

# IS JESUS...



# THE ONLY WAY?

the **JESUS IN HIS OWN WORDS** series

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The worldwide church of Jesus Christ is an incredibly diverse body. Our unity of belief that runs alongside our diversity of practice is not only a beautiful expression, but speaks to the church's miraculous inception and powerfully sustained presence throughout the world. God is at work in His church, and His church is on the move.

As part of this movement and diversity, the church is becoming more open in embracing a variety of voices on issues such as social justice, creation care, politics, faith and science, legalism, worship styles, evangelism, and asking honest questions. This is a movement I applaud.

But in this new era of recognizing, accepting, and celebrating our diversity, we must never lose sight of the fact that there is one point where the road narrows dramatically. The road to salvation is very narrow, passing through the death and resurrection of one man, Jesus Christ.

The reason this is so important is because we have a generation coming up that has been raised on salad bar religion. They have been taught to pick and choose their truth from a variety of religious traditions. They have been encouraged to toss aside tenets of faith that don't feel right to them or their circle of friends. And in this setting, the idea that Jesus is the only way comes across as too narrow, too intolerant, and too divisive. But this point, this idea, this concept, is the defining message of the gospel: Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

Over the next several pages we are going to dive into the middle chapters of the gospel of John to discover the claims of Jesus regarding this issue. Many today believe a misconception that Jesus never said He was the Son of God, or never said He was the only way to salvation. As we will see going forward, that is just not true. Jesus' claims to be the Christ, His assertion to be the Son of God, His self-identification as the Messiah all point to His death, burial, and resurrection as being the only way to heaven. His divinity claims and His exclusive promise that all who believe in Him will have eternal life are critical to our gospel message.

In the introduction to his gospel, the apostle John presents Jesus as the divine Son of God from the outset. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:1,14). This is followed by the testimony of several eyewitnesses. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), and "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God" (Jn 1:34). Andrew, later in chapter one, identified Jesus as "The Messiah" (Jn 1:41). And Nathaniel addressed Jesus with, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (Jn 1:49). So many divinity titles and this just in chapter one!

The testimony of these eyewitnesses is powerful, but what did Jesus say about Himself? We will begin to answer that question with a visit to John chapter 5 and the Pool of Bethesda.

## **Jesus Heals a Lame Man on the Sabbath – John 5:1-13**

Starting in John chapter 5, the apostle records a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders centered around the shocking claims of Jesus. His claim to be the Son of God, His claim to be an equal of God, and His claim to be the only Way to eternal life flies in the face of the Messianic expectations of both the religious leaders and the common folk of Jesus' day. It is during these confrontations that we learn many things about Jesus Christ, His nature and His work.

As we cover John chapters 5 through 7 throughout this book, we will follow a verse-by-verse format where the biblical text is shown in red letters. My running commentary is included in black text in and among the Scripture passage.

John 5:1 **After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**<sup>2</sup> **Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes.**<sup>3</sup> **In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, waiting for the moving of the waters;**<sup>4</sup> **for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.**

<sup>5</sup> **A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.** We assume with some form of paralysis based on his answer to Jesus' forthcoming question. <sup>6</sup> **When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"** This may seem like a rhetorical question on Jesus' part, but He commonly asked it of the sick. I think it is to allow the person to express their faith with a "Yes" answer. After all, on many occasions, Jesus said to those whom He had just healed, "Your faith has made you well." In the same manner, our faith in Jesus is an important ingredient in our salvation as we will see throughout these chapters.

<sup>7</sup> **The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me."** Somewhere in the man's answer is a "Yes" based on what Jesus says next. <sup>8</sup> **Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk."**<sup>9</sup> **Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.** Jesus healed the man on the spot and the man responded by obeying Jesus' command and picked up his pallet - basically a sleeping mat - and walked away.

**Now it was the Sabbath on that day.** The fact that it was the Sabbath sets the stage for the confrontation that is to come. <sup>10</sup> **So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."** According to Jewish tradition, it was unlawful to carry furniture outside your house

on the Sabbath, and a sleeping mat was considered furniture. <sup>11</sup> But he answered them, “He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’” In this short answer it is unclear if the man was just reporting the facts, or trying to shift the blame to the one who commanded him to take up his sleeping mat, or if the fellow is actually making a statement that I have amazingly just been healed and the command of the one who healed me trumps your lifeless tradition. At any rate, the man appears to be off the hook as the focus changes to, “Who is the one who gave this command?” <sup>12</sup> They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk?’” <sup>13</sup> But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.

There is a pause in the story here as we wait for the healer to be identified. Will Jesus be found out and confronted? And will He be on the hot seat for His healing work on the Sabbath?

## Jesus Identifies Himself as God’s Equal – John 5:14-18

Continuing the story in John 5:14, **Afterward Jesus found him** (the man whom He had healed by the pool) **in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”** <sup>15</sup> **The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.** Now that the healer - the one whose command contradicted the Sabbath rules - has been identified, the focus of the Jews turns to Jesus. <sup>16</sup> **For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.** We are left without much explanation of how the Jewish leaders went from questioning the man who was healed to now persecuting Jesus in such a short span of time, but the bottom line in verse 16 is that the Jews were upset with the “work” Jesus did on the Sabbath. Rather than just leave it at that, Jesus takes the point of their persecution as a launching pad for His revelation of who He is. His discourse lasts the rest of chapter 5.

