At last he decided to build them a church. No one saw the complete plans for the church until it was finished. When the people gathered, they marveled at its beauty and completeness. Then someone asked, "But where are the lamps? How will it be lighted?" The nobleman pointed to some brackets in the walls. Then he gave each family a lamp which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship. "Each time you are here the area where you are seated will be lighted," the nobleman said. "Each time you are not here, that area will be dark."

The light of access, knowledge, and salvation is here to light up your church and your world. Are you ready to carry that light into the dark places of your community, your workplace, and your family? Only when we begin to bring the light into the dark places will we begin to make a real difference in our world. Jesus' purpose is our purpose. Jesus' light is our light. Let's take this light and shine it in our lives so that the world may know Jesus too.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt “locked out” when it came to access to God the Father? If so, explain how you felt and why:

2. What do you think of Jesus’ exclusive claim to the only way to the Father (John 14:6)? Does it make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?

3. In what ways is knowledge gained when we come to the light of Jesus Christ? In what way are we benefited by that knowledge?

4. When you compare your own life to the light of Christ does it effect you in a positive or a negative way? If negative, what can you do to change that?

5. Consider the facts concerning Jesus being the light of salvation – how can knowing and acting on these facts change your life, your church, your world?

LESSON NINE

THE SAVIOR

Key Verse: *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* – John 3:17

Billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Some of the groups near the front talked heatedly – not with cringing shame, but with belligerence. "How can God judge us?" said one. "What does he know about suffering?" snapped a brunette. She jerked back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror, beatings, torture, death!"

In another group a black man lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched for no crime but being black! We have suffocated in slave ships, been wrenched from loved ones, toiled till death gave release."

Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He permitted in His world. How lucky God was to live in Heaven where there was no weeping, no fear, no hunger, no hatred! Indeed, what did God know about what man had been forced to endure in this world? "After all. God leads a pretty sheltered life," they said.

So each group sent out a leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. There was a Jew, a black, an untouchable from India, an illegitimate person, a victim of Hiroshima, and one from a Siberian slave camp. In the center of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case.

It was rather simple: before God would be qualified to be their judge, He must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God "should be sentenced to live on earth – as a man!" But because He was God, they set certain safeguards to be sure He could not use His divine powers to help Himself: Let Him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of His birth be

doubted, so that none would know who is really His father. Let Him champion a cause so just, but so radical, that it brings down upon Him the hate, condemnation, and efforts of every major traditional and established religious authority to eliminate Him. Let Him try to describe what no man has ever seen, tasted, heard, or smelled – let Him try to communicate God to men. Let Him be betrayed by His dearest friends. Let Him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let Him see what it is to be terribly alone and completely abandoned by every living thing. Let Him be tortured and let Him die! Let Him die the most humiliating death—with common thieves.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the great throngs of people. But when the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew: God had already served His sentence. (Author Unknown).

God came in the flesh and experienced all that has been described because He had an objective in mind: He wanted to save us from our sins.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." – John 3:16-18

1. GOD'S MOTIVE: LOVE

Napoleon thought he could be great because he founded a kingdom on force. Perhaps it's worth listening to his words of warning at the end of his life. Napoleon said, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded His empire upon love. And at this hour millions of men would die for him."

Do you know that God loves you? Do you understand that no matter who you are, or where you've been, or what you look like, or how you've lived your life, God loves you? John 3:16 informs us that God loves the "world." The word "world" is a word that includes every man, woman, and child who has ever or will ever walk the face of the earth. Instead of the word "world" put your name in its place and you'll begin to understand in a personal way the love God has for you. "For God so loved _____ that he gave his one and only Son."

Much of the so-called love in the world today is a perverted love. It is a love that is only offered when a person proves of what worth they can be to another. It is what is called "conditional love" – I will love you "if"... The love of God is unconditional, there are no strings attached. If you spit in God's face He still loves you. If you curse His Name He still loves you. If you push a crown of thorns down upon His head He still loves you. If you beat Him until His flesh is raw and bleeding He still loves you. If you nail Him to a cross He still loves you. God doesn't love you "if", He loves you "in spite of". God knows all of our faults, our doubts, our sins, but He still chooses to love us. It is a love that is beyond our comprehension, but that does not make it less real.

How much love does it take to send your Son to die for someone else? *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son..."* The motive behind Jesus' coming to earth for our salvation is love. A love that is so strong and so deep that I have no way to illustrate it for you. I can only point to examples of love in this world and say, "It's much more than that."

2. GOD'S MISSION: TO SAVE

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." – John 3:17

An orphaned boy was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to get upstairs to rescue the boy, perished in the flames. The boy's cries for help were finally answered by a man who climbed an iron drain pipe and came back down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck. Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to

determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town's wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons they felt they should be chosen to give the boy a home. But as they talked, the boy's eyes remained focused on the floor. Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hand from his pockets, revealing severe scars on them. As the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition. This was the man who had saved his life. His hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap the boy threw his arms around the man's neck and held on for dear life. The other men silently walked away, leaving the boy and his rescuer alone. Those marred hands had settled the issue.

And so it is with Jesus. His nail-pierced hands remind us that he has rescued us from sin and its deadly consequences. Jesus' purpose in coming was to save. It was a rescue mission designed to take us away from our lives of sin and death so that we could experience holiness and eternal life.

God's motive of love is carried out in His mission to save. Do you need proof that God loves you? Just look at the cross. The Bible tells us that, *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."* – 1 John 3:16

The question is, what did Jesus come to save us from? He came to save us from our sin and our rebellion and our mistreatment of God. Peter, speaking of Jesus, says, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed"* (1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus came and placed Himself on the cross to face the death we deserved. He took our sins upon Himself. He is our substitute. He has taken our punishment. This was Jesus' mission – to save us by becoming our sin and accepting the wrath of the Father unto Himself. Paul writes, *"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus' mission was to come so that our sins might be removed, and so we could be ushered into the presence of the Father. Jesus came to save us so that we would not come under condemnation for what we have done.