<sup>17</sup> **But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”** In the opening salvo of His response, it is as if Jesus is saying, “You are worried about my Sabbath work? Here is something even more mind-bending for you. You say that I should not be doing the healing work I am doing on the Sabbath. Did you know God Himself is working on the Sabbath? He is working on the Sabbath because He has never stopped working. And, oh by the way, did you catch that I called God my Father. So what I am saying is that God my Father is always working and am only following His example in the healing work I am doing on the Sabbath.”

Now to bring God into the equation and say, “I can work on the Sabbath because I am only following God’s example” would have been bad enough, but Jesus went so far as to say that the God who is working on the Sabbath is His very Father!

This leads to two charges against Jesus. The first charge concerns His work on the Sabbath and the second, the greater charge, is His claiming equality with God. His actual answer in verse 17 may seem short to us, but Jesus obviously said enough for the Jews to get the point and clearly understand what He is saying. Because the very next verse sums up their reaction. <sup>18</sup> **For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**

To the Greek mind, equality with God was no big deal. They had gods all over the place, and they were mostly just super-powered and super-sized human forms. But to the Jewish mind, the line between human and divine was very clear. And rightfully so. The entire Old Testament is built on monotheism. The entire Old Testament is built on the concept that the God we worship is holy, unique, the one and only. That is why Jesus’ claims to be equal with God stirred such a violent reaction on the part of the Jewish establishment.

Did Jesus ever really claim to be the Son of God or claim equality with God? Not only do we find it in Jesus’ own words, but the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders makes it clear. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, “making Himself equal with God” (Jn 5:18).

## The Father Honors the Son – John 5:19-30

Even with the Jews seeking to kill Him because of His claim of equality with God (John 5:18), Jesus continues to add fuel to the fire. Starting in John 5:19, Jesus begins a discourse where He shows in what sense He claims equality with God.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. God the Father initiates; the Son follows. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; The unity of the Father and Son is based on love. and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. <sup>21</sup> For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. The Father has given the Son authority over life and death. <sup>22</sup> For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, The Father has given the Son authority to judge. <sup>23</sup> so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. We honor the Father by showing honor to the Son. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

The honor of the Father and the Son are tightly linked. Jesus is making it clear that no one can refuse the Son’s claims and still say they honor the Father. This is exactly what Jesus’ opponents were trying to do. They claimed to be followers of God, but at the same time were seeking to kill the one who claimed to be His Son. The honor of God the Father and Jesus the Son are inextricably linked.

The application here is not just to the Jews who heard Jesus’ words in the first century. There is application for us as well. We cannot call ourselves followers of God without wholeheartedly embracing the Christ He has sent and the message of the Christ He has sent. Many people want to embrace a portion of Christ’s message; His moral platitudes and ethical teaching. But if we are to honor the Father, we must honor His Son and embrace the entire message of Christ including His exclusive claim to be the only way to heaven; a claim Jesus expounds on in the very next verse.

<sup>24</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” For the first of many many times in John chapters 5 through 7, Jesus links “believe” and “eternal life.” We will look at every one of these verses. Here the focus is on belief in God and believing that it is He who sent Jesus, the Son. Jesus identifies Himself, “Me”, as the one sent by God.

<sup>25</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup> For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; <sup>27</sup> and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, <sup>29</sup> and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” More discussion of God granting to Jesus authority over life and death and judgment.

<sup>30</sup> “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” Again, the Father initiates and I act, because it is God the Father who sent Me and it is God the Father who has given Me my marching orders.

## Jesus Calls His Witnesses to the Stand – John 5:31-47

Up to this point in John chapter 5, Jesus has been identifying Himself as the divine Son sent by God. But now Jesus explains that the testimony of one person about himself is not worth much and He calls on the testimony of several witnesses to support His claim to be the divine Son of God.

John 5:31 “If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. <sup>32</sup> There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true.” There is not only “another” who testifies about Jesus, but several “others” as we are about to see.

<sup>33</sup> “You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth.” The first witness Jesus calls is John the Baptist. <sup>34</sup> “But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup> He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.” John the Baptist’s testimony regarding Jesus is recorded primarily in chapter 1 of the apostle John’s gospel. John the Baptist said of Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.’ Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ ” (Jn 1:29, 34-36).

The next witness is Jesus’ works. <sup>36</sup> “But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish – the very works that I do – testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.” The testimony of Jesus’ works is even greater than the testimony of John. Three miracles

have been recorded so far in this gospel and many more have surely been performed. And even greater miracles are coming; the feeding of the 5000 and the raising of Lazarus from the dead, for example. These works Christ performs are clearly supernatural, and indicate that He has been sent by God.

Continuing on to the witness of the Father, <sup>37</sup> “And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.” The Father is also His witness, referring to Jesus’ baptism. What did the Father say? “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Mt 3:17). They did not hear the voice, but it was enough to convince John the Baptist (Jn 1:32-34). <sup>38</sup> “You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.”