What did Jesus save us to? He saved us from our sins, He saved us to eternal life. Verse 16 tells us that, *"whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* The biblical concept of "eternal life" is more than immortality, and it involves not only the soul but also the body. From creation man was made for never-ending life, not for death. To have eternal life means much more than to live forever. The stress is more on the quality than on the quantity, though both are affirmed. This is the life Jesus offers to the world. A life that is free from the sin and tribulation of this world – yes! But much more than that, it is a life that is filled with the glory of Almighty God. Jesus gave a short definition of eternal life in John 17:3, *"Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

Eternal life involves knowing God in a complete sense that is beyond our grasp as long as we exist in this sinful world. But Jesus came to save us to this time when we will be in full and total fellowship with God, when nothing shall distract us from His holiness. A time when we can rightfully claim that we have looked into the face of God. This is eternal life, not just to live forever, but to live forever with God.

3. GOD'S MEANS: BELIEF

Someone has said that, "Man's life is made up of 20 years of his mother asking him where he is going, 40 years of his wife asking him where he has been and one hour at his funeral when everyone wonders where he is going." We don't need to wonder where we are going, if we come to God believing in Jesus Christ; because belief in Jesus is our means of salvation.

"Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." – John 3:16b).

"Whoever believes in him is not condemned." – John 3:18

We see these tremendous promises to the person who believes, but what does it mean to believe? We know it is not a matter of simply

acknowledging who Jesus is, it goes much further than that. It literally means to place our trust in Him, to have faith in Him.

When John Paton was translating the Bible for a South Seas island tribe, he discovered that they had no word for trust or faith. One day a native who had been running hard came into the missionary's house, flopped himself in a large chair and said, "It's good to rest my whole weight on this chair." "That's it," said Paton. "I'll translate faith as 'resting one's whole weight on God.'"

That is what it means to believe in Jesus. To believe in Him means to rest one's whole weight on Him, to trust in Him completely for your salvation. To come to a point where you realize you cannot save yourself but that Jesus does have the ability to save you through His death and resurrection. To believe in Jesus means to give yourself over to Him fully.

Belief in Jesus means we will obey Him. If I truly believe in something or someone I act upon that belief. If I believe the ice cream in my dish is good I will act upon that belief by eating it. If I believe someone is in the process of robbing my house, I'll call the police. If I believe I've been wrongly accused, I'll defend myself. True belief is demonstrated through action. If I believe in Jesus Christ it will be demonstrated through obedience to Him.

Since He tells me I need to repent, I'll repent. Since He tells me I need to be baptized, I'll be baptized. Since He tells me to witness, I'll witness. Since He tells me to be honest, to live a pure life, and to help those in need, those are the things I will do because my belief in Him results in action. To believe in Jesus Christ means that I give my life to Him so that He might use me in anyway He sees fit. Anything less than that is not pure belief.

Does that mean I have to be perfect? No, not at all. But it does mean I strive to be everything that Christ wants me to be, knowing that when I fall short of His goals I can come to Him for grace and forgiveness. And when I believe in Jesus I can claim His promise of eternal life.

An anonymous author made this striking comparison:

Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, and Jesus for only 3. Yet the influence of Christ's 3-year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching from these men who were among the greatest philosophers of all antiquity.

Jesus painted no pictures; yet some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from Him. Jesus wrote no poetry; but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by Him. Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the hymns, symphonies, and oratorios they composed in His praise.

Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble carpenter of Nazareth. His unique contribution to the race of men is the salvation of the soul! Philosophy could not accomplish that. Nor art. Nor literature. Nor music. Only Jesus Christ can break the enslaving chains of sin and Satan. He alone can speak peace to the human heart, strengthen the weak, and give life to those who are spiritually dead.

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, explain what it means to love unconditionally:

2. In what way(s) has God proven His unconditional love for humankind?

3. What did Jesus come to save us *from*? What did Jesus come to save us *for*?

4. Explain what it means to believe in Jesus?

5. How is obedience connected to belief?

LESSON TEN

THE CONVICTER

Key Verse: *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* – Luke 5:27-32

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." – Luke 5:27-32

Centuries ago a number of workmen were seen dragging a great marble block into the city of Florence, Italy. It had come from the famous marble quarries of Carrara, and was intended to be made into a statue of a great Old Testament prophet. But it contained imperfections, and when the great sculptor, Donatello saw it, he refused it at once. So there it lay in the cathedral yard, a useless block. One day another sculptor caught sight of the flawed block. But as he examined it, there rose in his mind something of immense beauty, and he resolved to sculpt it. For two years the artist worked feverishly on the work of art. Finally, on January 25, 1504, the greatest artists of the day assembled to see what he had made of the despised and rejected block. Among them were Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, and Pietro Perugino, the teacher of Raphael. As the veil dropped to the floor, the statue was met with a chorus of praise. It was a masterpiece! And the succeeding centuries have confirmed that judgment – Michelangelo's David is one of the greatest works of art the world has ever known.

Jesus saw in the flawed life of Levi the tax collector, a Matthew, the writer and evangelist. Jesus still sees men and women with His accomplished artist's eye today. Jesus sees within each one of us a masterpiece waiting to be chiseled out of flawed material. Jesus' purpose in coming was to

convict us of our sins, so that we might come to Him to have those sins removed and replaced with His righteousness. What is our reaction to Jesus, the convicter?

1. WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE OUR SIN

The following three verses are helpful to us in this regard:

"There is no one righteous, not even one." – Romans 3:10

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." – Romans 3:23

"Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." – Romans 5:12

From these verses we learn that there is not a person who has ever existed who has not sinned. I have sinned and you have sinned. Think of the most godly person you have ever known or heard about and realize that no matter how good of a person they might be they have still sinned. The problem of sin is a universal one, "all have sinned". The first action we must take in response to the conviction Jesus brings us is to recognize our state of sinfulness. There are some who take this all-important step and there are others who do not.

Those who Jesus describes as "healthy" and "righteous" are those who have yet to recognize their state of sinfulness. Now those terms would usually be used to describe those who have it all together. But in this case they are used to describe those who, although they think they have it altogether, do not. The sickest and biggest sinners in this world are those people who refuse to recognize their own sinfulness. Sometimes they are religious people like the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. Sometimes they are people who think they are above the Law. Many times they are people who would describe themselves as, "good, moral, law-abiding

citizens." The one thing all of these people have in common is that they believe that somehow they have either attained righteousness on their own, or they have no need for righteousness at all. In so many words Jesus is saying, "I didn't come for people who aren't willing to recognize their sin – I'm here for those who know they're sinners and are ready to do something about it."

To come to Jesus we must first recognize that we are sick people in need of a cure. We are sinners in need of cleansing. Matthew (Levi) did exactly that. He knew he was a sinner and he was willing to look deep down inside his heart and see that it was black with sin because of his rebellion against God. Have you looked at your heart lately? What do you see? If all you see is righteousness and goodness, quit fooling yourself and recognize that you, just like everybody else, have sinned and are in need of a cure.

2. WE NEED TO RESPOND TO GOD'S CALL

Once we have recognized that we are sinners we need to do something about it. That "something" we need to do is follow Jesus and accept His offer of forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus said that He came to *"call...sinners to repentance."* To "repent" means to "change your mind." It means to quit following the sinful nature and begin to manifest the nature of Christ in your life. It means to kick the sin-man out the door and let the God-man inside. It means to give possession of yourself to Jesus Christ and let Him take control. Jesus said that He was calling us to "repent".

There are only two possible responses to Jesus' invitation to repentance. The first possibility is rejection. This is seen in the response of the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. The reason they rejected Jesus' invitation is because they had not yet recognized that they were, in fact, sinners. Instead of turning to the One who could save them, they placed themselves on the throne of their own righteousness and asked, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" They thought that they were too good for the people Jesus was keeping company with. They believed that they were holding to the high moral ground. But through their rejection of Christ they were proving that they were more immoral than the rest of the crowd.

The second possible response to Jesus' invitation is reception. This was the choice of Levi (Matthew). Now there are several things we can say about this tax-collector, Levi: We know that his father's name was Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). He was undoubtedly skilled in writing and keeping records. He was apparently well-versed in the Old Testament since the Gospel he wrote quotes more from it than any other gospel writer. We also know that he left a lucrative position to follow Jesus.

One difference between Matthew and the others Jesus called was that Matthew was a man of means. We know this simply by virtue of his occupation, but it is also demonstrated in the text at the beginning of this chapter. Matthew had the money to pay for a "great banquet" and he also held this banquet at "his" house, which was obviously big enough for all these guests. If the other disciples had chosen to leave Jesus they could have gone back to fishing for a living, but Matthew gave up everything to follow Jesus.

Where do you find yourself right now? Do you find yourself in a state of rejecting what Jesus has to offer? Are you holding on to self, refusing to come to Christ in repentance? Or are you like Matthew, ready to give up what the world has to offer to receive what Jesus has to give you?

I know the standard reasons why people refuse to give their lives to Christ: It will upset my family and friends; I'm not ready for commitment; I don't know enough yet; I'll accept Him later. But nobody ever rejects Christ because He doesn't have anything to offer them. All of our reasons for rejection look ridiculous when we compare them with what Jesus is offering us.

Jesus will take our sin and turn it into His righteousness. All that Jesus wants is to give us the eternal blessings He has at His disposal. He is holding out His hand, offering us eternal life, freedom from sin and guilt, a life filled with direction and purpose. A future that is secure.

3. WE NEED TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Do you know what is 750,000 miles long, reaches around the earth 30 times, and grows 20 miles longer each day? Answer: The line of people who are without Christ.

Those who have responded to Jesus' call are expected to reach out to others. Verse 29 tells us that Matthew held a great banquet "for Jesus." Now what was the purpose of this banquet? It was to provide an opportunity for those in attendance to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Notice who Matthew invited – tax-collectors and sinners; the very people who were receptive to the gospel message. These people knew that they were sinners. There was no religious pretense. These are the people that Jesus came to save. Those people who were willing to admit that they had failed at life and they were in need of salvation.

If we are to bring people to Jesus for salvation, we need to find those who will acknowledge they are sinners. And there is only one way to find sinners, befriend them, associate with them, and introduce them to the Lord. Befriending sinners does not mean we condone their sin. It means we care about their eternal state. Lost people are not going to beat down the doors of the church trying to get in. They need those who are already believers to show them the way. That can only happen when we begin to build relationships with them and they see that we really care.

An artist, seeking to depict on canvas the meaning of evangelism, painted a storm at sea. Black clouds filled the sky. Illuminated by a flash of lightning, a little boat could be seen disintegrating under the pounding of the ocean. Men were struggling in the swirling waters, their anguished faces crying out for help. The only glimmer of hope appeared in the foreground of the painting, where a large rock protruded out of the water. There, clutching desperately with both hands, was one lone seaman. It was a moving scene. Looking at the painting, one could see in the tempest a symbol of mankind's hopeless condition. And, true to the Gospel, the only hope of salvation was "the Rock of Ages", a shelter in the time of storm.

But as the artist reflected upon his work, he realized that the painting did not accurately portray his subject. So he discarded the canvas, and painted

another. It was very similar to the first: the black clouds, the flashing lightning, the angry waters, the little boat crushed by the pounding waves, and the crew vainly struggling in the water. In the foreground the seaman was clutching the large rock for salvation. But the artist made one change: the survivor was holding on with only one hand, and with the other hand he was reaching down to pull up a drowning friend.

That is the New Testament picture of evangelism – that hand reaching down to rescue the perishing. Until that hand is extended, there is no Gospel, and there is no hope for the world.

Jesus the convicter has given us three marvelous opportunities: The opportunity to recognize our sin. The opportunity to respond to His call to repent and receive salvation. And the opportunity to reach out to the lost world. You and I need to take advantage of those opportunities if we are to be all that Jesus has created us to be.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it difficult for some people to recognize their own flaws and sinfulness?
2. Explain what Jesus sees when He looks at our hearts:
3. According to the Bible, how many people have not committed sin?
4. List the two possible responses to Jesus' invitation:
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____
5. What is the best way to lead someone to make the right choice?
6. How can you befriend non-Christians?

LESSON ELEVEN

THE WITNESS

KEY VERSE: *"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." – John 18:37*

The story has been told of a judge who stared at a case-hardened criminal. "Because of the gravity of this case," he said, "I am going to give you three lawyers." "Never mind three lawyers," replied the defendant. "Just give me one good witness"

Isn't that what each one of us needs today? One good witness. One who will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There is One who has come into the world for the purpose of testifying to the truth. And this One who has come, Jesus, wants us to accept His testimony.