Now a new witness, the Scriptures, is called to the stand. <sup>39</sup> “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; <sup>40</sup> and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.” You search the Scriptures for the key to eternal life when eternal life is right in front of you; Me! The Scriptures bear witness of Me. I am the eternal life you seek, but you are unwilling.

<sup>41</sup> “I do not receive glory from men; <sup>42</sup> but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. <sup>43</sup> I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. <sup>44</sup> How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?” If you had the love of God, you would have received the One who came in God’s name. If you had the love of God, you would have listened to the testimony of John the Baptist, the miracle works, God the Father, and the Scriptures. But you were more interested in the accolades of your peers than of God.

<sup>45</sup> “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” “Even your most sacred prophet, Moses, wrote of Me.” The testimony of Moses and Christ are so closely linked that Jesus expects His listeners to embrace the testimony of both. At least that is how it should be. But as we will see in the passage ahead, the Jews are not buying it.

We close our exposition of John chapter 5 with this quote from F. F. Bruce in his commentary on the book of John. “The conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment in Jerusalem, begun in this chapter with His claim to be the Son of God, continues to be waged with increasing intensity throughout the gospel until it reaches its climax in the passion narrative, ‘By our law He ought to die, because He has made Himself the Son of God.’ (Jn 19:7)”

## The Feeding of the 5000 – John 6:1-15

Moving now to John chapter 6, Jesus has left Jerusalem and gone to Galilee. <sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). <sup>2</sup> A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. <sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup> Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” <sup>6</sup> This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii - two hundred days wages - worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” Philip was from this area so it made sense to ask him where to buy some food. Of course, it was just a test and rather than giving a grocery store recommendation, Philip stated the obvious that the crowd was much too large for the disciples to feed.

<sup>8</sup> One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, <sup>9</sup> “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?” Andrew draws attention to the ludicrous idea that we could somehow use this boy’s lunch to feed the crowd. Besides it being far too small, the word for fish here is a specific Greek word for small fish used as a relish. These were not a couple of ten pound catfish and five traditional loaves of bread. The boy’s meal was basically some kipper snacks and small dinner rolls.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. <sup>11</sup> Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> When they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.” <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Starting with the boy’s meal of kipper snacks and dinner rolls, Jesus feeds five thousand people and the disciples pick up twelve

baskets of leftovers. Jesus had said earlier that His miracle works were one of the signs that He had been sent by the Father and this is one of the more spectacular.

<sup>14</sup> **Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."** When people saw the "sign", they immediately proclaimed Jesus to be the Prophet of Moses (see Deut 18:15). The people were looking for the Prophet of Moses and in fact had asked John the Baptist (Jn 1:21) if he were the Prophet. John correctly answered, "No." But now, they give that title to Jesus based on the miracle He had just performed. Despite this recognition, it must be pointed out that the Jews did not necessarily put the Prophet of Moses and the Promised Messiah together as the same person as we do today.

<sup>15</sup> **So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.** If Jesus is the Prophet of Moses, the next logical step is to make Him king. If Jesus is the Prophet of Moses, He would surely do what Moses did for their ancestors and deliver them from the oppression of the Romans. The crowd understood the Prophet's appearance only on the material level. They did not understand or embrace the spiritual significance of Jesus' arrival on the scene. In fact, later in this chapter, when Jesus explains the spiritual significance of His coming, many fall away. But for now, because it was not yet time for Jesus to accept the King title – a mantle He would accept and embrace on Palm Sunday – He slipped away from the crowd.

## **The Food That Will Not Perish – John 6:16-29**

John 6:16 **Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea (the Sea of Galilee),<sup>17</sup> and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.<sup>18</sup> The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.<sup>19</sup> Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened.** Jesus walking on the water – another supernatural sign. <sup>20</sup> **But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."<sup>21</sup> So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.** It is not clear if they were near their destination when they received Jesus into the boat or if this is another miracle – instantly transported to shore.

<sup>22</sup> **The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone.** A little mystery as to where Jesus was. <sup>23</sup> **There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.<sup>24</sup> So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.** Given their experience from yesterday, it makes perfect sense that the crowd would be looking for Jesus and more miracles.

<sup>25</sup> **When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"** When the crowd finds Jesus, they quiz Him about his path to Capernaum. But rather than answer their question, Jesus begins another long discourse concerning His identity.

<sup>26</sup> **Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."** You are looking for Me because your tummies were filled, but the miracle you witnessed is merely a shadow of something greater. <sup>27</sup> **"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."** The something greater is to eat the food that leads to eternal life. We will learn later that this food is Christ Himself, but at this point Jesus only identifies Himself as the agent God has appointed to deliver this life-giving food.

<sup>28</sup> **Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"** "What work must we do to receive this food that will not perish?" <sup>29</sup> **Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."** The only "work" that a man or woman can do that is acceptable to God is to believe in Jesus Christ; believe in His claim to divinity, believe He has been sent by the Father, believe He is the path to eternal life. The only "work" that is required is to believe.

We have now landed on the theme of John's gospel message: Belief in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, leads to eternal life. In fact, this is John's summary message at the conclusion of his gospel. "These things have

been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jn 20:31).

Coming back to what is next in chapter 6, Jesus will continue His analogy about food and bread. But let me leave you with this pointed question from the passage, “Do you believe in Jesus whom the Father has sent?” This is the only work required to receive the food of eternal life.

## The Bread of Eternal Life – John 6:30-42

Jesus is in the middle of a dialogue with the Jews as He taught in the synagogue in Capernaum. He has just emphasized the need to believe that He is the Son of God sent by the Father. His hearers aren’t so sure, so they quiz Him further.

<sup>30</sup> So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?” In other words, “If you are really the one God has sent, what sign do you do in order that we might believe?” <sup>31</sup> “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.” Jesus ignores their request for a sign, and goes on with His discussion about bread. Unlike the manna in the wilderness, God is sending you “new bread”. This bread is not coming from Moses, but from God Himself.

<sup>33</sup> “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” This “new bread” from God gives life. <sup>34</sup> Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” The crowd is still focused on the physical, thinking whatever this bread is, we want some. <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” Jesus says plainly, “I am the bread of life. I am not only the giver of the gift, the new bread, but I am the gift itself!”

<sup>36</sup> “But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. In this one verse, we have reference to God’s sovereignty in salvation (“the Father gives”), man’s responsibility in salvation (“the one who comes”), and our security in salvation (“I will not cast out”).

<sup>38</sup> “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” The will of God is not the wish of God. It is the promise of God. The will of God is not a wish that everyone who believes in the Son will have eternal life. It is a promise that everyone who believes in the Son will have eternal life. It is God’s will. It is God’s promise. It is God’s purpose. It is God’s plan that “everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life” (Jn 6:40). The salvation message is made quite clear as John zeroes in on its essential truth.

Now, what is the audience reaction to all this talk of Jesus, the bread of eternal life? <sup>41</sup> Therefore the Jews (probably refers to the congregation in the synagogue, not just the religious leaders) were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.” The Jews are complaining because Jesus said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” To them this does not make sense; it borders on crazy talk. <sup>42</sup> They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?”

You can understand why this does not make sense to them. Messiahs do not grow up from little boys! They knew Jesus’ parents. In this area of Galilee, some in the crowd may have known Jesus as a child. To say He is the Son of God, the Bread of Heaven is too much of a stretch for them. I used to think that being in the crowd, hearing Jesus in person, would have made it much easier to believe; seeing Christ in the flesh. But in some ways, seeing Jesus in person made it harder. They knew Him as a regular person. He was as far removed as possible from their Messianic expectations. No, for His first century hearers, the need to believe by faith was just as great, if not greater, than our need to believe by faith.

We were not in that Galilee crowd. For us looking back it does make sense, because we hear Jesus’ words through the ears of faith. Because we have only known Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, His words make perfect sense to us. But the requirement of faith is the same now as it was then. Their faith requirement was to believe in spite of being well connected to Jesus’ humanity and lineage. Our faith requirement is almost the opposite. It is to

believe – almost 2000 years after the fact – that Jesus did come in the flesh and was and is who He said He was. Salvation comes by faith. “Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life” (Jn 6:40).

### “I am the Bread of Life” – John 6:43-54

We are near the halfway mark in our exploration of John chapters 5 through 7. Summarizing to this point in the story, Jesus is confronted by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem over what we might now consider a minor offense, healing on the Sabbath. The confrontation escalates when Jesus claims to be following the example of God, His Father. Jesus first made the Son of God claim in John 5:17 and followed it up with the statement that, therefore, eternal life is found only in Him. Between His discourse in Jerusalem (John chapter 5) and His teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (John chapter 6), Jesus has claimed at least seven times that believing in Jesus, the Son of God, is the path to eternal life.

- John 5:21 – The Son gives life.
- John 5:24 – He who believes has eternal life.
- John 5:25 – Those who hear (synonymous with believe) will live.
- John 6:29 – The work of God is that you believe.
- John 6:33 – The Bread of God gives life.
- John 6:35 – He who believes in Me will never thirst.
- John 6:40 – Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life.

All this talk of bread coming down from heaven and believing in the Son left the Jews in Capernaum pretty confused and they began to discuss among themselves, “We know this guy. We know his parents. He can’t be anything special. Messiahs don’t grow up from little boys.”

So Jesus addresses their confusion. <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. “Don’t be stumped by this. Here is some more explanation.” <sup>44</sup> No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; - God the Father does the calling - and I will raise him up on the last day - and I do the raising. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. Jesus says that He has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” For the eighth time; belief equals eternal life.

<sup>48</sup> “I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; (ninth reference to eternal life) and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Christ is now referring to His death on the cross. His death is both voluntary – “the bread which I will give up” – and vicarious – “for the life of the world.” Christ is going to die in place of the world to bring life to the world. The use of “world” emphasizes the global scope of Christ’s death in our place. The gospel message is not targeted to a specific group, but is open to all.

<sup>52</sup> Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” The Jews are still thinking on the physical level with their concern, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” <sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. <sup>54</sup> He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

I am not so sure that this last statement of Jesus really cleared anything up in the minds of His listeners. The idea of eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood was not only confusing, but outright offensive to the Jews. But again, their focus was purely on the physical angle of bread and drink, flesh and blood.