As we focus on this lesson I want you to place yourself in the jury box. By the time our lesson ends you will need to make a decision based upon what you have heard. The decision that you make will determine where and how you will spend eternity. Now before you can reach a decision there are two factors that must be considered.

1. THE WITNESS

The setting for the following text is the last week of Jesus' life. Jesus has been arrested, questioned by the high priest Annas, then Caiaphas, and now stands before the Roman Governor, Pilate and gives this testimony:

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." – John 18:36-37

Before we can determine the credibility of a man's testimony we must examine the man himself. As we consider Jesus, the witness, what can we learn about Him?

First we learn that He is a King. Jesus admitted to being a king when Pilate questioned Him, but He was not claiming to be the kind of king Pilate was thinking of when he asked Him. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world but from another place. Paul describes Jesus as, *"the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God"* (1 Tim. 1:17). In the Apocalypse He is the, *"King of the ages"* (Rev. 15:3), as well as the, *"King of Kings and Lord of Lords"* (Rev. 19:16).

There is a vast difference between the royalty that belongs to Jesus and the royalty that Pilate had in mind. Jesus' does not rule over territory, but over the hearts and minds of men. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It is not in the natural realm. Jesus' kingdom exists wherever men accept Him and bow down to Him as King. Jesus explained, *"the Kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke 17:21). Now if Jesus' kingdom is not territorial, but spiritual, we see that the only limits that are placed on His rule are the limits we place on our own hearts. Once those limits are removed the kingdom of God comes within and we begin to live our lives in the supernatural realm where Jesus is King.

The second thing we find out about our witness is that He was born. Now that might not be a startling revelation to you, but understand the significance of what He is saying. Jesus is telling us that He is the ruler of a kingdom, and that kingdom is a supernatural kingdom, but in order for mankind to come into this kingdom the King would have to enter into the natural realm where we are. Jesus is not saying here that this was the point of His origin, He is saying "this is the point I left the heavenly realms and was born into the natural world so that I could establish my kingdom in the hearts of men." "...For this reason I was born," Jesus said, "and for this reason I came into the world." He is announcing to the world that He left the supernatural realm to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men.

So here is our witness. He is a King unlike any other. He is a King who came to establish His kingdom in our hearts. So we know who He is, but before we make a decision there is a second factor we must consider:

2. THE TESTIMONY

Jesus said, *"I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"* (v.37b). And then Pilate asks the question on the hearts of many, *"What is truth?"* That is a good question isn't it? What is "truth"?

Jesus is the message of truth. In the Old Testament God is described as, *"the God of truth"* (Psalm 31:5; Isa. 65:16). In the New Testament we find expressions like, *"the truth of God"* (Rom. 15:8), and Paul's teaching that idolaters exchange the truth of God for a lie (Rom. 1:25). This teaching of both the Old and New Testaments is that truth is essential to God's being. In John's gospel Jesus states, *"I am the truth"* (14:6). In John 1:14 Jesus is introduced as One who came *"full of grace and truth."* Jesus Himself is the embodiment of truth of which He came to witness. When Jesus says, *"I came to testify to the truth."* He is telling us that He came to testify about Himself. Jesus is the message. He is the truth.

Jesus is also the messenger of truth. He not only is the truth, He is the One who communicates truth to the world. He says that He came to, "testify." How did Jesus spread His message? How did Jesus testify to the truth? He testified to the truth by living a life that was true. Everything that Jesus did or said was based on the foundation of truth. Jesus' teaching is a testimony to the truth. Jesus' compassion is a testimony to the truth. Jesus' miraculous works are a testimony to the truth. Jesus' death on the cross is a testimony to the truth. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a testimony to the truth. Jesus' return is a testimony to the truth. Jesus' life, death, burial, resurrection, and return all testify to the fact that He is the truth.

Now the two factors that we need to consider concern the Witness: Who is He? – and the Testimony: What does He have to say? Having established that the Witness is the King of Kings, and that His testimony is the truth, the question we must all ask ourselves is, "What are we going to do about it?" At the beginning of this lesson I told you that you were to place yourself in

the jury box. Each of us, having considered the witness and His testimony, have a decision to make. So the last thing we need to consider is:

3. THE VERDICT

There are only two possibilities when it comes to declaring our verdict. The choices are not innocent or guilty, they are, 1) Reject the Witness and His testimony; or 2) Accept the Witness and His testimony. Whichever verdict you choose it is your choice and it has no bearing on the rest of us. You must choose for yourself when it comes to this King named Jesus.

The first possible verdict is to reject Jesus and His testimony. If you are one who has chosen to reject Jesus, Jesus has a question to ask you: *"If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?"* (John 8:46). That's a good question isn't it? If Jesus is telling the truth, why do you reject Him and His testimony? Why do you resist giving in to the One who wants to give you everything? Perhaps you are like the Jews who stated, *"We have no king but Caesar"* (John 19:15). Perhaps you're not ready to turn over your allegiance to this King. Somehow you believe that everything will turn out all right on its own. And you turn your head to the sin in your life, and mistakenly tell yourself that everything's okay.

It is said that about two hundred years ago, the tomb of the great conqueror Charlemagne was opened. The sight the workmen saw was startling. There was his body in a sitting position, clothed in the most elaborate of kingly garments, with a scepter in his bony hand. On his knee lay the Holy Scriptures, with a cold, lifeless finger pointing to Mark 8:36: *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"*

All of the things people think they are gaining by rejecting Jesus are actually a loss. Because the day will come, if they continue to reject Him, when they will realize that all of their excuses were walls they were putting up to keep God out of their life. This God who wants to take us and bless us and be with us forever, is the one we are shutting out. And if we continue to reject Him and His approach, He will honor our choice and allow us to go our own way. But it doesn't have to be that way. God doesn't want it that way, and I don't believe any of us really want it that way either.

There is a second path to take, another verdict, another decision we can make. Accept Jesus and His testimony. Jesus said, *"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* In John 8:47 Jesus said, *"He who belongs to God hears what God says."* Can you hear God speaking to you as you read His words?