Of course, we see that Jesus is focused on the spiritual and the spiritual significance of His teaching about bread and drink. The spiritual lesson here – Jesus’ tenth reference to Him being the path to eternal life – is that to share in God’s life, the eternal life, it is necessary to be united with Christ by faith. “He who eats and drinks” is connected to Christ in a spiritual union and “has eternal life” (Jn 6:54).



## True Food and True Drink – John 6:55-65

As we ended last time, Jesus was explaining the spiritual significance of His “eating My flesh and drinking My blood” metaphor. Eating the flesh of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ is a metaphor for appropriating Christ by faith, embracing the message of Christ. It is the same as believing in Christ. It is meant to be understood in the spiritual realm, not the physical realm.

<sup>55</sup> “For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.” Eating is a word picture for belief in Christ. Eating leads to eternal life. <sup>58</sup> “This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.” Unlike those who ate the manna in the wilderness, he who eats this bread will live forever. <sup>59</sup> These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. This discourse, which began in verse 26, took place as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup> Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” These difficult teachings were a challenge, even to His closest followers. <sup>61</sup> But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble? <sup>62</sup> What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” “If I were to disappear into heaven, then would you realize that I am speaking in the heavenly realm, the spiritual side of life?”

<sup>63</sup> “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” True life is given by God’s Spirit and is found in the spiritual realm. The flesh in this discussion represents the material world. You are not going to find your answers to life’s big questions in the material world. An important principle of the Christian message is that there is an unseen spiritual aspect to our existence that is just as real as the material world that we see, smell, hear, and touch. Just because we cannot experience it with our senses does not make it less real. It exists!

<sup>64</sup> “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

The idea that only those chosen by the Father can grasp the spiritual significance of what is going on here is such a weighty topic that we will give it our full consideration next section.

## The Father Draws His Own – John 6:64-65

John 6:64 “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” In the midst of His hearers’ confusion, Jesus explains that only those chosen by the Father can grasp the spiritual significance of what is going on here. This text harkens back to John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

The idea of God choosing and our responsibility in salvation is still the subject of much discussion today. Here is the short answer as I understand it. If you scour the New Testament for every occasion where the Greek word for “choose” or “elect” is used, there is such a preponderance of use with God as the subject doing the choosing that there can be no doubt that God has chosen you to join His family.

Having said that, you also have a requirement to respond to God’s choice by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one can boast.” We almost always focus on the words “grace”, “gift”, and “not of works” in this salvation passage and almost never on the word “faith”. But based on this passage and others, somehow our faith matters. Our faith is of great importance. Yes, salvation is by grace and we contribute nothing to this grace. It is the free gift of God. But to lay hold of this grace – this gift – faith is required. So there actually is one “work” that is required of us to be saved; the “work” of faith.

This blends right in with the teaching of Jesus in John chapter 6. “They said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may *work* the *works* of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the *work* of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He has sent” (Jn 6:28-29). There is one “work” required of us. It is the work of faith. It is the work of “believing in Him [Jesus Christ] whom God has sent.”

The idea that God does the choosing and we respond in faith gives us great courage in evangelism. We have the opportunity to join God in something He is already doing, drawing men and women to Himself. We are not responsible to make belief happen. This gives us tremendous freedom when we face rejection. It is not *our* message that is being rejected, it is the message of Jesus Christ. If the message of Christ is being rejected, it is because it has not been revealed by God to the hearer. It is not because we muddled the message, did not say exactly the right words, or somehow goofed up the presentation.

The idea that God chooses does not hinder evangelism, it frees us up to plant as many seeds as possible without fear because we do not know the whole story of what God is doing next in a person's life. We can't see below the surface and know where the good soil is. Our responsibility is to plant and water, and "God causes the growth" (I Cor 3:7). "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father" (Jn 6:65).

## Words of Eternal Life – John 6:66-69

Returning now to the narrative of John chapter 6, Jesus has concluded His discussion about true food and true drink with the following result. John 6:66 **As a result of this** - the confusion over Jesus' explanation of the spiritual meaning of the true "food", and possibly His claim to be the Christ - **many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore**. The followers who withdrew were not true disciples in the spiritual sense. They were followers in the material sense. It appears that they were attracted to Jesus by the signs and miracles; wonders performed in the material world. His true disciples embraced the spiritual significance of the signs. But now the crowd has diminished dramatically and Jesus turns His attention to the twelve apostles.

<sup>67</sup> **So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"** <sup>68</sup> **Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."** Peter recognized that Jesus indeed had the words of eternal life. The words of Christ are not merely words of wisdom, not only moral platitudes, not just a higher ethic; they are words of eternal life. At their very core, the words of Christ are the words of life itself. Beginning in chapter 5, Jesus has used the words "eternal life" (or in some cases, just the word "life" to refer to eternal life) over and over again, well over a dozen times in these two chapters. And that message has not been lost on Peter. In fact, he confirms his belief and appears to speak for the group as well in the next verse.

<sup>69</sup> **"We have believed** - met the requirement for eternal life, see John 6:40 - **and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."** - and the basis for our belief is your identity as the Christ, the Holy One of God.