President Franklin D. Roosevelt got tired of smiling and saying the usual things at all those White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed his big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely!" or "Just continue with your great work!" Nobody listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

Many of us are so consumed with our lives and the things going on around us that we never take the time to stop and listen to what anybody is saying. The tragedy is, many of us don't even take the time to hear what God is saying. Again, Jesus said, *"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* Are you listening to Jesus today? Because if you are really listening, you will find yourself walking towards Him. If you can really hear Him today, you will receive Him into your life. If your verdict of this witness and His testimony is acceptance, then you are about to begin a holy adventure that cannot be put into words. If your verdict of this witness and His testimony is rejection, I beg you to reconsider before it's too late.

Once a sailor brought his girlfriend to the local minister late on a Friday evening and asked that they be married. "That's fine," replied the preacher, "Do you have a marriage license?" The sailor hung his head. "We got to the courthouse too late, it was already closed." The minister shook his head, "I'm sorry, I can't perform a marriage ceremony without a license." The sailor put a pleading expression on his face, "Couldn't you just say a few words to get us through the weekend?"

There are those who are not yet Christians who wish I could say a few words to get them by as they continue to live their lives without Christ. But I have no words to give. Each one of us must make a personal decision as to what we will do with Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever sat on a jury? If so, what criteria was used to determine the credibility of a witness? Would Jesus meet that criteria?
2. If Jesus is King, what territory does He reign over?
3. What impact, if any, does the fact that Jesus was born into this world have on you?
4. Jesus is both the Message of truth and the Messenger of truth – what does that mean on a practical level?
5. What do people gain by rejecting Jesus? What do they gain by accepting Jesus?

LESSON TWELVE

THE SON

KEY VERSE: *"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* – John 6:40

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." – John 6:37-40

25% of South Korea's 40 million people are Christians. The city of Seoul has over 6,000 churches. 100 years ago it had none. God's will is being accomplished in South Korea.

Costa Rica has seen a 100 percent increase in evangelical churches in the past four years. God's will is being accomplished in Costa Rica.

An estimated six million people in Africa are turning to the Lord each year. Continent wide, 5,000 new churches are started annually. God's will is being accomplished in Africa.

More Iranians were saved in the last decade than during the previous 70 years. God's will is being accomplished in Iran.

One out of every three in the former Soviet Union now profess to be born again. God's will is being accomplished in the former Soviet Union.

Jesus' purpose in coming was to do the will of the Father. And we see from the text we just read that the Father's will involves people coming to salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus has done everything that is necessary for

the Father's will to be accomplished. Let's look together at some ways that God's will for the salvation of mankind is taking place.

1. RECEPTIVITY

If I were to describe you as being a "receptive" person I am saying that you are a person who has the ability to take in, to absorb, to accept. This can have many applications: You might be receptive to guests in your home; to a truth that was new to you; to requests that are made of you. When we speak of God's will for our salvation in terms of its receptivity, we are saying that God wants to take us in, to absorb us, to accept us. There are a couple of specific actions involved in God's receptivity.

The Father gives us to the Son. Twice in these verses Jesus speaks of us being given to Him by the Father: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me"* (v. 37); *"I shall lose none of all that he has given me"* (v. 39). In John 17 Jesus repeats this truth as He prays to the Father (vv. 2,6,9,24). The question is: How does the Father give us to the Son? I want to answer this question as simply as possible by what I believe to be the truth of Scripture.

First, we need to understand that God foreknows who will believe and who will reject Jesus in the sense of foreknowing what men will do. Second, God sees all time as present. Third, God foreknows who will be faithful, and by grace gives the faithful to Jesus. Am I saying that God picks out certain people for salvation and others for damnation? Not at all! I am saying that our all-knowing God knows who will accept Jesus and be faithful to Him and these are the ones who have been given to Christ. God's will is that all men come to Him, but not all men do. The ones who do are given to the Son by the Father. God is receptive to us.

Another specific action taken is that the Son receives us. Have you ever felt rejected? UCLA Football coach Pepper Rodgers was in the middle of a terrible season. It even got so bad that it upset his home life. He recalls, "My dog was my only friend. I told my wife that a man needs at least two friends, and she bought me another dog."

There are some people who have gone through serious periods of rejection. One woman shared her story of her childhood as a polio victim: "When my mother left me in Sunday School, I always asked to wear her locket. She thought I liked the locket. That wasn't it at all. I knew that I wasn't worth coming back for, but I knew she would come back for her locket."

One of the wonderful truths that we learn about God's will for our lives is that Jesus Christ will not reject us when we come to Him. Jesus said, *"whoever comes to me I will never drive away"* (v. 37b). Some people have the mistaken idea that Jesus is not receptive to them. They think that if they came to Him for salvation He would reject them. They believe that their sins have been so terrible that they must beg Jesus to accept them, or they must "pray through" the experience. We need to understand that Jesus is on our side. He died so that we could experience the salvation He offers. Jesus will not reject us, He wants to accept us. Jesus waits for us with open arms to welcome us into the fold of the kingdom.

2. SECURITY

It is God's will that we be secure in our salvation. And there are three persons who keep us saved:

First, we are secure because we believe. In verse 37 we read that we must come to Jesus. In verse 40 we read that our salvation rests in Jesus Christ because we believe in Him. In a previous lesson we looked at this word "believe" and learned that if we believe on or in something or someone we will act upon it. To "believe" in Jesus means that we come to Him in obedience to His conditions for salvation. Both the word translated "looks" and the word "believes" in verse 40 are in the present tense and can only mean continuing action. I am secure in my salvation because I am continually living in a state of belief and reliance upon Jesus Christ. As long as I believe in Jesus I have security, and that security remains unless I would choose to cease believing in Christ. We in no way, shape, or form save ourselves, but our salvation is dependent on our belief in Jesus.