Think about the apostles' progression of belief. Early on, the apostles lacked insight into Jesus' true identity. Look at their reaction when Jesus calmed the stormy sea, "Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened" (Mk 6:51-52). The disciples were yet to connect the dots between Jesus' miraculous actions and His identity, still surprised by His miracles.

Now, fast forward to Matthew chapter 16, "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to Him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven' " (Mt 16:16-17). They went from hardened hearts to soft hearts that embraced God's revelation concerning the identity of His Son.

Peter's answer in John 6:69, "We have wholeheartedly placed our faith in your claim to be the Holy One of God" is a perfect capstone to this chapter. Is faith in Jesus the only way to heaven? Jesus has said so Himself at least a dozen times in our study and we still have a chapter to go.

## “My Time Has Not Yet Come” – John 7:1-9

Moving now to John chapter 7, let’s take a quick review of our timeline so far.

- Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath in Jerusalem.
- Jesus claims to be the Son of God.
- The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem seek to kill Jesus.
- Jesus explains to the Jerusalem crowd His unique relationship with the Father.
- Jesus supports His claim with several witnesses: John the Baptist, Jesus’ supernatural works, the voice of God the Father, and the Old Testament scriptures (particularly the words of Moses).
- Jesus goes to Galilee and feeds 5000 people.
- Jesus rejects the attempt to be made king.
- Jesus explains to the Capernaum crowd His identity as “the Bread of Life that came down from heaven.”
- Jesus clearly presents the crux of the gospel: “He who believes in Me has eternal life.”

John chapter 7 starts with Jesus still in Galilee. John 7:1 **After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him.** Jesus was not returning to Jerusalem because the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him. This is not because Jesus is afraid of them, it is more related to the fact that “His time has not yet come”.

<sup>2</sup> **Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near.** The feast of tabernacles or booths was held in the fall of the year to celebrate the fall harvest. The name comes from the fact that people lived in makeshift shelters during the eight day festival. This was one of the three great pilgrimage feasts that happened each year and brought people from all over the countryside into the city of Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> **Therefore His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing.** <sup>4</sup> **For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”** Jesus’ brothers were saying, “If you are indeed the Messiah, go up to Jerusalem, home of the big show, and be recognized publicly. Show yourself to the Jerusalem crowd.” It seemed incredible to them that if Jesus wanted to proclaim His identity as the Messiah that he would make such an effort to avoid publicity. But this is exactly what it appeared He was doing by laying low in Galilee. <sup>5</sup> **For not even His brothers were believing in Him.** Since His brothers did not believe in Him, we don’t totally know their motivation for encouraging Jesus to go up to Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> **So Jesus said to them, “My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune.** Jesus answers the why of His not going to Jerusalem. “My time is not yet here. For you, my brothers, who are not following an intentional agenda, anytime is a good time to come and go. But for me, the time is not right.” Jesus’ reference to this not being the right time may refer to His final revelation to the crowds as the Messiah (still to come on Palm Sunday) or the time of His crucifixion (still to come on Good Friday).

As an aside, throughout Jesus’ ministry He always carried an intentionality as to what He would do next. Was it a rude, narrow schedule on Jesus’ part? Not at all. Jesus constantly responded to interruptions with compassion and action. But in the midst of all the drama He faced, He seemed to always have a “holy must” about what He should do next.

<sup>7</sup> **“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.”** This may be an allusion to the fact that the Jews in Jerusalem are out to kill Him. <sup>8</sup> **“Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come.”** <sup>9</sup> **Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.** Jesus again explains that His time has not yet come, so his brothers go up to the feast without Him. But Jesus does have a secret plan to show up on the Jerusalem scene.

## Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem – John 7:10-25

Jesus initially turned down His brothers’ suggestion that He join them in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. But once they are on their way, Jesus does follow them to the feast in secret. <sup>10</sup> **But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if in secret.**

<sup>11</sup> So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, “Where is He?” There must have been some rumor of Jesus’ arrival at the feast or just an expectation by the Jewish leaders that this is an event He would attend. The “Jews” here are probably the Jewish religious leaders out to arrest Jesus. They had no authority to arrest Jesus while He was in Galilee since it was under Herod’s rule. But now, they suspect that Jesus is back on their turf, so to speak.

<sup>12</sup> There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him. Some were saying, “He is a good man.” Others were saying, “No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray.” Jesus’ identity will be a dividing line from this day forward for the next 2000 years. <sup>13</sup> Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews. If anyone did know of Jesus’ whereabouts, they were keeping silent. It was a well-known fact that Jesus was a wanted man.

<sup>14</sup> But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. It was a common practice for rabbis to go to the temple and set up shop in an area for teaching; to basically put on a teaching seminar. So Jesus, following the rabbinical tradition, is about to begin a seminar of His own. <sup>15</sup> The Jews then were astonished, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?” The Jewish leaders recognized that Jesus taught with a great command of the law and religious issues. Given that Jesus was never trained in the rabbinical schools, the Jews cannot understand where this expertise came from. We will see later that the soldiers were so impressed with His teaching that they refused to carry out their assignment to arrest Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> So Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. <sup>17</sup> If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.” Anyone who truly desires to do God’s will, will be able to judge for themselves the origin of Jesus’ teaching.