Secondly, we are secure because we are kept by the Father and the Son. Even though our belief plays a role in our security, we can thank the Lord that He remains active in our salvation. He wants us to be saved and to continue to be saved. Again, we are not in a battle with God, He is on our side in this. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all here to guard the commitment we have made to them. God does not cast anyone away. If we leave we do it on our own accord. Jesus said that the will of the Father was that *"I shall lose none of all that He has given Me"* (v.39). Consider Jesus' words in the following passage:

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." – John 10:27-30

Here in these verses it is evident that both the Father and the Son have an active part in guarding our salvation. We are held in the mighty hands of the Father and the Son. We are secure because we are guarded by God Himself. Paul wrote these assuring words to Timothy, *"I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12).

There are three persons at work in keeping us secure. We are secure because we continue to believe, and because God the Father and God the Son are guarding us.

3. GENEROSITY

A woman who was shopping took a break for some coffee and to eat some cookies she'd brought with her from home. She sat in the one unoccupied chair across from a man reading a newspaper. She sipped her coffee and reached for a cookie, only to see the man across from her also taking a cookie. She glared at him; he just smiled at her, and she resumed her eating. Moments later she reached for another cookie, just as the man also took one. Now, feeling quite angry, she stared at the one remaining cookie – whereupon the man reached over, broke the cookie in half and offered

her a piece. She grabbed it and stuffed it into her mouth, as the man smiled at her again, rose, and left. The woman was really steaming as she angrily opened her purse, her coffee break now ruined, and put her magazine away. And there, in her purse, she saw her bag of cookies. All along she'd unknowingly been helping herself to the cookies belonging to the gracious man whose table she'd shared.

Whether we realize it or not we've been going through life sharing God's cookies – we've been enjoying all the blessings He gives us in life. And do you know what? God has so much more to give to those who come into a relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. God's will for our salvation is a generous one. Not only does He save us from condemnation, He wants to give us some things in addition to that.

He wants to give us eternal life. Jesus said, *"My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life"* (v.40).

In an Indiana cemetery there is a tombstone over 100-years-old that bears the following epitaph: "Pause, Stranger, when you pass me by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so you will be. So prepare for death and follow me." An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply: "To follow you I'm not content, until I know which way you went."

We know that all those who are in Christ will be with Christ forever. Ecclesiastes 3:11 speaks of our eternal state with God: *"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."* This gift that God has given us of life eternal is beyond our comprehension, but we do know that it is a life with God, and that is a life worth living forever.

The second thing that God wants to give us is a resurrection body. When we die our souls immediately go to be with the Lord. But the time is coming when we will receive a resurrected body like the glorified body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The time when we receive this body is described by John as, "the last day." Consider the following passages:

“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” – 2 Corinthians 5:1

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” – 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

“But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” – 1 John 3:2

There are many more Scriptures we could look at that all teach we will receive a resurrection body like that of our Lord. And the time that we will receive it is when Jesus Christ returns for His bride, the Church.

Jesus the Son came to earth to do the will of the Father concerning our salvation. The Father's will is receptive; it brings security, and is overflowing with generosity. God's will is being accomplished all over the world, and it is being accomplished in many lives today.

Discussion Questions

1. Who gives us to the Son? Explain your answer:

2. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus Christ will not reject you?

3. What three Persons keep us saved? Explain each one's role:

4. What two gifts does God give those who believe in His son?
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____

5. How is God's will being accomplished?

LESSON THIRTEEN

THE SEEKER

KEY VERSE: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* – Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." – Luke 19:1-10

Zaccheus was a man who was lost and Jesus came to find him. Jesus said "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." This is a direct fulfillment of Ezekiel 34:11-12,16:

"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness".... "I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice."

Jesus' purpose in coming was to seek us out and save us from our sins. And in His purpose, we who are Christians find our purpose. Because when we put on Christ we also accept His mission as our own. As we

continue our study we will see that our common purpose can be broken down into two stages: 1) Quest; 2) Triumph.

1. JESUS' QUEST AND OUR OWN

In a testimony an evangelist one time described his mother as being love personified. As a boy he found her sitting at the table with an old tramp one day. Apparently she had gone shopping, met the tramp along the way, and invited him home for a warm meal. During the conversation the tramp said, "I wish there were more people like you in the world." Whereupon his mother replied, "Oh, there are. But you must look for them." The old man simply shook his head, saying, "But, lady, I didn't need to look for you. You looked for me."

When that mother reflected her Christian kindness toward the tramp she did something more than simply offer him welfare. It was a compassion that went out of its way to love the unlovely. That's the story of our Savior's life, death and resurrection. He came looking for us in the sick, the maimed, the lame, the bruised, the broken hearted, the wretched wanderer, the poor and forgotten, the prisoner, and the lonely rich.

The quest begins in the garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned they hid from God among the trees of the garden. They were ashamed because of their sin because they knew they had let God down. And as they hid trembling in their shame and their newly realized nakedness, they heard the voice of God call out, "Where are you?" And here we find the beginning of God's quest, of His seeking us out, of His desire to bring us back into fellowship with Him. God made Adam and Eve garments of animal skin to hide their nakedness, and in this act we see symbolically God's shedding of blood to atone for sins.

The quest continues in the person of Christ. God came in the flesh to seek us out and to save us. As Paul reveals, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15). We read in our text that Zacchaeus was looking for Jesus, but Jesus was already seeking for him. Jesus quest is to seek out all who are in need of salvation and to offer it to them. Mankind can only be saved through regeneration. When the Son of Man came to

save us, He came prepared to sacrifice all that He had to secure our salvation. Paul informs us that, "*(Jesus) humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross*" (Phil. 2:8). Zacchaeus climbed up a tree seeking the Savior. The Savior climbed up on a tree and was crucified seeking you and me. In John 12:32, speaking of His crucifixion, Jesus said, "*But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*" Through the cross event Jesus is calling out to a lost humanity, seeking us out, drawing us to Himself, so that we can be saved.

The quest continues through each one of us. Jesus' seeking didn't stop after His death and resurrection. He gave the Holy Spirit so that we might be empowered to seek along with Him. At His ascension Jesus promised the Apostles and promises to us today that, "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses*" (Acts 1:8). What is the power of the Holy Spirit to be used for? It is power that is given to us to seek out the lost and to have a bold witness.