<sup>18</sup> “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. <sup>19</sup> Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?” “Why do you seek to kill Me, the One in whom there is no unrighteousness at all?” <sup>20</sup> The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?” The crowd makes the false assertion that no one is out to kill Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus answered them, “I did one deed, and you all marvel.” “I have done one controversial thing (Jesus is referring to His healing a man on the Sabbath), and you get all bent out of shape.” <sup>22</sup> “For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. <sup>23</sup> If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?” “You allow circumcision on the Sabbath and want to disallow Me to heal the entire man on the Sabbath. You are now the ones not making sense.”

<sup>24</sup> “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” <sup>25</sup> So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?” The crowd is now in a total state of confusion. Is Jesus a “good man”? Or is He a “devil leading people astray”? Are the religious leaders really out to kill Him? What for? Healing on the Sabbath? That seems pretty minor. Or is there something more in their pursuit of His death?

## Rivers of Living Water – John 7:25-39

John 7:25 So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? <sup>26</sup> Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?” The crowd in their confusion are asking, “Since the leaders who we thought wanted to kill Jesus are not moving in, is it possible that they believe He really is the Christ?”

<sup>27</sup> “However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from.” “Wait just a minute. Jesus cannot be the Christ. We know where Jesus came from. We know where He grew up. The Messiah is going to come out of nowhere and miraculously appear on the scene. The Christ will be a man of mystery, not the Jesus we know.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, “You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. <sup>29</sup> I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me.” “You think you know where I am from. But, in fact, you do not know.” Jesus again asserts His unique relationship to God, the Father, who sent Him. And His hearers do not miss the

implication and we are back on the trail of the leaders trying to apprehend Jesus. <sup>30</sup> So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. The arrest of Jesus would happen along God's timeline, not man's.

<sup>31</sup> But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?" Even if Jesus' apparent earthly origin and lack of interest in overthrowing the Romans do not fit their Messiah expectations, Jesus is performing incredible miracles expected of the Christ. "You can't expect the Christ to outperform these miracles Jesus is doing, can you?" they ask. Some in the crowd may have witnessed the healing of the man at the pool, or at least heard about it. Some may be Galilee pilgrims in town for the feast who witnessed the feeding of the 5000.

<sup>32</sup> The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him. The Pharisees need to nip this kind of talk in the bud, and send their temple police to arrest Jesus. <sup>33</sup> Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me." Jesus is going back to the Father. <sup>34</sup> "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." <sup>35</sup> The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? <sup>36</sup> What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come'?" "Where is He going? He is not leaving Palestine and going to teach the Greeks, or Jewish followers among the Greeks, is He? And what does He mean that we will not be able to follow or find Him?"

<sup>37</sup> Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup> He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' " <sup>39</sup> But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus is now making a very public proclamation that He is the specific living water, the source of eternal life. And the only requirement for receiving this water is "He who believes in Me." Faith in Christ is the only requirement to experiencing the water's life-giving flow. Flowing water in this context also refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit inside every believer; a promise that was yet to be fulfilled.

## "Is This the Christ?" – John 7:37-52

John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup> He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' " <sup>39</sup> But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

<sup>40</sup> Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, (Jesus' proclamation regarding His identity as the living water) were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." <sup>41</sup> Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Remember, we understand now that the Prophet and the Christ are one in the same. The Jews of that day did not necessarily make that connection. At any rate, the question keeps coming up, "Who is this man?"

Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? <sup>42</sup> Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" The crowd identifies Jesus as a Galilean which to them disqualifies Him from being the Christ. Maybe they were unaware of the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of the house of David as the Scriptures foretold. <sup>43</sup> So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. "A division occurred" is a recurring theme as Jesus explains more and more about who He is. <sup>44</sup> Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

<sup>45</sup> The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, (they were sent to arrest Jesus in John 7:32 and now have returned empty-handed) and they said to them [the officers], "Why did you not bring Him?" <sup>46</sup> The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." Even the temple police recognized the unique teaching authority that Jesus possessed and refused to arrest Him.

<sup>47</sup> The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? <sup>48</sup> No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?" The Pharisees respond to the soldiers' failure to bring Jesus in with an exasperation that surely you soldiers have not joined this naive crowd in their belief. They make the pointed comment to the officers that none of us experts are believing in Him. Of course, we know that some of the Pharisees are believing in Him or at least moving in that direction.

<sup>49</sup> “But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.” The Pharisees had a very dim view of the “crowd” who could easily be misled by any plausible teacher because of their ignorance of the true interpretation of the Law. The Pharisees also had a general disdain for the common people who had given up long ago any interest in keeping the minutia of the Law that the Pharisees were so proud of.

<sup>50</sup> Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, <sup>51</sup> “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” Speaking of the Law, Nicodemus points out the Law requirement to let Jesus speak for Himself before the group jumps to any conclusions about His guilt or innocence. <sup>52</sup> They answered him, “You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.” “There is really no point in debating this any further. Look at our history. No prophet comes out of Galilee.” This is not referring to a specific prediction of Scripture; it is more of a history lesson and maybe a comment of prejudice. Basically, it never happens. A Galilean cannot be the Christ.