Why aren't people coming to Christ the way they did in the book of Acts? Because the church, for the most part, has stopped relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. It has been said that, "The church today is raising a whole generation of mules. They know how to sweat and to work hard but they don't know how to reproduce themselves." In other words, the church is always busy doing good things, but perhaps we're not focusing on the right things. When we truly rely on the Holy Spirit to equip us, we will begin to focus on the most important thing, seeking and saving the lost. Jesus' Great Commission to the church was a command for us to continue on in the quest for the souls of mankind. Jesus said to, "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Paul asked a great set of questions in Romans 10:14, "*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*" The answer is, they cannot believe in one they have not heard of and they cannot hear without someone preaching to them. Who is called to preach to them? Who is called to seek after the lost?

Who is called to witness? Each and every one of us who carries the name of Jesus Christ – the quest continues through us.

2. JESUS' TRIUMPH AND OURS

Once a young minister rang the doorbell of some people he wanted to visit and was waiting for the homes' occupants to answer but no one came to the door. He sensed that someone was at home so he kept ringing. As a final departing act he wrote *Revelation 3:20* on the back of one of his calling cards and stuck it under the door: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

Two days later the minister received his calling card back in the mail with a brief note attached that simply contained the text from Genesis 3:10; "*I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.*" I guess there are times when we're glad people don't answer their door.

In all seriousness, when we seek the lost and share the gospel with them, many of them are ready to accept the message of Jesus Christ. Jesus statement to Zacchaeus in verse 9 is a statement of triumph: "*Today salvation has come to this house...*" Luke's Gospel tells us that, "*there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*" (15:10). Every time a lost person is found, every time a sinner is saved, the entire kingdom of God can stand up and shout for joy! We rejoice because we have triumphed in the great battle over the souls of men.

If you have never led anyone to Christ you are missing out on the greatest experience of your life. Because when God uses you as His witness you not only know the power of God is working through you, but you see that power in action in the heart of the one you are sharing the message of salvation with. We share the gospel of Christ knowing that we will not be triumphant in every case, but we realize if we don't share the gospel we will be triumphant in none. Our triumph comes every moment that we live our life for Christ.

In the third century, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to his friend Donatus: "It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have

discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians... and I am one of them."

Cyprian learned that to live for Christ is to be triumphant no matter what is going on in the world around you. For Zacchaeus, it would no longer matter what people thought of Him, or how people treated him, because the life he now led was one of triumph in Jesus Christ.

Former NBA center and coach Johnny Kerr said his biggest test as a coach came when he coached the expansion Chicago Bulls and his biggest player was 6'8" Erwin Mueller: "We had lost 7 in a row, and I decided to give a psychological pep talk before a game with the Celtics," Kerr said. "I told Bob Boozer to go out and pretend he was the best scorer in basketball. I told Jerry Sloan to pretend he was the best defensive guard. I told Guy Rodgers to pretend he could run an offense better than any other guard, and I told Mueller to pretend he was the best rebounding, shot-blocking, scoring center in the game. We lost the game by 17. I was pacing around the locker room afterward trying to figure out what to say when Mueller walked up, put his arm around me and said, 'Don't worry about it, coach. Just pretend we won.'"

One of the wonderful things about being a Christian is that we never have to pretend. We know that we are triumphant because of our relationship to Jesus Christ. And no matter what is thrown at us, poverty, disease, or death, we know that we are victorious because Jesus Christ has sought us out and we are living our lives for Him.

Jesus' purpose continues to be fulfilled today. It is an endless cycle that will continue until He returns for His Church. Seeking and saving, seeking and saving, seeking and saving. The wonderful thing about it is that we get to play a part. Because Jesus' purpose is our purpose. And so we go through our lives seeking and saving along with Him.

It is not like God set us in the world with no purpose, with no mission – He has sent us on a quest to find the lost and give them the message of Christ, and He has given us the blessing of eternally triumphing in the victory He shares with us.

Discussion Questions

1. What similarities do you see between yourself and Zacchaeus?
2. How did Jesus find you?
3. Name some reasons that Jesus seeks for us:
4. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is interested enough in you to seek you out?
5. In what way does the Holy Spirit empower us concerning Jesus' purpose?
6. How long will Jesus' purpose continue to be fulfilled?

LESSON FOURTEEN

THE DESTROYER

KEY VERSE: *He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. – 1 John 3:8*

Have you ever noticed how one structure must be destroyed so that a new structure can be built? The first permanent home of First Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky was the remodeled Triangle Fraternity House. That building had to be destroyed so that progress could be made and the new church structure they now meet in could be built.

We see this happening all the time – new subdivisions, new high rises, new skyscrapers – most of these buildings are erected only after some type of demolition has taken place.

Have you ever thought of Jesus as a destroyer? That title doesn't seem to quite fit when we're speaking of Jesus. When we talk about Him we're usually talking about fixing not destroying. But we need to understand that in order for Jesus to fix our lives and build them up into a beautiful structure some demolition has to take place. The old man, our sin, and the devil himself must be destroyed before the process of building can begin. So when we talk about Jesus as a destroyer, what we're really talking about is the first step that must be taken before progress can be made in our lives.

In the biblical texts we're about to look at we find three different characters who are affected by Jesus' work of destruction. They are the devil, humanity, and Jesus Himself.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” – Hebrews 2:14-15

"He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." – 1 John 3:8

1. A DOOMED DEVIL

The devil holds the power of death. Death is Satan's weapon. And as we shall soon discover, the only way to destroy Satan was to rob him of his weapon of death. The devil finds pleasure in our death – physical death, spiritual death, eternal death. Satan knew that God required death for us because of sin. Death had become the most certain fact of life. Satan knew that men, if they remained as they were, would die and go out of God's presence into hell. Satan wants to hold onto men until they die, because once they are dead the opportunity for salvation is gone forever. One of the devil's goals is to hold us in his possession until death because he knows that there is no escape for us once death has taken place.

The devil has been sinning from the beginning. Notice that John makes it a point to share the fact that the source of sin is the devil. All sin originates with Satan. There has never been a sin committed that did not have its origin in the Satanic mind. Now how are we to understand this phrase, *"the devil has been sinning from the beginning"*? How long Satan existed in the angelic state that God created him we do not know. But when he fell into sin by rebelling against God he became the originator and the instigator of sin. He enticed Adam and Eve and through them put the whole human race in the bondage of sin.