The debate stops here for the time being, but is not finished. In fact, the confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders over His identity continue to escalate until, “The Jews answered him [Pilate], ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God’ ” (Jn 19:7). And Jesus is put to death.

For our purposes, we will stop here; having completed our exposition of John chapters 5 through 7. I hope the thoroughness of our discussion has driven home the point that Jesus was very clear about who He is. Jesus was emphatic over and over again that He, the true Son of God, is the only way to eternal life. This claim, put forth by Jesus’ own words and confirmed by the Jew’s reaction, is critical to lay hold of as we evaluate the message of the gospel.

## Is Jesus the Only Way?

Our tour through the gospel of John, chapters 5 through 7, has been a long answer to a single question: Is Jesus the only way to heaven? And our conclusion, based on Jesus’ own words, is an emphatic “Yes” many times over. The reason I went into so much detail on this topic is because Jesus’ divinity claims followed by His death, burial, and resurrection (His resurrection being God’s stamp of approval) are what make Christianity CHRISTianity. The Christian message is all about Christ. And Christ followers become believers based on one life-changing decision. What do you believe about Jesus’ claim to be the way to eternal life? Embracing the gospel message is saying “Yes” to “everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life” (Jn 6:40).

The reason this is so important is because we have a confused generation that has been raised on salad bar religion. They have been taught to pick and choose their truth from a variety of religious traditions. And in this setting, the idea that Jesus is the only way comes across as too narrow, too intolerant, and too divisive. But the Bible makes it clear and Jesus Himself confirmed it with His own words many times: Jesus is the only way to heaven.

If the idea of embracing this message of good news is new to you, let me offer you this. When Jesus came to earth, He initiated a new arrangement between God and man. A new arrangement based on His identity as the Son of God and His promise that eternal life is found in Him. Our release from the penalty of our sin was totally founded upon His death, as a substitute for each of us, on a cross. Under God’s old arrangement, the default arrangement for the whole human race, we stand guilty of breaking His moral code. But that all goes by the wayside when we agree to God’s new arrangement by acknowledging our guilt, accepting the free gift of Christ’s death in our place, and embracing what Jesus says as true. If you wish to say “I’m in” with this new arrangement, tell God in prayer about your decision. Then, talk to someone about it. If you would like to know more about God’s offer or talk with us about a decision you’ve made, drop us a line at [jrllehman@att.net](mailto:jrllehman@att.net)

## Epilogue

Because this book is based on one long passage of Scripture to make essentially one point, I am working from the premise that the Bible is true. If believing the Bible is true is a challenge for you, I understand that my presentation of Jesus' divinity claims may be hard to swallow. So let me share a bit about my own path to believing that the Bible is indeed true and its words and its God can be trusted.

I am a natural born skeptic. When *they* say I should drink two glasses of water before breakfast, I wonder who *they* are. When *they* say I should change my oil every 3000 miles, I wonder if *they* are engine experts or shills for the oil companies. When *they* say I need eight hours of sleep a night, I wonder how *they* know that about me specifically. I subscribe to the theory that my body will wake up when it has had enough sleep. Is that too simple-minded? Maybe I should ask *they*.

So what happens to my skepticism when *they* tell me that the 27 books of the Bible that make up my New Testament are God-inspired? In short, it disappears.

And my skepticism disappears for two reasons. First, the manuscript evidence supporting the authenticity of the New Testament is outstanding. No, we don't have the actual originals penned by the apostles. But we do have documents from so close to the time of the originals, that to a trained archeologist, the gap is basically zero.

I like to think of it this way. As a geophysicist, I make predictions about the subsurface of the earth from measurements taken at the earth's surface. And there is always a varying uncertainty as to what I am "seeing". (In fact, a large part of my job is quantifying that uncertainty.) Sometimes the "picture" is fuzzy and the uncertainty is high and my interpretation is nothing more than an educated guess. Other times, the "picture" is quite clear and the certainty is high and I have a 90% confidence in my prediction. And 90% is close enough to 100% to move any project forward.

We can't say with a 100% certainty that the manuscripts we have are authentic. But we are so close that, in my mind, the leap of faith is not very large to get there. But we all vary in our natural skepticism, so let me encourage you that whether you think the leap of faith to get there is large or small, it is your faith that will take you the rest of the way. And given the manuscript evidence at hand, it is a reasonable faith.

Now the second reason my skepticism disappears is because there is no *they* in the Canon of the New Testament. No church council said, "OK, here is a list of 50 books, let's pick 27 and get this finished." While two church councils – in 393 and 397 A.D. – did indeed confirm the canon of the New Testament, the key word is "confirm", not decide. The councils codified something that already existed; the books of the New Testament.

For over two and a half centuries, prior to the councils, the developing church had adopted the 27 books of the New Testament. The early church, in its teaching and practice, had come to accept the Fourfold gospel, the book of Acts, the letters of Paul, and the letters of the other apostles as the authentic Canon of the New Testament. So if there is a *they*, it is the church at large, listening to the voice of God over a large geographic area and over a long period of time.

So I believe that we can proceed with confidence that we are indeed exploring the God-inspired text as we return to the over-arching message of John's gospel. And that message is clear: Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.