So far we've seen that the devil holds the power of death and that he has been in a state of sin since the beginning, we also need to understand that he wants to take us down with him.

Two young boys were walking home from Sunday School and were sharing their reflections on the lesson. They had been studying the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Little Peter said to his friend John, "Do you believe that stuff about the devil? Do you really think there is a devil?" John looked at him and said, "Naah – it's just like Santa Claus – it's your dad."

Many of us like to pretend that the devil is a character of myth, but the Bible presents him as being very much for real. And not only is he for real, he wants us to share in his reality. Sin and death are Satan's tools and he wants to use them on us. What has been Satan's desire from the beginning? To be worshipped. When he tempted Jesus he desired for Jesus to worship him. The devil desires the same from us. He wants us to bow down to him. How do we do that? When we give in to the sin that he is the author of. When we refuse to bow down to Christ we find ourselves bending the knee to the devil. The devil knows that he is doomed. He knows that he cannot stand up to God. He is bitter, and envious, and he wants us to be on his team. Satan's desire is that you and I would share in his eternal damnation. He wants to take us along for the ride. The good news is that Jesus came to change all that.

2. A HOPEFUL HUMANITY

We are made of flesh and blood. This should come as no great surprise to us. We have been given bodies so that we might exist in the natural world. As creatures of the natural world we are susceptible to not only the physical elements of the world but also to the spiritual. Although this body of flesh and blood is made for the natural world we have also been given souls which exist in the supernatural realm. We are both creatures of this world and the world beyond. What I am getting to is this – although we live in the natural realm we participate in the supernatural realm. Although we have bodies of flesh and blood we have souls that cry out for something more. We also need to understand that we are sinners.

Once, while dressed in a devil costume, a man was walking to a Halloween costume party and it began to rain very hard. The man ran for the first cover he could find. It happened to be a church in the middle of a service. He ran directly into the sanctuary to the shock of all in attendance. The congregation panicked. All of them cleared the room, except for the one unfortunate woman who was trapped beneath the feet of the man dressed as the devil. With fear and trembling the woman pleaded, "You know I've been on your side all along."

The sad fact is, we really have been on the devil's side. John says, *"He who does what is sinful is of the devil."* Paul tells us that, *"all have sinned"* (Rom. 3:23). As our souls have cried out for something more to fill the void we all feel, we accepted a substitute for what God had provided. We all, each and every one of us, have allowed sin to dominate our lives.

We are all held in slavery. Slavery to what? Slavery to the fear of death. When we are still in a sinful state without Christ our worst fear is the fear of death. Because it is in death that we will face the penalty for our rejection of God. And this fear holds us captive. We are in bondage to it, because we have no hope.

We are each going to die. Woody Allen said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve immortality through not dying." We all are aware that we are going to die. The day will come for each of us, some old, some young, some from disease, some from accidents, some from old age. We all face death. It's a part of having a body made of flesh and blood. It's a part of living in a world dominated by sin.

Now we've been talking about "A HOPEFUL HUMANITY" but none of this sounds all that hopeful. We're sinners, we're held in slavery, and we're all going to die, but the hope is not found in any of these facts. The hope comes when we discover the Savior.

3. A STRONG SAVIOR

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." – Hebrews 2:14-15

Jesus came to share in our humanity. This word translated "shared" literally means "to take hold of something that is not naturally one's own kind." We by nature are flesh and blood; Christ was not. Yet, He willingly took hold of something which did not naturally belong to Him. He added to Himself our

nature in order that He might die in our place, and that we might take hold of the divine nature that did not belong to us. Peter tells us that, *"he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires"* (2 Pet. 1:4). Jesus shared in our humanity so that we might share in the divine nature. Jesus became like us, so that we might become more like Him.

Jesus came to destroy the devil. He came to destroy the devil's work. What is the devil's work? The devil's work includes everything that Satan has brought into God's perfect creation to spoil it. Morally, his work is enticement to sin. Physically, the infliction of disease. Intellectually, seduction into error. He still assaults man's soul, body, and mind in these three ways. The good news is that Christ came to destroy his works. The destruction was literally a "loosing", as if the devil's works were chains which bound us. The devil is still busy doing his wicked works, but he has been defeated and in Christ we can escape from his control.

Jesus came to destroy the devil's power over death. Satan's power over us had to be broken in order for us to be brought to God. Satan's primary power over man and his supreme weapon is death. The Hebrew writer tells us, *"that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil."* If you have a more powerful weapon than your enemy, his weapon becomes useless. You cannot fight against a machine gun with a bow and arrow. Satan's weapon is extremely powerful. But God has a weapon even more powerful, eternal life, and with it Jesus destroyed death.

The way to eternal life is through resurrection, but the way to resurrection is through death. So Jesus had to experience death before He could be resurrected and thereby give us life. Jesus' dying destroyed death. How? He went into death, through death, and came out on the other side, thereby conquering it. That's why Jesus could say, *"Because I live, you also will live"* (John 14:19). The resurrection of Jesus Christ provides the believer with eternal life. It is the only thing that could ever have done it. Death is the power of Satan's dominion, and when Jesus shattered Satan's power He also shattered his dominion.

Jesus came to deliver us. We have seen that the thing that terrifies people more than anything else is death. But when we receive Jesus Christ, death holds no more fear. We have been released from bondage to the fear of death, and instead, actually look forward to it. We can say with Paul, *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Phil. 1:21) and *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* (1 Cor. 15:55). Death no longer holds any fear, for it simply releases us into the presence of our Lord. Why? Because we have placed our hands into the hands of the Conqueror of death, and He will lead us into one side of the grave and out the other.

To make progress we often have to tear something down before we can begin the building process. For us to begin in the new life God wants for us we must first destroy the old man. Jesus has made that possible for us through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. He destroyed everything that kept us from moving forward. He's cleared the path for us so that we no longer have to be dominated by the devil. He has made a way for you and I to enter into eternal salvation. That was His purpose in coming.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the Devil hold the power of?
2. Are you truly aware of the presence of Satan in this world?
3. How do humans exist in both the natural and supernatural realms?
4. What do we do that places us in bondage?
5. Why did Jesus share in our humanity?
6. How has Jesus completely delivered us?

